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# Different Platforms, Shared Belonging: Media Preferences, Cultural Identity, and Perceived Online–Offline Self-Discrepancy across Saudi Generations

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**Abstract**

This study examines generational differences in preferences for traditional and digital media in Saudi Arabia and their association with three dimensions of cultural identity: reported language practices and attitudes, social values, and national belonging. A descriptive-analytical survey was administered electronically to a non-probability quota sample of Saudi citizens (N = 372; 124 per generation) recruited through social networks. Data were analyzed using one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and chi-square tests.

Preferences for channels varied by generation: official TV was most strongly associated with Generation X ($F = 28.2$, $p < .001$) and TikTok with Generation Z ($F = 15.7$, $p < .001$). Motives also differed across generations ($\chi^2 = 41.85$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$): Generation X more often cited cognitive/informational reasons, whereas Generation Z was more often motivated by entertainment. Contrary to the predicted negative relationship, digital media use was not associated with reported linguistic-hybridity practices (code-switching, attitudes toward English, and Arabizi use) or social values and showed only a weak positive relationship with heritage pride ($r = .146$, $p = .004$). The data therefore offer no evidence that digital media use erodes cultural identity, although a cross-sectional survey cannot establish causal effects.

The only belonging-and-identity item that differed robustly by generation was a single-item measure of perceived online–offline self-discrepancy ("identity duality"), which was highest among Generation Z ($F = 5.408$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .027$). There were no significant generational differences in national pride or global citizenship. The results point to intergenerational differences in perceived online/offline consistency rather than a gap in values.

**Keywords:** digital media, cultural identity, generational differences, Generation Z, Saudi Arabia, uses and gratifications, social identity theory, self-discrepancy

## 1. Introduction

The advent of digital technologies has changed not only communication practices but also the social and cultural configuration of nations. In Saudi Arabia, these changes are consistent with Vision 2030, which pursues the digitalization of the country while preserving national heritage. By 2024, internet penetration had reached 99% of the population, and 35.10 million active social media users (94.3% of the total population) spent more than seven hours per day online, making Saudi society one of the most digitally connected in the world (DataReportal, 2024).

These processes have produced a so-called "digital generational gap" between those who grew up with centralized traditional media and Generation Z, who have grown up in open networks where TikTok and Snapchat serve as the main media for global connection. Al-Rashidi and Alalfy (2023) argue that this situation has changed perceptions of family cohesion and digital citizenship because each generation lives in its own informational bubble.

The problem is cultural as well as communicative, because identity becomes increasingly negotiable in a borderless environment of global content. Social media now share with traditional institutions the role of shaping the cultural identity of Saudi citizens, while exposing young people to global values, languages, and behaviors that may diverge from national heritage; some researchers therefore anticipate the emergence of "hybrid" or "fluid" identities (Al-Anazi & Abdel-Azim, 2023).

Although the literature on new media is extensive, comparative and cross-generational research remains scarce in Arab countries, where most studies have focused only on young people. The current study addresses this gap by comparing the media preferences of Generations X, Y, and Z and examining how these preferences are associated with cultural identity. The paper presents a conceptually organized literature review, the theoretical framework, the method, the results, and a discussion of their implications.

## 2. Literature Review

Rather than summarizing studies one at a time, this review organizes recent Saudi and Gulf research (2019–2026) around three tensions in how digital media and identity are understood: preservation versus transformation of cultural identity, language maintenance versus linguistic hybridity, and stable versus context-dependent self-presentation. A fourth subsection addresses generational differences in platform use, and the review closes by identifying the gap the present study addresses.

### *2.1 Preservation versus Transformation of Cultural Identity*

One strand of research treats digital media as a force that transforms, and potentially erodes, inherited identity. Saudi respondents associate social media with indecency, family disunity, and the replacement of Arabic by other languages (Maashi, 2025), with the marginalization of formal Arabic and problems of content control (Al-Anqari & Al-Diri, 2025), and, within Gulf families, with changing priorities, a perceived decline in Arabic proficiency, and a Western orientation (Ibn Al-Masoud, 2024). At the family level, uneven technology adoption has been linked to structural change in family relations and reduced intergenerational communication (Al-Khuraif et al., 2019; Al-Rashidi & Alalfy, 2023). These studies, however, largely record respondents' perceptions of risk rather than observed change, and Al-Khuraif et al. (2019) is a foundation field report rather than a peer-reviewed article.

A second strand treats digital media as a resource for preserving, and even strengthening, national identity. Social media use positively predicted national identity (pride, respect for national symbols, and belonging) among 386 Saudi university students (Al-Saify et al., 2024), and social software has been described as working alongside traditional institutions in building Saudi cultural identity (Al-Anazi & Abdel-Azim, 2023). Purposeful use was the strongest predictor of value and heritage awareness among 384 Saudi citizens (Al-Anqari & Al-Diri, 2025); social media contributed to cultural and social awareness, but less to religious awareness, among 400 Saudi youths (Al-Marei, 2024); and platforms raised both behavioral and conceptual awareness among 426 youths across six regions (Mazyad, 2020).

Between these positions, a third body of work suggests that effects are limited, selective, or negotiated. Abedi (2024) found no effect of social media exposure on cultural attitudes and behavior among 156 Saudi participants, attributing this to personality, socialization, and religion, and Al-Dahmashi (2023) found that Snapchat entertainment content conflicting with traditional ethics did not produce moral transformation among youths in the Eastern Province. Among Emirati students, Rehim et al. (2026) reported the strongest perceived association between social media and cultural values ($M = 4.56$) and the weakest with social values ($M = 3.36$), interpreting the process as negotiation rather than substitution. Modernization theory offers a broader frame for such findings: technological and economic change can shift value priorities while a society's cultural heritage continues to leave a durable imprint (Inglehart, 2020). The present study treats this negotiated view as the competing expectation to the erosion hypothesis tested in H2.

