Social media and youth identity: Educational strategies for local and global values orientation in the Saudi Arabian context

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Abstract

The role of social media in influencing personal norms and values has rarely been examined. This position paper addresses the impact of the flood of global values arising from top-down globalization and Western hegemony on Saudi Arabia's (SA) locality (i.e., religion, culture, and language). Using a neologism coined for this paper – *social media orientation* (i.e., how values are oriented and perpetuated via social media) – the issue was anchored within the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) with its focus on technological innovation especially social media platforms. I focused on what can be done to preserve SA's locality in the face of social media orientation to avoid being swept up in the flood of global values that contradicts Islam's core value system and SA's core culture and rich heritage. After profiling SA's locality (Islamic religion, Hofstede's cultural profile, and the Arabic language), and Saudi's social media usage patterns, I shared my opinion on how best to protect the locality. The next generation must become *flood resilient,* so youth can lessen the risk the flood of global values poses for Saudi citizens and the Saudi religious/cultural/language infrastructure and view the flood as a chance to analyze, clarify, and adjust values. From an educational stance, this resilience could manifest through curricular reform, social media literacy programs, cultural awareness campaigns, and targeted values education. Pushback against a juggernaut empowered by social media orientation *is* possible if the momentum is reframed as an opportunity to leverage the local to redirect the flood to benefit Saudi's cultural heritage and economic future.

Introduction

The world is experiencing the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) characterized by (a) technology and exponential technological fusion (physical, digital [cyber physical], and biological) (smart factories with web connectivity) in concert with (b) never-before-seen societal transformation due to exponential evolutions in digital and artificial intelligence (David, 2016; Trailhead, 2023). 4IR "represents entirely new ways in which technology becomes embedded within societies" (David, 2016, para. 4) especially social media platforms. This embeddedness reflects and affects societal values, which are a set of principles and

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standards that controls people's ideas and beliefs and determines their behavior, inclinations, aspirations, and attitudes (General Authority for Statistics, 2019).

Triggered or exacerbated by the 4IR, humanity is facing urgent issues and wide-ranging problems that are testing societal values (value dominance and value clashes). Examples of such problems include top-down globalization combined with Western hegemony, unsustainability, climate change, loss of biodiversity, health epidemics, violence and wars, and disparity in income and wealth distribution. Of interest in this position paper is the imbalance between what is *local* and *global* in terms of values when it comes to addressing the fallout from these problems. I specially share my thoughts about the role of *local* values and mechanisms for confronting the flood of global values driving and perpetuated by the 4IR and top-down, corporate-led globalization especially values that contradict local values.

Some recent changes at the societal level to better ensure a transition to a knowledge-based economy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) reflect shifting *local* values in response to the *flood* of global values. Some changes may appear to contradict local values despite the intent to modernize the economy. For example, the Islamic lunar calendar was Saudi Arabia's formal calendar (since 1932) until 2016, when the nation switched to the international Gregorian solar calendar for civil and economic purposes (Saudi Arabia adopts the Georgian calendar, 2016). Weekends used to span Thursday and Friday (the holiest day for Muslims). But to promote KSA's economic status and improve its trading relationship with other countries, the weekend was changed to Friday and Saturday in 2013 (Ahmed, 2023). Saudis do not consider Saturday and Sunday as weekend days (a Western convention). Some view these economic-driven changes with skepticism because the main principle of the Basic Law of Saudi Arabia says the government is obligated to adhere to Sharia (Islamic Law), which is derived from the Islamic doctrines in the *Quran* (Holy Book) and *Sunnah* – the traditions and practices of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that constitute a model for Muslims to follow (Nurunnabi, 2017).

Unless this flood of global values is exposed and critiqued, many societies (including Saudi Arabia) will continue to face challenges to preserving their locality against top-down globalization. This exposition will require both values clarification and values analysis. Values clarification helps people become aware of their own values and how they compare to those held by others. The intent is to modify poorly founded values while holding other values more confidently because they stood the test of review and comparison. Values analysis helps people become aware of other people's values, which are revealed while critically analyzing different viewpoints and positions on an issue (Olmo, 1976).

The flood of values stemming from 4IR and top-down globalization comprise profit, competition, scarcity, individualism, consumerism, economic growth, progress, survival of the fittest, and so on. People holding these values are keen to maintain their power and influence – hegemony (i.e., ability to exert control due to power and strength). This value set is not conducive to the future of humanity or the preservation of *the local*. This requires valuing such things as solidarity, inclusion, diversity, justice, equity, respect, tolerance, peace, nonviolence, sustainability, human rights and human responsibilities, and traditions and customs. These and related values are cross cultural and embedded in the globalization-from-the-bottom-up movement, which is led by civil society and grassroots/shop floor social movements and strives to protect the *local* from the top-down *global* juggernaut – the flood (Navarro, 2017; Samli, 2008).