### *2.2 Language Maintenance versus Linguistic Hybridity*

Language is the identity dimension most often framed in terms of loss: perceived marginalization of formal Arabic (Al-Anqari & Al-Diri, 2025), perceived declines in Arabic proficiency within families (Ibn Al-Masoud, 2024), and concern over the substitution of Arabic (Maashi, 2025) recur across studies. Sociolinguistic research, however, distinguishes practices that such accounts tend to conflate. Arabic–English code-switching and code-mixing are bilingual resources whose use differs across generations rather than signs of wholesale replacement (Alshehrib & Abdelhalim, 2025). Arabizi, writing Arabic in Latin letters and numerals, is an orthographic practice: among 74 Saudi adults over the age of 28, Alanazi (2022) found it used markedly less often than among younger users, and as a form of code-switching rather than full script substitution. Attitudes toward English, such as associating it with sophistication, are a further, evaluative phenomenon.

This distinction shapes how the present study treats language. Its linguistic items capture reported practices (writing in formal Arabic, code-switching, Arabizi use) and one attitude (the prestige of English); they do not measure Arabic proficiency. The study therefore interprets them as indicators of language maintenance and hybridity in reported practice, not as evidence of linguistic competence or erosion.

### *2.3 Stable versus Context-Dependent Self-Presentation*

A third tension concerns whether the self is presented consistently across settings or adapted to each. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical account treats self-presentation as inherently context-dependent, as people manage impressions for different audiences, whereas self-discrepancy theory holds that perceived gaps between self-representations can carry psychological costs (Higgins, 1987). Saudi evidence suggests that online self-presentation is strategic: among 715 Saudi students, 85%

used anonymous accounts, exemplification (M = 3.31) was preferred over ingratiation (M = 2.74), ingratiation was more common among passive and heavy users, and social anxiety was associated with heavy use (Muyidi, 2025). Among 290 Egyptian university students, younger participants misrepresented core identity information online (Sharif, 2021). A difference between online and offline self-presentation may therefore reflect audience-specific impression management rather than a fractured identity, and the present study treats it as a perceived online–offline self-discrepancy.

*2.4 Generational Differences in Platform Preference and Motives*

Studies of platform preference point to a shift from traditional to digital sources. In a survey of 325 Saudi youths, 86.2% relied on digital media for news and only 12.6% on traditional platforms, while 79.1% did not read print media, citing speed and availability (Al-Saeed, 2020). Among 840 Saudi university students, millennials used social media mainly as news channels, with gender differences in trust and use (Alsulaiman, 2023). Combining a content analysis of ten Saudi online newspapers with 18 interviews, Alkhomees and Bahfen (2025) found that Generation Z readers prefer dynamic, interactive news presentation while remaining discerning about credibility. Maashi (2025) identified entertainment as the main driver of use among King Faisal University students, followed by maintaining social contacts. Because most of these samples consist of students or youth, they describe generational change only indirectly.

*2.5 Research Gap*

Taken together, this literature is dominated by descriptive surveys of students or young people (e.g., Sharif, 2021; Abedi, 2024; Maashi, 2025) or treats the family as a homogeneous unit (Ibn Al-Masoud, 2024), and it rarely separates language practices from language competence or self-presentation from identity change. The present study draws operational definitions from this work, namely cultural-identity dimensions (Al-Anqari & Al-Diri, 2025), self-presentation (Muyidi, 2025), media preference (Al-Saeed, 2020), and the distinction between code-switching and Arabizi (Alanazi, 2022; Alshehrib & Abdelhalim, 2025), and adapts survey items from Mazyad (2020), Al-Anqari and Al-Diri (2025), and Maashi (2025). Its contribution is a cross-generational comparison of Generations X, Y, and Z that examines media preferences and motives alongside reported language practices, social values, and national belonging.

## 3. Research Problem and Significance

Saudi society today spans generations with markedly different communicative formation: Generation X and part of Generation Y grew up with traditional, centralized media, whereas Generation Z is immersed in globalized platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat that circulate competing values, languages, and behaviors. This raises a central question: What are the differences in media preferences among Generations X, Y, and Z in Saudi society, and how are these differences associated with their cultural identity?

Practically, the study offers media and cultural authorities a generation-specific map of media consumption to guide national messaging (what reaches Gen X via television may not reach Gen Z via TikTok), and offers families an evidence base for understanding the digital lives of younger members.

Theoretically, the study adds to a Saudi literature that lacks intergenerational research by treating the audience as generational segments rather than one bloc. It uses Uses and Gratifications Theory to explain generational differences in media choice and draws on Social Identity Theory only as an interpretative lens for the identity findings.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two complementary theories. Uses and Gratifications Theory explains *why* each generation selects the media it does (motive) and is operationalized directly by the study's measures of platform use and motives. Social Identity Theory is used as an interpretative lens for what those choices may mean for belonging and self-concept; the study does not test it empirically.

*4.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory*

This theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) treats the audience as active, choosing media that satisfy psychological and social needs. It explains the "preference gap": Gen X's attachment to traditional media (credibility, stability) versus Gen Z's migration to fast digital platforms (entertainment, self-affirmation, interaction) — operationalized directly by the motives items in Table 4.