Method

Despite the growing influence of the bottom-up movement (Navarro, 2017), many societies face challenges to preserving the locality against top-down globalization. Locality encompasses religion, culture, and language (Keane, 1997). Respecting this struggle, this position paper strives to contribute to a constructive dialogue about the issue of protecting the local in the face of a global juggernaut using Saudi Arabia as a working example. In a position paper, the "author asserts a personal statement about a topic or issue based on a well-reasoned argument [while] anticipating the opinion has merit and is worthy of others' consideration and adoption" (McGregor, 2018, p. 471). Position papers are legitimate tools for helping ideas grow (McLean, 2011). Drawing on my personal lived experience as well as related literature (McGregor, 2018), I will profile Saudi Arabia's locality (including social media usage) and then discuss how KSA's locality is being influenced by top-down globalization via social media, which is an aspect of the technology-focused 4IR.

To aid me in this task, I will explore the role of *social media orientation* (SMO) by which I mean how values are oriented and perpetuated via social media. This neologism is different from how cultural values shape social media behaviour, which is another underresearched area. Studies have shown that, because of different cultural models, Western individuals strive to maximize positive feelings and minimize negative ones when using social media, whereas East Asian individuals strive for a greater balance of positive and negative feelings when using social media; cultural values affect social media behaviour (Hsu et al., 2021). This paper is about social media orientation not behaviour.

The business discipline employs the SMO construct but from an organizational perspective pursuant to small and medium sized enterprises' business development and firm performance (Dutot & Bergeron, 2016). In this context, SMO is "a set of principles and goals that direct and influence corporate activity on social media to improve performance" (Faisal et al., 2018, p. 24). Of note, culture, society, and personality are major antecedents of values. Attitudes and behaviour are the key consequences of applying human values. Herein, social media orientation deals with how social media orients people to certain values and perpetuates them rather than social media behaviour per se. Values are very durable compared to attitudes and can change over one's lifetime. However, core, established values may change the least, and it is extremely difficult to deliberately change them (Rokeach, 1973).

Prolonged exposure to social media can insidiously change values by exerting a progressive and accelerating effect on people's cognitive development especially their perceptual filters that help form beliefs and opinions (Grigs, 2023; Hynes & Wilson, 2016). "Social media's interconnectedness enables individuals to be quickly exposed to others' behaviours, and this exposure is likely to impact both personal norms [and values]" (Hynes & Wilson, 2016, p. 350). Mihr (2022) coined the powerful construct "social media echo chambers" (p. 77). Messages posted on social media platforms resonate, and they sometimes insidiously slither into people's minds, entrapping and beguiling them.

As a caveat, social media does have positive aspects including but not limited to the dissemination of local values, cultural exchanges, and it is an unfiltered form of cultural expression. Social media platforms can help people meet others and stay connected, share ideas and information beyond geographical boundaries, stay up to date, find emotional support and advice, advance their career, and achieve their goals and aspirations (Ghafar, 2024; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016).

Research Inquiry

"The role of social media in influencing personal norms, values and attitudes has rarely been examined" (Hynes & Wilson, 2016, p. 350). This position paper aims to address that gap via a reasoned argument asserting that considering social media orientation (i.e., how values are oriented and perpetuated via social media) is a timely stance to better understand how the flood of global values creates a need to protect the locality. Social media content can "spark the invasion of culture [by] shouting about different values. Local cultures can therefore slowly lose their identities [via the process] of cultural invasion through social media" (Tang & Chan, 2020, Abstract). This paper is among the first to discuss how Saudi's locality may be challenged by global values with the imperative that Saudi citizens must preserve religion, culture, and language to stave off the threat of melting into a mostly Western value set that disagrees with Islam's core value system and KSA's core culture and heritage.

The Saudi Ministry of Culture (2019), which was established in 2018 to oversee a cultural transformation within the Kingdom, concurred. "The Kingdom prides itself with a rich heritage and diverse traditions spanning 13 regions. … The Saudi culture will remain an essential part of our lives" (Saudi Ministry of Culture, 2019, p. 3). But the perpetuation of any culture (Saudi Arabia included) depends on the continuation of core values, beliefs, and norms, so future generations are socialized to adopt them as well (Ogbonna & Harris, 2014). This imperative drives the main research inquiry: *What can be done to preserve Saudi Arabian locality in the face of social media orientation to avoid being swept up in the flood of global values that contradicts Islam's core value system and KSA's core culture and rich heritage*?
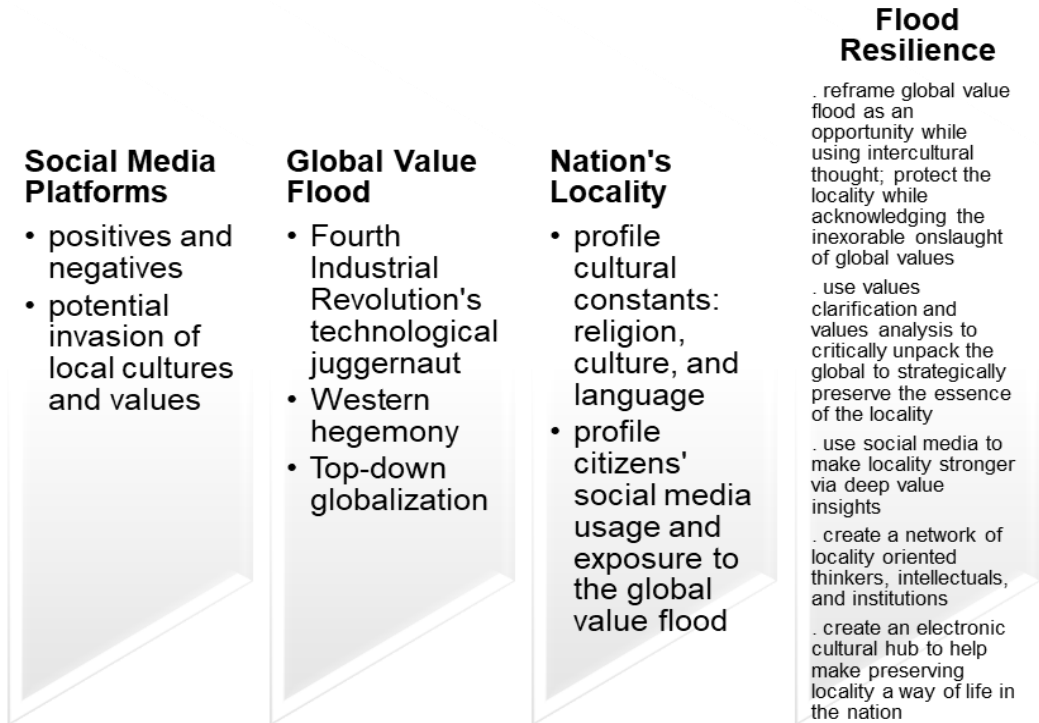

Social Media Platforms
- positives and negatives
- potential invasion of local cultures and values

Global Value Flood
- Fourth Industrial Revolution's technological juggernaut
- Western hegemony
- Top-down globalization

Nation's Locality
- profile cultural constants: religion, culture, and language
- profile citizens' social media usage and exposure to the global value flood

Flood Resilience
- . reframe global value flood as an opportunity while using intercultural thought; protect the locality while acknowledging the inexorable onslaught of global values
- . use values clarification and values analysis to critically unpack the global to strategically preserve the essence of the locality
- . use social media to make locality stronger via deep value insights
- . create a network of locality oriented thinkers, intellectuals, and institutions
- . create an electronic cultural hub to help make preserving locality a way of life in the nation

Figure 1. Conceptualizing and operationalizing social media orientation pursuant to protecting national locality

In this inaugural attempt to apply the SMO construct to the Saudi Arabian context, I conceptualized and operationalized SMO by using secondary data about (a) Saudi Arabia's locality (cultural constants) relative to religion, culture, and language; and (b) Saudi Arabian youths' social media usage and exposure to the global value flood as a preamble to exploring how to protect Saudi Arabian locality (see Figure 1). This conceptualization and operationalization of SMO can be used in any locality threatened by the global value flood juggernaut. Other researchers are invited to use and improve it in their context.

Saudi Arabia's Locality

As noted, locality comprises religion, culture, and language (Keane, 1997). Each of these is discussed relative to the Saudi context followed with an overview of Saudi citizens' use of social media platforms. Knowledge of the latter bolsters my argument that social media orientation is indeed problematic in KSA right now and must be addressed using short- and long-term strategies.

Saudi Arabia the Heart of Islam (Qibla of Muslims)

"Saudi Arabia presents itself as a nation founded upon religion" (Pikos-Sallie, 2018, p. 53). Not surprisingly, Saudi society and its culture greatly value Islamic codes and regulations and strongly reject any opinions not under Islamic law. Saudi society is also based upon ethics and a commitment toward fulfilment (KSA, 2016). Saudi Arabia is the *Qibla* (direction) of nearly 2 billion Muslims (practicing Islam) across the globe who direct their bodies during prayer toward Mecca to face the Holy city. All Muslims must visit Mecca and perform *Hajj* at least once in their lives to fulfill the fifth pillar of Islam. This requirement makes Saudi Arabia special to Muslims.