*4.2 Social Identity Theory as an Interpretative Lens*

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) theory explains identity through membership in, and comparison between, social groups. The instrument does not operationalize in-group/out-group comparison; the "global citizen" item (Table 7) is at most a loose proxy for identification with a global rather than a national category. The theory is therefore used only to interpret the pattern of results, for example whether access to global virtual communities appears to add a global layer of identification without displacing national belonging. Claims drawn from it in Section 8 are presented as interpretations for future research to test, not as tests of the theory's mechanisms.

## 5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Central question: How are generational differences in media preferences associated with cultural identity in Saudi society?

RQ1. How do media patterns and preferences differ across Gen Z, Y, and X?

RQ2. Do motives for using digital platforms differ significantly by generation?

RQ3. What is the relationship between digital-exposure intensity and the dimensions of cultural identity (reported language practices, social values, and belonging)?

RQ4. Does Generation Z differ from earlier generations specifically in perceived online–offline self-discrepancy (identity duality), and not necessarily in the other hybrid-identity indicators (global citizenship, heritage pride, virtual participation)?

H1. There are statistically significant differences among Gen X, Y, and Z in media preferences and motives for use.

H2. There is a statistically significant inverse correlation between digital-exposure intensity and adherence to traditional cultural identity.

H3. There is a statistically significant difference in perceived online–offline self-discrepancy (identity duality), but not necessarily in the other hybrid-identity indicators (global citizenship, heritage pride, virtual participation), attributable to generation, favoring Generation Z.

## 6. Method

### *6.1 Key Terms and Operational Definitions*

Media preferences: the frequency and motives (entertainment, information, communication) of use across the six outlets measured in this study (television, newspapers, YouTube, Snapchat, platform X, and TikTok). WhatsApp is referenced elsewhere only as a questionnaire-distribution channel (Section 6.3), not as a measured outlet.

Cultural identity: respondents' self-reported orientation across three dimensions measured on five-point Likert scales: (a) reported language practices and attitudes (writing in formal Arabic, Arabic–English code-switching, attitudes toward English, and Arabizi use); (b) social values; and (c) belonging and identity (heritage pride, virtual national participation, global citizenship, and perceived online–offline self-discrepancy). The linguistic items measure reported practices and attitudes, not Arabic proficiency, and the four language indicators are treated as related but distinct phenomena rather than as one construct of language erosion.

Motives for use: utilitarian (information), ritualistic (entertainment), or social reasons for platform use, per the questionnaire's motives scale.

Identity duality (perceived online–offline self-discrepancy): the degree to which a respondent perceives a difference between their self-presentation on social media and their offline identity, measured by a single Likert item ("I feel that my personal identity on social media differs from my real-life identity") (Table 7). Because it is a single self-report item rather than a validated multi-item scale, it is treated as an indicator of perceived self-discrepancy, which may reflect audience-specific self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) as much as a divided sense of self (Higgins, 1987); "identity duality" is used only as shorthand for this perception.

Generations: Gen Z, "digital natives," ages 18–28 (born 1997–2007); Gen Y, ages 29–44 (born 1981–1996); Gen X and older, ages 45+ (born 1980 or earlier).

### *6.2 Study Design and Approach*

The study uses a descriptive-analytical design, combining a descriptive survey of platform-use patterns with a comparative analysis of statistically significant differences between generations in media preferences and cultural identity.

### *6.3 Population and Sample*

The population comprises all Saudi citizens (male and female) aged 18 and above residing in the Kingdom, across all administrative regions and the three target generations. Data were collected during the first semester of the 1446–1447 AH / 2025 academic year.

Given the population's size and dispersion, the study relied on a non-probability quota sample distributed electronically via social media (X, WhatsApp, LinkedIn). Because respondents were not drawn from a defined sampling frame by random selection, the sample does not support confidence-interval or margin-of-error claims associated with probability sampling; it is interpreted throughout strictly as a non-probability quota sample. The target of 372 (124 per generational cohort) was informed by conventional sample-size guidance (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), used here only to justify quota-cell *size*, not to certify the *representativeness* of the achieved, self-selected sample.

Quota cells were filled and closed in two steps: a mandatory age-screening item routed respondents into one of three

generational cells (Gen Z, 18–28; Gen Y, 29–44; Gen X, 45+); once a cell reached its 124-response target, its link closed while data collection continued in the remaining open cells. This produced the balanced 124/124/124 split in Table 3, but — as discussed in Limitations (Section 9) — does not make the achieved sample within each cell a probability sample of that generation.

*6.4 Study Instrument*

The electronic questionnaire was the study's data-collection tool, chosen for its reach across regions at low cost, distributed via channels suited to each age group (WhatsApp for older respondents; X and TikTok for youth). It comprises three sections: (1) demographics, with precise generational screening; (2) exposure habits and motives (intensity of use; utilitarian vs. ritualistic motives); and (3) cultural identity (reported language practices and attitudes, social values, and belonging-and-identity items).

*6.5 Validity and Reliability Procedures*

Face validity was assessed by a panel of media and sociology specialists, who reviewed clarity and section fit. Internal-consistency validity used Pearson correlations between each item and its section total, following a small pilot application (exact pilot respondent count not retained in the original study records — see Limitations, Section 9). Reliability used Cronbach's alpha, with 0.70 as the conventional threshold for acceptability.

*6.6 Statistical Analysis*

Data were processed in SPSS using frequencies and percentages (demographics, usage rates), means and standard deviations (motive ranking, identity levels), Cronbach's alpha (reliability), Pearson correlation (Hypothesis 2), one-way ANOVA (Hypotheses 1 and 3), and independent-samples t-tests (dichotomous variables such as sex).