Historically, although SA was established as a unified nation in 1932 after the discovery of oil, tribes had resided in the desert environment and interacted with each other for thousands of years. Islam became the dominate religion in the region in the 1700s replacing centuries-long adherence to Arabian polytheism (i.e., belief in multiple deities). Its culture and deep-rooted religious traditionalism have developed through age-old interactions between the people and their harsh desert environment. Also, tribal characteristics, such as values, beliefs, and lifestyle, embedded in the country centuries ago, have contributed to Saudi culture and the formation of Saudi identity (Wynbrandt, 2004). Pharaon (2004) observed that "the combination of Arabian culture and Islam has shaped the character of the region. Islam is totally ingrained in the fabric of contemporary Saudi life. All Saudis are Muslims, with a vast majority as true believers or practitioners. Shari'a (Islamic doctrine) is the law and constitution of the land" (p. 349). Saudi Arabia is the heart of Islam and the Qibla of nearly 2 billion Muslims.

Culture is a complex social set of attributes (e.g., knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, customs, traditions, rituals, art, morals, law, concepts, and a way of life) that distinguish one sociocultural group from another (Su Kim, 2003). Deeply rooted in Saudi's sociocultural norms and practices, the Saudi identity embraces a cultural framework that values religious devotion, adherence to traditions, a strong emphasis on familial bonds and loyalty to the tribe, and the Arabic language. Saudi culture and identity are derived from three main elements: geography, Islam, and tribal characteristics (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013; Alsweel, 2013; Wynbrandt, 2004) and the Arabic language (Alrabai, 2018).

The geographical environment is considered one of the toughest on the planet. Its massive desolate desert caused the country to be naturally remote until the twentieth century and the discovery of oil in the 1930s. The harsh nature of the Saudi geography has kept the country isolated until recently and has formed the distinctive Saudi character and culture. Saudi lives, customs, traditions, identities, and even their political constitution are knit together with Islam (Wynbrandt, 2004), and Islam is at the center of every aspect of Saudi lives, formally and informally. Alsweel (2013) agreed that Saudi identities are grounded in their Islamic faith. Islamic devotion permeates Saudi citizens' daily lives. Arabic is the Kingdom's official language and the principle medium of communication among Saudis who assume that pervasive use of the Arabic language (instead of English) will protect (prevent the erosion of) Arabic culture, customs, traditions, and identity (Alrabai, 2018).

Saudi Arabia's Hofstede Cultural Profile

Recognizing that different cultures guide people to perceive the world in distinct ways, Hofstede et al. (2010) created a cultural dimensions model that reflects national tendencies to favor one value over another. These tendencies differentiate countries and their cultures from one another. The model consists of six dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long/short-term orientation, and indulgence/restraint. Succinctly,

> The power dimension concerns how a society handles power inequalities among people. If people are comfortable pushing for more equality, the nation has a low power distance; that is, it does not tolerate a large gap between those in authority positions and the rest of society. A nation with higher power distance means the people in that culture accept and expect power to be unequally distributed. A culture high in individualism expects people to take care of only themselves and their immediate family (loosely knit social fabric). Conversely, collectivism means people can expect others to take care of each other (tight knit society). A culture shaped by masculinity is very competitive, informed by achievement, assertiveness, material gains and success. A feminine-oriented society prefers consensus as well as cooperation, caring and quality of life. It also favors equal opportunity for everyone, eschewing rigid role behavior. … The uncertainty avoidance dimension focuses on whether people should try to control the future or just let things happen. Nations exhibiting high uncertainty avoidance do not tolerate unorthodox behavior and ideas; to this end, they maintain rigid codes of behavior and beliefs. They cannot deal well with vagueness and need rules and structures. Societies with low uncertainty avoidance are more relaxed in practice, opting instead for a principle-based approach to the future. They are better able to handle anxiety in the face of uncertainty. They are comfortable with changing things. The [long/short-term] perspective dimension pertains to how cultures view time and the importance of the past, present, and future. A long-term perspective focuses on the future, valuing perseverance and adaptability. A short-term perspective values the past and traditions and strives for immediate gratification in the present. Finally, an indulgent culture allows for fun and enjoying life, while restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of human drives opting instead to regulate them. (McGregor, 2017, p. 591)

Because cultures change slowly (Rokeach, 1973), the 90-plus national cultural profiles that Hofstede et al. (2010) have developed are still relevant. Individuality is not encouraged in Saudi Arabia (Jiang et al., 2018) and is, to some extent, rejected. As such, the group's values, needs, and goals are of higher significance for a person than their own personal ones (Heyn, 2013). Arab countries in general, Saudi Arabia in particular, built their societies on tribes, obligations, relationships, and connections as well as loyalty to family and extended groups

(i.e., tribes). Responsibility toward the group is highly respected and regarded and considered an essential component of Saudi culture. Saudi scored 25 on individualism, meaning it emphasizes individuals as being dependent on their families, extended families, and tribes instead of encouraging an individual's independence. Any attempt at the latter and detachment from a group is thus discouraged. Therefore, centralization in Saudi culture is common, and individuals expect to be told what to do (Heyn, 2013; Hofstede, 2011, 2015).