## 7. Results

*7.1 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument*

Table 1 reports Pearson item-total correlations for Sections Three through Five, testing internal-consistency validity.

Table 1. Pearson Item–Total Correlation Coefficients by Section

| Item | Linguistic Dimension (r) | Value & Social Dimension (r) | Belonging & Identity Dimension (r) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .336** | .751** | .722** |
| 2 | .740** | .686** | .175** |
| 3 | .693** | .668** | .613** |
| 4 | .772** | .700** | .718** |

*** Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.*

Correlations were positive and significant ($p < .01$) for most items — linguistic dimension .336–.772, value dimension .668–.751, belonging/identity .613–.722 for three items — except the heritage-pride item (.175), below the conventional .30 retention threshold owing to near-uniform responses. It is flagged here as a candidate for revision or removal in any future application of the instrument and is retained only as a standalone descriptive indicator (Table 7), not combined with other belonging-and-identity items into any composite score.

One linguistic-dimension item — "I always strive to write in correct formal Arabic" (Item 1, Table 5) — is conceptually reverse-poled relative to the section's other three hybridity-marker items (code-switching, English attitudes, Arabizi use); it was reverse-scored before its Table 1 correlation was computed, yielding a positive but comparatively weak .336.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the Study Sections

| Section | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Third section: Linguistic dimension (hybridity items only) | 3* | 0.694 |
| Fourth section: Value and social dimension | 4 | 0.656 |
| Fifth section: Belonging and identity dimension | 4 | not computed** |
| Overall score (all items) | 18 | 0.750 |

** Item 1 was excluded from this calculation not for statistical convenience but because it measures a construct (Arabic maintenance) that is the theoretical opposite pole of hybridity, not a further indicator of it; it is reported and interpreted throughout as a standalone indicator (Table 5). ** No composite reliability is reported for the belonging-and-identity dimension because its four items span heterogeneous constructs (heritage pride, virtual participation, global citizenship, identity duality) that do not form one underlying factor; no total score is computed for this section anywhere in the study (Table 7), and each item is analyzed individually.*

The linguistic-hybridity ($\alpha = .694$) and value-and-social ($\alpha = .656$) subscales fall below the conventional 0.70 threshold, though within the range some psychometric guidance treats as acceptable for short, exploratory 3–4-item scales (Hair,

Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). The full 18-item instrument reached an acceptable 0.750. Results from the two below-threshold subscales are interpreted with corresponding caution throughout (see Limitations, Section 9).

*7.2 Demographic and Preliminary Data*

Table 3. Demographic Distribution of the Sample by Sex, Age Group, and Educational Level

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | Female | 232 | 62.4% |
| | Male | 140 | 37.6% |
| Age group | 18–28 years (Gen Z) | 124 | 33.3% |
| | 29–44 years (Gen Y) | 124 | 33.3% |
| | 45+ years (Gen X) | 124 | 33.3% |
| Educational level | High school or below | 34 | 9.1% |
| | University (Bachelor's/Diploma) | 290 | 78% |
| | Postgraduate studies | 48 | 12.9% |
| Total | | 372 | 100.0% |

Females made up 62.4% of the sample; the three generational quotas were exactly balanced (124 each, 33.3%); and the sample skewed strongly university-educated (77.9% bachelor's/diploma, 13.0% postgraduate, 9.1% high school or below).

*7.3 Section Two: Exposure Patterns, Media Preferences, and Motives*

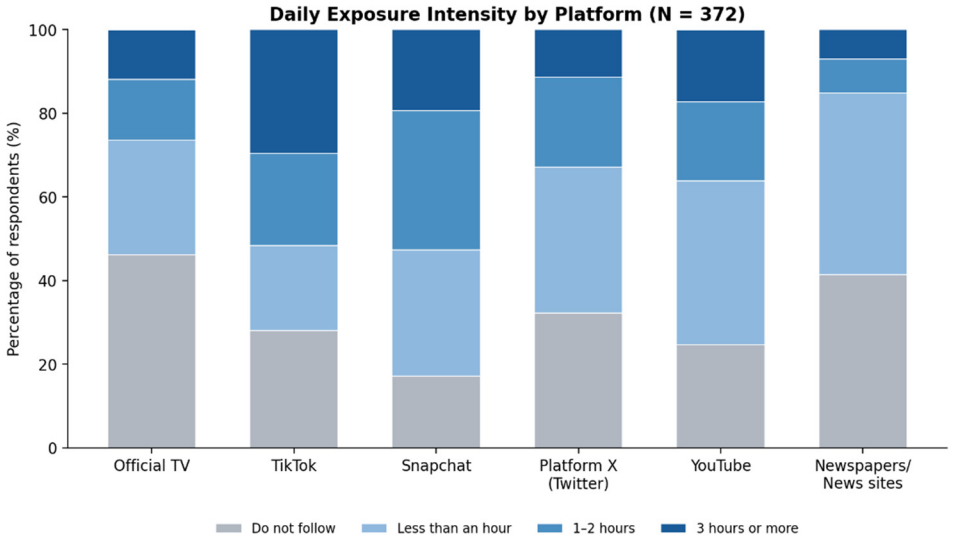



Figure 1. Daily exposure intensity by platform, computed from the full sample (N = 372)

Snapchat led daily engagement (33.3% at 1–2 hours; 19.4% at 3+ hours; only 17.2% non-users). TikTok showed the sharpest generational split: 29.6% heavy use (3+ hours) alongside 28.0% non-use. YouTube skewed moderate (39.2% under an hour). Newspapers/news sites and platform X showed quick-browsing patterns (43.5% and 34.9% under an hour, respectively). Traditional television showed the clearest decline: 46.2% non-viewers and 27.4% under an hour.