Saudi society also has a high acceptance of inequality of power distribution, which Saudis consider a natural way of organizing communities. Saudi Arabia scored 95 in the power/distance dimension as it exhibited high acceptance of a hierarchal authority. It scored 80 on uncertainty avoidance, which illustrates its preference for highly traditional and religious systems. Cultures scoring high on this dimension emotionally need rules even if they are not always followed. On the religious front, they believe in ultimate truths. And they need the clarity and structure that religion offers (Hofstede, 2011). Until very recently, the country's culture was very conservative with rules, laws, and policies that restricted and forbid things that other cultures might view as freedoms. Saudi Arabia scored 36 on the long/short-term orientation meaning it valued the past and traditions. And it scored 52 on indulgence/restraint, meaning Saudi Arabia took a middle position on valuing the allowance or restraint of human desires. The latter involves establishing strict social norms, and gender norms (Hofstede, 2011, 2015).

Gender Segregation in Saudi Arabia. Until very recently, Saudi Arabia was one of the world's most gender-segregated nations, but this cultural practice is changing. Segregation occurred throughout most public and private domains including separate schools for boys/men and girls/women and different places for prayer (Alkharusi, 2013). Yamani (2000) observed that "the new generation is aware of its capabilities, and this inevitably leads to the questioning of some norms and social rules" (p. 69). These societal changes, and the resulting shifts in cultural perspectives, create an opportunity to explore the status of women in Saudi Arabia, which is traditionally very patriarchal. Saudi Arabia has managed to move to full empowerment of women in all aspects of life. Women's inclusion is factual evidenced by their presentation in the *Shura* Council (i.e., parliament), the highest female employment rates in SA's recent history, and employing women as ambassadors and cultural attaché. Currently, women are not only welcomed but actively encouraged to engage in public life alongside men. They also now play a crucial role in nation building in that they frequently lead efforts to strengthen families and communities, which are now viewed as a necessary pillar in KSA's economic growth and progress (KSA, 2016; McGregor & Hamdan Alghamdi, 2022).

Saudi society's practice of gender segregation, along with its restrictions on Saudi women, is more cultural than religious (Hamdan, 2012). Saudi culture considers itself masculine as indicated by the country's Hofstede score of 60 in masculinity values (Al Hassoun, upcoming; Hofstede, 2015). Yet, female engagement across various economic sectors is increasing per KSA's current national development plan, *Vision 2030,* as the 21st century unfolds. This development is aided by government support for female empowerment since 2005 particularly in alignment with *Vision 2030* (Alghamdi Hamdan & Aldossari, 2021). The number of women in prominent positions has grown with women appointed to high-profile positions in mixed-gender organizations and in critical roles in highly sensitive government sectors. As women's status in SA continues to grow, their increased appearance in the public

arena is hand in hand with improvements in their education. The illustration of the interconnectedness of societal transformation and educational development would require an exploration of the Saudi educational system and an examination of the opportunities and advancements made in providing high-quality education to all Saudis, including women (see Alghamdi Hamdan & Mustafa, 2021).

Arabic Language and Global Value Exposure

Aside from faith and culture, locality is also perpetuated through language. The Saudi Ministry of Culture (2019) is supportive of the Arabic language. "As a policy, the Ministry will encourage all of its partners to do everything possible to make the fruits of any cultural exchange accessible in Arabic. This will enable as many people as possible to benefit from any programs launched by the ministry" (p. 20). UNESCO has classified the Arabic language as one of the most spoken languages in the world and characterized it as the Saudi civilization's "legacy for the entire world" (Ramos, 2020, para. 2). In 2016, UNESCO signed a partnership agreement with the Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Foundation to launch a programme to "enhance the use of Arabic at UNESCO [and] build a better understanding of the contribution of Arabic language and culture to the world" (Ramos, 2020, para. 5). United Nations-level sanction of the Arabic language speaks volumes to its importance in Saudi Arabia and abroad.

Nonetheless, Saudi families are sending their young children to international schools where all Arabic subjects are replaced with Western subjects taught in English. Although no relation has been reported between good education and learning all subjects in English, I view this trend as a form of "cultural hegemony" in which one culture, Western in this case, is influencing another (e.g., Arabic and Saudi). According to Gramsci (1985), an Italian philosopher, the supremacy of the ruling class (i.e., cultural hegemony) manifests both in domination and intellectual or moral leadership. I view cultural hegemony as one culture dominating another culture using language. But cultural hegemony is also at play via mass social media applications and the incursion or influx of global values that clash with local values.

Before the incursion of social media into Saudi life, Standard Arabic was used in written, formal communication. But when engaging in nonformal communication on social media (especially Facebook), Saudis now tend to use nonstandard Arabic (i.e., their local dialect). For them, using their own dialect makes it easier to express themselves and avoid being mocked for using Standard Arabic (Al-Jarf, 2023). In an earlier paper, Al-Jarf (2019) reported that Saudi youth also resorted to Romanizing their text (i.e., converting Arabic script to Roman alphabet letters usually in the English language). One quarter (24%) of Saudi local dialect Facebook text was Romanized. This shift in writing style could reflect shifts in values. Saudi social media users may value local tradition less and fitting in with global social media conventions more. After all, English *is* the dominant social media language (Al-Jarf, 2019).

Saudi Arabian Youth and Social Media Usage

This position paper concerns social media orientation as it affects locality in the face of a flood of global values. Wike et al.'s (2022) study within 19 nations (not Saudi Arabia) found that respondents felt social media is *a good thing*. They said people are now more (a) informed of current events abroad and in their own country (73%) and (b) accepting of differences and diversity (45%). Young adults were especially likely to hold these views. On the other hand, social media makes people more divided in their political opinions (65%), less civil when

talking about politics (46%), and more easily manipulated (84%). Social media is also very effective at getting people to change their mind about issues (65%), which intimates a concurrent shift in values.

To illustrate, social media bloggers and influencers are presenting some extravagant lifestyles as norms. These global norms are becoming a driving force among Saudi youth making them materialistically driven. This contradicts the local, faith-based values of modesty, which is entrenched in every aspect of one's life, and moderation. Modesty and moderation are being forsaken for consumerism. Moderation means not letting one's religious practices be a problem for those of a different faith (Wani, Abdullah, & Chang, 2015). They professed that "moderation in religious practice is … so important that without it, the goal towards building a sustainable planet would be an illusion. Moderation can be the backbone of civilizational dialogue…. Recognizing one another…is the basic philosophy of Islam" (Wani et al., 2015, p. 642). These two Islamic values are being besieged by the global flood of materialistic consumerism, which is exacerbated and perpetuated by Saudi citizens' excessive social media exposure.

BBC Arabia (2013) said that a *Global Web Index* study found that Saudis had the highest growth rate globally in terms of X usage (previously known as Twitter) (12% of the population used it a decade ago and posted 1.5 million messages a day). Six million used Facebook, 1 million used LinkedIn, and Saudis were among YouTube's biggest viewers. Statista (2023) reported that the most used social media platforms in Saudi Arabia in 2022 were WhatsApp (87%), Instagram (78%), Twitter (72%), Snapchat (68%), and Facebook and TikTok (63% each) (see also GMI Blogger, 2023). BBC Arabia opined that "Saudi users employ these social media … for entertainment and [to] fill free time, and some of them follow … serious political discussions, and read hadiths, religious fatwas, thoughts and sports commentary. Some of them simply want to exercise their freedom of expression in a society governed by many strict restrictions and traditions" (2013, para. 4). Ten years later, the same reasons prevail with several new ones. Saudi citizens (aged 16-64) said they used social media to communicate with friends and family (45%); fill spare time (read news stories, watch videos, and create and send memes) (43%); stay updated with news around the world (31%); shopping (31%); watch sports (28%); meet new people (29%); follow influencers and celebrities (24%); and find information (24%) (GMI Blogger, 2023). In their study of Saudi university students' social media usage, Al-Khamshi et al. (2023) reported the most common reasons as entertainment, connecting with friends, filling free time, and learning from published scientific papers. Respondents appreciated increasing their knowledge about community life, learning new behaviours, and strengthening national identity. A downside was watching people act in ways not conducive and contrary to Islamic values.

What can be understood from these data is that social networking sites and usage occupy a large area of Saudis' interests at a constant pace over recent years. The percentage of Saudi citizens using social media increased from 7.6 million in 2014 to 28.8 million in 2023 (a 73% increase). Nearly all (79%) the Saudi population uses social media. Far more Saudi men (65%) than women used social media regardless of age category (GMI Blogger, 2023). When this interest is transformed into time, Saudi Arabia averaged 3 hours and 1 minute daily (GMI Blogger, 2023), which equates to more than an eighth of the day and a fifth of one's waking life. This usage rate is comparable to 3 hours and 12 minutes in the Arab region but is very high relative to the global average of 2 hours and 24 minutes (Chaffey, 2023).