Table 4. Ranking of Saudi Audience Motives for Using Their Preferred Platforms

| Motive / Reason for Use | Frequency (N)* | % of Cases | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cognitive/informational: to follow news, events, and accurate information | 297 | 79.8% | 1st |
| Entertainment: to fill leisure time, for entertainment, and to escape routine | 235 | 63.2% | 2nd |
| Social: to stay in touch with friends and family and follow their news | 185 | 49.7% | 3rd |
| Self-expression: because it allows me to share my daily life and express my opinion freely | 62 | 16.7% | 4th |
| Seeking fame: to gain followers and influence others | 23 | 6.2% | 5th |

** Percentages do not sum to 100% because the item permitted multiple responses.*

Cognitive motives led (74.3%), followed by entertainment (58.8%) and social connection (46.3%); self-expression (15.5%) and fame-seeking (5.8%) trailed — the sample leans toward cognitive and entertainment consumption over image-building.

*7.4 Section Three: Reported Language Practices and Attitudes*

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the Linguistic-Dimension Items

| Statement | Mean | SD | Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I always strive to write in correct formal Arabic in my posts.* | 3.90 | 1.141 | High | 1 |
| I find myself automatically mixing English terms into my daily speech (code-switching). | 2.92 | 1.312 | Moderate | 2 |
| I believe using English terms in speech conveys an impression of sophistication and culture. | 2.24 | 1.229 | Low | 3 |
| I frequently use "Arabizi" (Latin letters and numbers) when chatting with friends. | 1.85 | 1.204 | Low | 4 |

*Levels: 1–1.79 very low; 1.80–2.59 low; 2.60–3.39 moderate; 3.40–4.19 high; 4.20–5.00 very high. * Reported in original (non-reverse-scored) form; measures a construct distinct from — and opposite in polarity to — the other three hybridity items, so no combined total is reported (see Section 7.1).*

Writing in formal Arabic was the most frequently reported practice (M = 3.90, high). Among the three hybridity markers (mean = 2.34), code-switching was most common (2.92, moderate), followed by associating English with sophistication (2.24, low), while Arabizi use ranked lowest (1.85, low). Reported use of formal Arabic thus coexists with moderate code-switching, while Arabizi remains comparatively rare. These items describe self-reported practices and attitudes, not Arabic proficiency; because they represent distinct phenomena, the three-item hybridity mean is used only as a summary index in Table 10 and the items are also interpreted individually.

*7.5 Section Four: The Value and Social Dimension*

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for the Value-and-Social-Dimension Items

| Statement | Mean | SD | Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I believe some old customs and traditions no longer suit the spirit of the present age. | 3.23 | 1.183 | Moderate | 1 |
| I feel a significant intellectual gap between myself and the older/younger generation within my family. | 3.17 | 1.144 | Moderate | 2 |
| I tend to adopt global lifestyles and fashions that I see on social media platforms. | 2.73 | 1.284 | Moderate | 3 |
| I derive my religious and value-related information from social media "influencers" more than from my family. | 2.33 | 1.257 | Low | 4 |
| Total score for the value and social dimension | 2.86 | 0.854 | Moderate | — |

*Levels: 1–1.79 very low; 1.80–2.59 low; 2.60–3.39 moderate; 3.40–4.19 high; 4.20–5.00 very high.*

Overall moderate change (M = 2.86): openness to revising customs (3.23) and a felt intergenerational gap (3.17) lead, followed by adopting global lifestyles (2.73); deriving values from influencers ranked lowest (2.33), suggesting family and traditional sources retain primacy despite openness to contemporary lifestyles.

*7.6 Section Five: Belonging and Identity*

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for the Belonging-and-Identity-Dimension Items

| Statement | Mean | SD | Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel pride and admiration when I see content that highlights Saudi heritage and national identity. | 4.71 | 0.544 | Very High | 1 |
| My participation in national occasions (such as National Day) is mostly limited to digital (virtual) interaction. | 3.18 | 1.178 | Moderate | 2 |
| I consider myself a "global citizen" belonging to the world more than to any geographic borders. | 2.94 | 1.261 | Moderate | 3 |
| I feel that my personal identity on "social media" differs from my real-life identity (identity duality). | 2.69 | 1.318 | Moderate | 4 |

*Levels as above. No composite "total score" is reported: as explained in Section 7.1, these four items span heterogeneous constructs rather than one factor, and the section received no reliability coefficient for the same reason; each item is interpreted individually, consistent with Table 10.*

Heritage pride recorded the study's highest mean overall (4.71), reflecting near-total consensus on national attachment. Hybrid-identity markers were moderate: virtual national participation (3.18), global citizenship (2.94), and perceived online–offline self-discrepancy (2.69). Item by item, openness to the world appears to sit alongside, rather than displace, national identity, though this reading is item-level rather than based on a validated composite (Section 7.1).

*7.7 Hypothesis Testing*

Hypothesis 1: There are statistically significant differences among the three generations (Gen X, Y, Z) in media preferences and motives for use.