Also of interest is the type of influence and exposure to global and local values from using social media sites so much that Saudis exceed others in the world. Social networking site users are surely influenced and affected by what is being circulated on these platforms, which are open to billions of people. It is easy for people to get lost in this endless stream of content, which is exacerbated by the rise of influencers and bloggers who are shaping people's values and decisions (GMI Blogger, 2023). But how deep is the difference between influenced and being affected by social media? Influence means the power to sway someone's thoughts, opinions, or behaviour. Influence is more indirect than affect, which refers to a direct cause and effect relationship leading to a change (Affect vs. influence vs. impact, 2020).

In addition, how big is the difference between being positively and negatively *affected*, as social media networks are badly exploited by aggressive and sometimes hostile parties? For example, terrorist organizations use social media platforms to penetrate societies and recruit members, often youth. Saudi youth would be better prepared to resist falling prey to these lurkers if armed with awareness of national interests and national positions on global issues, cultural awareness, and a solid local value set. At the personal level, Saudi youth must mitigate the effect of negative social media content on their social relationships. Unfortunately, the 2019 *Saudi Youth Development Survey* revealed that over one third (36%) of Saudi youth said their social relationships were negatively affected by their use of social networking sites (General Authority for Statistics, 2019). Their use must be balanced and not overpower social relationships or reflect on them negatively. If the purpose of using social media is communication, it should be to build bridges, not destroy them (Al-Khamshi et al., 2023).

Protecting Saudi Arabia's Locality

Social media are bringing to the forefront foreign values that are grounded in the globalization top-down movement and often not compatible with or comparable to local Islamic values. As illustrated, Saudi exposure to this flood of values is heavy and constant. An obvious short-term strategy, relative to social media orientation and its complicitness in speeding up the flood of global values into Saudi Arabia, is to find workable solutions that will slow down the unavoidable influence and affect of cultural globalization on (a) Saudi customs and values (especially those arising from our tribal history and Islamic faith); (b) the Arabic language; and (c) life-and tradition-sustaining practices such as local food, clothing, and housing styles. These aspects of locality are constantly threatened by pervasive Western cultural styles that perpetuate consumerism and materialism (Guerlain, 1997; Ritzer, 2011), which, until recently, was foreign to Saudi Arabia and is now fuelled by oil wealth (Assad, 2007). This juggernaut continues to gain momentum via social media orientation.

In my opinion, one of the best long-term strategies for Saudi Arabia to use when confronting the social media-facilitated flood of global values, shaped by top-down globalization and Western hegemony (imposing Western culture on the world), is to reframe this flood as an opportunity. While remaining fully aware of the 4IR social media revolution, we can anchor ourselves in our Islamic faith, cultural values and traditions, centuries-old heritage, and the Arabic language (our locality) as we respect *interactive reciprocity*. By this I mean using *intercultural thought* as a "scientific strategy and means of breaking philosophical and cultural deadlocks whereby people ... do not necessarily regard 'others' as threatening or adversaries to [local] identity" (Yousefzadeh, 2018, p. 47).

Engaging in intercultural thought should help Saudis navigate the flood of global values, so they can highlight local Saudi cultural values that merit preservation and eschew any external values that threaten the preservation of the local in Saudi Arabia. This would entail both values clarification and values analysis (Olmo, 1976). This approach goes hand in hand with viewing social media as a benefit. Saudis can use this 4IR technological innovation as a cultural and intellectual weapon (for lack of a better word). After all, Arabs as a group do not completely reject top-down globalization. Many accept it as an inescapable fact of life due to the 4IR: the incursion of the information revolution, scientific and technological progress, international communication networks (including social media platforms), and artificial and digital intelligence (David, 2016).

That said, Saudi Arabia must not let this flood of global values bowl it over. Although many of these values are alien to Saudi Arabia and come to us prepackaged via social media platforms, they *can* be unpacked and critically examined to discern what can benefit the local and humanity (i.e., value analysis in concert with values clarification). To that end, Saudi Arabia must interact positively with other cultures (including Western culture). Islam is a religion of tolerance and cross-cultural understanding. It teaches that Muslims must respect (recognize) every ideology, culture, and religion, which is different from agreeing with them. In the 4IR context, other cultures (especially the Western culture) enter Saudi Arabia via social media platforms. Social media orientation must thus be reframed from being a threat to our identity, faith, culture, and language to an opportunity we can take advantage of. We can use this powerful 4IR tool to preserve and protect the local, so it can be the foundation of Saudi society while also enabling the Saudi economy to bring its unique contributions to the global economy (per *Vision 2030*) (KSA, 2016).