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA Results for Generational Differences in Media Preferences

| Platform | Generation | Mean | SD | F | $\eta^2$ | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Official TV / satellite channels | Gen Z | 1.42 | 0.677 | 28.2 | 0.142 | .000** |
| | Gen Y | 2.02 | 1.007 | | | |
| | Gen X | 2.34 | 1.185 | | | |
| TikTok | Gen Z | 2.97 | 1.167 | 15.7 | .073 | .000** |
| | Gen Y | 2.38 | 1.177 | | | |
| | Gen X | 2.23 | 1.091 | | | |
| Snapchat | Gen Z | 2.82 | 0.777 | 26.5 | .118 | .000** |
| | Gen Y | 2.75 | 1.088 | | | |
| | Gen X | 2.07 | 0.905 | | | |
| Platform X (Twitter) | Gen Z | 2.19 | 0.978 | 1.663 | .008 | .191 |
| | Gen Y | 2.18 | 1.082 | | | |
| | Gen X | 1.99 | 0.903 | | | |
| YouTube | Gen Z | 2.49 | 1.063 | 4.466 | .022 | .012*† |
| | Gen Y | 2.28 | 0.998 | | | |
| | Gen X | 2.12 | 1.008 | | | |
| Official newspapers / news sites | Gen Z | 1.59 | 0.663 | 6.199 | .030 | .002** |
| | Gen Y | 1.94 | 1.010 | | | |
| | Gen X | 1.87 | 0.821 | | | |

*Frequencies coded: do not follow = 1 ... 3+ hours = 4. $\eta^2$ per Cohen (1988): .01 small, .06 medium, .14 large. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (uncorrected). † Under a Bonferroni correction for six comparisons ($\alpha = .0083$), YouTube (.012) no longer reaches significance, though its effect ($\eta^2 = .022$) is small but non-trivial; TV, TikTok, Snapchat, and newspapers remain significant.*

Five of six platforms showed significant generational differences (partially supporting H1); four survive Bonferroni correction. Television showed the largest, most robust gap ($F = 28.2$, $\eta^2 = .134$, large), favoring Gen X ($M = 2.34$) over Gen Z ($M = 1.42$). The pattern reversed for TikTok ($F = 15.7$, $\eta^2 = .073$, medium; Gen Z highest) and Snapchat ($F = 26.5$, $\eta^2 = .118$; Gen Z and Y converging above Gen X). YouTube favored Gen Z before, but not after, correction ($\eta^2 = .022$, small); newspapers favored Gen Y/X over Gen Z ($\eta^2 = .030$, small). Platform X showed no generational difference ($\eta^2 = .008$, negligible) — a genuinely cross-generational platform.

A chi-square test of motives by generation required collapsing two sparse categories ("Social" and "Self-expression," both with cells below the minimum expected count of 5) into "Other." All frequencies are based on the full analytic sample ($N = 372$; 124 per generation). Because the collapsed "Other" row still had an expected count of 4.0 in each generation (3 of 12 cells, 25%), the asymptotic result was checked with a Monte Carlo exact test (100,000 permutations), which led to the same conclusion ($p < .001$). Table 9's categories therefore differ from Table 4's: Table 4 reports each motive's share under multiple-response selection, while Table 9 classifies each respondent by a single dominant motive, with "Mixed/varied" — not present in Table 4 — capturing respondents not reducible to one motive.

Table 9. Chi-Square Test Results for Generational Differences in Motives for Use (Collapsed Categories)

| Motive / Reason | Gen Z | Gen Y | Gen X | $\chi^2$ | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cognitive motive | 11 (12.4%) | 26 (29.2%) | 52 (58.4%) | 41.85 | 6 | .000** |
| Entertainment motive | 20 (48.8%) | 15 (36.6%) | 6 (14.6%) | | | |
| Other (social + self-expression, collapsed) | 6 (50.0%) | 3 (25.0%) | 3 (25.0%) | | | |
| Mixed/varied motives | 87 (37.8%) | 80 (34.8%) | 63 (27.4%) | | | |

*Frequencies (row-wise %). ** $p < .01$. $N = 372$ (124 per generation). Cramér's $V = .24$. Monte Carlo exact $p < .001$ (100,000 permutations).*

Motives differed significantly by generation ($\chi^2 = 41.85$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .24$), confirming H1's second component: the cognitive motive concentrated in Gen X (52 of 89 cognitive responses, 58.4%), entertainment in Gen Z (20 of 41, 48.8%). The collapsed "Other" category ($n = 12$) was too sparse to interpret by generation and is noted only for a larger follow-up sample. Mixed/varied motives, the largest category, skewed toward Gen Z and Y, consistent with younger and middle generations using platforms for overlapping purposes versus Gen X's more singular (cognitive) use. H1 is accepted: generations differ significantly in both media preferences and motives.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant inverse correlation between the intensity of exposure to global digital platforms and the level of adherence to traditional cultural identity.

Table 10. Pearson Correlation Matrix between Digital-Exposure Intensity and Dimensions of Cultural Identity

| Dependent Variables (Identity Dimensions) | Pearson r | Sig. | Relationship / Magnitude* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Linguistic hybridity subscale (items 2–4 mean) | 0.094 | 0.070 | None |
| Value and social dimension (total score) | -0.031 | 0.530 | None |
| "I consider myself a global citizen" | 0.104 | 0.045 | Positive / small |
| "I feel pride seeing content highlighting Saudi heritage" | 0.146 | 0.004 | Positive / small |
| "My national participation is mostly digital" | -0.121 | 0.015 | Negative / small |
| "I feel identity duality (real vs. virtual)" | 0.117 | 0.019 | Positive / small |

** Cohen's (1988) benchmarks for r: <.10 negligible, .10–.29 small, .30–.49 medium, .50+ large. All four significant correlations are small; none approaches medium or large. Exposure intensity sums frequency scores across six platforms; identity items are tested individually given the absence of a validated composite (Section 7.1). The formal-Arabic item (Table 5, Item 1) was not included in this analysis.*

Exposure showed no significant relationship with the linguistic-hybridity subscale (p = .061) or the value-and-social dimension (p = .530); that is, heavier use was not associated with reported linguistic-hybridity practices (code-switching, attitudes toward English, and Arabizi use) or social values. The formal-Arabic item (Table 5, Item 1) was not entered into this analysis, so no inference is drawn about whether exposure is related to reported formal-Arabic use. Among belonging-and-identity items, exposure correlated positively but only weakly with heritage pride (r = .146), global citizenship (r = .104), and self-discrepancy (r = .117), and negatively, also weakly, with confining participation to digital interaction (r = -.121). Because none exceeds a small effect, and a sample of N = 372 renders even small correlations significant, H2 is rejected: digital exposure shows no meaningful relationship with cultural-identity erosion in either direction.

Hypothesis 3: There is a statistically significant difference in perceived online–offline self-discrepancy (identity duality), but not necessarily in the other hybrid-identity dimensions, attributable to generation, favoring Generation Z.

Table 11. One-Way ANOVA Results for Generational Differences in Hybrid-Identity Dimensions

| Identity Dimension | Generation | Mean | SD | F | $\eta^2$ | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Global citizenship | Gen Z | 2.94 | 1.229 | 0.003 | <.001 | .997 |
| | Gen Y | 2.95 | 1.190 | | | |
| | Gen X | 2.93 | 1.362 | | | |
| Pride in heritage and national identity | Gen Z | 4.76 | 0.524 | 0.745 | .004 | .476 |
| | Gen Y | 4.69 | 0.582 | | | |
| | Gen X | 4.69 | 0.525 | | | |
| Virtual national participation | Gen Z | 3.11 | 1.233 | 2.164 | .011 | .116 |
| | Gen Y | 3.07 | 1.221 | | | |
| | Gen X | 3.34 | 1.067 | | | |
| Identity duality (real vs. virtual) | Gen Z | 2.98 | 1.285 | 5.408 | .027 | .005**† |
| | Gen Y | 2.61 | 1.395 | | | |
| | Gen X | 2.48 | 1.231 | | | |

*$\eta^2$ per Cohen (1988). ** p < .01 (uncorrected). † Survives Bonferroni correction for four comparisons (α = .0125), though the effect remains small-to-moderate ($\eta^2$ = .027).*

Generations were statistically indistinguishable in global citizenship (Sig = .997, $\eta^2$ < .001), heritage pride (Sig = .476, $\eta^2$ = .004, means all above 4.69), and virtual national participation (Sig = .116, $\eta^2$ = .011); a sense of global belonging and national pride is broadly shared, not youth-specific. The sole robust exception was perceived self-discrepancy (F = 5.408, $\eta^2$ = .027, small-to-moderate, Bonferroni-significant): Gen Z scored highest (2.98) and Gen X lowest (2.48), meaning that Gen Z reports the greatest perceived difference between online and offline self-presentation. H3 is accepted, with the caveat that this difference rests on a single item.

## 8. Discussion

In summary, generations differed in platform preferences (RQ1) and motives (RQ2); digital-exposure intensity was not meaningfully associated with reported linguistic-hybridity practices, social values, or belonging (RQ3); and Generation Z differed from older generations only in perceived online–offline self-discrepancy (RQ4). These findings connect to the tensions identified in Section 2 in four ways.

First, regarding preservation versus transformation, the findings align more closely with the negotiated view than with the erosion hypothesis. The small positive correlation between exposure and heritage pride (r = .146) parallels Rehim et al.'s (2026) finding that cultural values showed the strongest perceived association with social media use (M = 4.56), which they interpreted as negotiation rather than substitution. Read through Social Identity Theory as an interpretative lens (Section 4.2), uniformly high national pride combined with Generation Z's higher self-discrepancy is consistent with young Saudis adding a digitally mediated global layer of identification to a stable national identity rather than replacing

it. This remains an interpretation, not a test of the theory: in-group/out-group processes were not measured, all correlations were small (Section 7.7), and the only generational difference that survived correction for multiple testing concerned self-discrepancy, not national or cultural values.

Second, Generation Z's relatively low mean for official newspapers and news sites (M = 1.59) does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in news. Alkhomees and Bahfen (2025) found that Saudi Generation Z readers engage readily with news presented in dynamic, multimedia formats, and the cognitive/informational motive was the most frequently cited motive in the full sample (Table 4). Generation Z's distance from traditional news outlets may therefore reflect a preference about format rather than content, which has practical implications for the recommendations in Section 10.

Third, regarding language maintenance versus hybridity, respondents reported frequent use of formal Arabic (Table 5, M = 3.90) alongside moderate code-switching and infrequent Arabizi (M = 1.85). This pattern is consistent with Alanazi's (2022) observation that Arabizi functions as code-switching rather than script substitution, and with Alshehrib and Abdelhalim's (2025) finding that code-mixing differs by generation rather than replacing Arabic. Because the study measured reported practices and attitudes rather than proficiency, these results cannot speak to Arabic competence; they indicate only that, in this sample, hybrid practices coexist with a reported commitment to formal Arabic rather than displacing it.

Finally, regarding stable versus context-dependent self-presentation, Generation Z's higher score on the self-discrepancy item (M = 2.98 vs. 2.48 for Generation X) is consistent with Saudi evidence of strategic online self-presentation (Muyidi, 2025). Following Goffman (1959), this difference may reflect younger users' greater readiness to tailor self-presentation to online audiences rather than a divided identity in the sense implied by self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). Distinguishing these readings requires multi-item measures of self-presentation and self-concept.