Nations, including Saudi Arabia, can benefit from other cultures by taking from them what is needed to develop their local culture while keeping pace with the 4IR era of technological progress. With a critical analysis of the global values regurgitated via social media, Saudi Arabia can confront what harms, threatens, weakens, or undermines its locality especially its faith, eternal identity-forming cultural traditions, and language. These artefacts of localism – these *cultural constants* based on Islam and tribal traditions – must be valued and protected, so KSA can proactively deal with social media orientation during the 4IR. This is not to say that some things will not change. But enough of the locality must be protected to ensure that the essence of the Saudi culture is retained. To protect local values, the Saudi Ministry of Culture was established because preserving Saudi culture is the duty of all Saudi citizens. This preservation should entail looking "to the future by [being true to the past and] cherishing heritage [while] unleashing new and inspiring forms of [cultural] expression" (Saudi Ministry of Culture, 2019, p. 11). The Ministry combined UNESCO's conceptualization of culture with local Saudi understandings and identified 16 sectors shaping Saudi culture including language as well as heritage, traditions, and customs. True to the tenets of *Vision 2030*, the Ministry is committed to "promoting culture as a way of life, enabling culture to contribute to economic growth and creating opportunities for global cultural exchange" (Saudi Ministry of Culture, 2019, p. 12).

To that end the Ministry very recently launched a "Cultural Hub" electronic platform, which "facilitates easy access for both local and international audiences to a comprehensive database of Saudi cultural heritage, infrastructure, institutions, artefacts, and achievements" (Asharq

Al-Awsat News, 2023, para. 1). Users can monitor cultural movement and witness the preservation of cultural wealth and its dissemination locally and internationally. The platform represents one of the Ministry's products that helps it make culture a way of life for Saudi society and achieve the cultural aspect of *Vision 2030* (Asharq Al-Awsat News, 2023). Accessing this hub is a powerful way to protect the local while acknowledging the inexorable onslaught of global values.

Another way to confront the flood of global values is for Saudi Arabia to spearhead the formation of a network of Arab thinkers, intellectuals, and institutions committed to scientific and cultural exchanges between respective nations. This cadre of Arabian thinkers could work toward (a) unifying Arab thought about the threat to locality raised by 4IR's social media orientation and the flood of global values and (b) creating Arab concepts for cultural structures to stave off the erasure of the locality and special, distinct features of each homeland. It is imperative that youth be respected stakeholders in these arrangements. They are the future. Indeed, concerned scholars believe that confronting the challenges of top-down globalization and Western hegemony requires working on four integrated paths (Al-Gouth, 2021; Al-Jarf, 2020; Saadi, 2015). The first path is rebuilding an Arab political and security system based on the solidarity principle as an alternative to the current reality of rivalry and disintegration. The second path entails achieving Arab economic integration with the common Arab market as a starting point, which aims to achieve independent Arab development. The third path involves confronting the cultural and social media invasion of the forces of top-down globalization and the threat of a cultural melting pot and emphasize local identity (i.e., Islam religion, centuries-old culture and traditions, and the Arabic language). The fourth path involves releasing the freedom of youth power and preserving their rights to participate in national and cross-Arab national intellectual reflections and actions.

Conclusion and Implications

Saudis can maintain their locality without melting into the Western cultural pot and disappearing. But only if they proactively protect the local (religion, culture, and language) that is challenged by social media orientation and the flood of global values stemming from top-down globalization and Western cultural hegemony. Identifying and avoiding the negative components of social media orientation (i.e., how values are oriented and perpetuated via social media) is a good way to preserve locality. The Islamic perspective is clear on accepting and respecting all cultures and appreciating that cultural differences are a source of power not weakness. And "the human factor is the most important factor in the growth and development of a society [and its culture]" (Yazdani, 2020, p. 167). It is thus imperative that Saudi citizens (the human factor) gain deeper understandings of the influence and the affect of social media orientation on the security of *the local* when faced with the flood of *global* values.

As heavy social media users, Saudi youth especially must be enlightened about how to become *flood resilient*, so they can lessen the risk the flood of global values poses for people and Saudi Arabia's religious/cultural/language infrastructure (i.e., cultural constants) and view the flood as a chance to analyze, clarify, and adjust values. With flood resilience, challenges to local values and Saudi's cultural constants would be recognizeable and manageable during an onslaught of global values thus augmenting youths' ability (indeed all citizens) to critically engage with the situation and adjust accordingly. Flood resilience will help the next generation avoid melting into another culture that might contradict and undermine the Saudi culture.

From an educational stance, this resilience could manifest through curricular reform, social media literacy programs, cultural awareness campaigns, and targeted values education. Pushback against a juggernaut empowered by social media orientation *is* possible if the momentum is reframed as an opportunity to leverage the local (i.e., religion, culture, and language) to redirect the flood to benefit Saudi's cultural heritage and economic future. Future research and curricular reform should focus on on maximizing social cultural values to overcome the global melting-pot pressure exacerbated through social media that emphasize western Liberal values at the expense of locality.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: This research did not involve human subjects.

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