Together, these points argue against interpreting the results as evidence of a "values gap." The clearest generational difference concerns how consistently respondents perceive themselves across online and offline settings.

**9. Limitations**

1. Non-probability, digitally recruited quota sample, with incomplete recruitment records. Recruitment through social media (Section 6.3) is likely to have favored more digitally engaged respondents and under-represented less digitally engaged older Saudis. Generational differences in the wider population may therefore be larger than those observed here, so the null findings should be read as conservative, and platform-preference data should not be generalized to the full population of each generation. In addition, the survey platform did not log how many people opened the questionnaire relative to the 372 who completed it, so a response or completion rate cannot be calculated, and the size of the pilot sample was not retained (Section 6.5).

2. Cross-sectional design cannot separate genuine cohort (generational) effects from ordinary age or life-stage effects; only a longitudinal design can determine whether Gen Z's identity duality is a lasting cohort trait or a feature of youth generally.

3. Self-report bias may affect culturally sensitive items (religiosity-adjacent content, identity duality), particularly in a relatively conservative social context.

4. Reliability below conventional thresholds for two subscales (linguistic-hybridity $\alpha = .694$; value-and-social $\alpha = .656$), and no composite reliability for the belonging-and-identity items (Section 7.1); findings from these sections are indicative rather than definitive. Relatedly, the self-discrepancy finding rests on a single Likert item rather than a validated multi-item scale (Section 6.1), so it cannot be assessed for internal-consistency reliability and should be interpreted cautiously pending replication with a fuller instrument.

5. Unweighted gender imbalance (62.4% female, 37.6% male; Table 3), not corrected for and not separately assessed for its effect on generalizability.

6. Effect sizes are mostly small. Adding eta-squared throughout Section 7.7 shows several statistically significant results (the Hypothesis 2 correlations; the YouTube and "other motives" comparisons) are small in practical magnitude given N = 372 — readers should weigh statistical and practical significance separately.

7. Post hoc analytic decisions. Reverse-scoring and excluding one item from the linguistic-hybridity alpha (Section 7.1) and collapsing two sparse motive categories before the chi-square test (Table 9), were made after inspecting the data rather than pre-registered. Both are substantively justified and transparently reported, but alternative, equally defensible choices might have produced somewhat different results.

8. Measurement scope. The linguistic items capture reported practices and attitudes rather than Arabic proficiency, and Social Identity Theory was not operationalized beyond a single proxy item. Conclusions about language competence or intergroup processes therefore fall outside the study's evidence.

## 10. Recommendations

- Saudi media institutions should produce creative digital content — short-form video, fast formats — that speaks to Gen Z while embedding national identity and Arabic in an engaging, indirect way, since Gen Z's retreat from legacy news outlets reflects a format, not a content, preference (Section 8).
- Launch digital-dialogue awareness campaigns for parents (Gen X/Y) to reduce family value gaps and turn platforms into shared, not isolating, spaces.
- Support Arabic in digital spaces by cultivating Arabic-speaking influencers as digital role models, rather than by discouraging code-switching or Arabizi, which are better understood as hybrid practices than as language loss.
- Treat youth openness to global culture as an opportunity for Saudi "soft power" — encouraging export of local culture — rather than a threat.
- Youth-facing digital-literacy programs should explicitly address the online/offline self-presentation gap identified here — for example, media-literacy curricula that normalize a healthy distinction between curated online personas and offline identity, rather than treating the gap itself as a problem to be closed.
- Conduct longitudinal studies tracking the same Gen Z cohort, using validated multi-item measures of self-presentation and Arabic proficiency, to determine whether perceived self-discrepancy persists, changes with age, or reflects a durable digital-era shift.
- Replicate this design across other Gulf states, building on the Saudi-Emirati parallels in Section 8, to test whether resilient national/social identity alongside growing cultural and linguistic hybridity generalizes regionally or reflects country-specific policy and education.

## 11. Conclusion

This study examined differences in media preferences among Generations Z, Y, and X in Saudi Arabia and their associations with cultural identity. Using a descriptive-analytical design (N = 372), it found that digital platforms were used more intensively than traditional television overall, and that generations differ in their engagement with specific platforms and in their motives for using them.

Contrary to the common "digital erosion" thesis, more intensive digital media use was not significantly associated with reported linguistic-hybridity practices (code-switching, attitudes toward English, and Arabizi use) or with social values. Because the formal-Arabic item was not included in the correlation analysis and Arabic proficiency was not measured, the study makes no claim about whether digital media use is related to formal-Arabic use or to language competence. Generations also did not differ in national pride or global citizenship. After Bonferroni correction, only one belonging-and-identity indicator differed significantly by generation: Generation Z reported a greater perceived discrepancy between their online and offline selves ($F = 5.408$, $\eta^2 = .027$), measured by a single item. The generational difference in this sample therefore appears to lie less in attachment to national and cultural identity than in how the self is presented across online and offline settings.

Read alongside related Gulf research (Rehim et al., 2026) and Saudi studies of hybrid language practices (Alanazi, 2022; Alshehrib & Abdelhalim, 2025) and digital news consumption (Alkhomees & Bahfen, 2025), the results are consistent with the view that, in this sample, the generational divide concerns self-presentation more than access or values; because the design is cross-sectional, it cannot show whether this divide is changing over time. Generation-sensitive media content, family-based digital media literacy programs, and replication with multi-item measures are natural next steps.

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**Author contributions**

Haya Ibrahim Al-Husayni led conceptualization, design, literature review, theoretical framing, and manuscript drafting. Sherif Badran led questionnaire design, data collection, statistical analysis, and manuscript revision. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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