

Cultural Identity of University Youth under Digital Plurality: A Study at Khorfakkan University

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the level of cultural identity representation among university youth at Khorfakkan University in the context of digital plurality, analyze the nature of their patterns of digital usage, demonstrate the extent of its impact on the components of cultural identity, and reveal differences in the features of cultural identity. The study adopted the descriptive-analytical method. The study sample consisted of 150 male and female students enrolled at Khorfakkan University, distributed across five colleges. The study used a questionnaire tool to measure the level of cultural identity representation, patterns of digital use, and the impact of the university environment on cultural identity. The results showed that the level of cultural identity representation among students was high, with arithmetic means ranging between (3.85–4.32) and percentages between (77%–86.4%). The data indicated that students regularly use digital platforms for social and cultural purposes, with a clear tendency to employ them to enhance their awareness of national and cultural identity. The analyses indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in the level of cultural identity between males and females or between colleges, while the average number of hours of daily digital use was significantly associated with a higher level of cultural identity representation. The study recommended enhancing the integration of digital plurality with university programs and activities to support cultural identity and developing digital educational strategies that encourage cultural openness while preserving national identity.

Keywords: Cultural identity, university youth, digital plurality, Khorfakkan University, digital use, university environment.

INTRODUCTION

Accelerating digital transformations have become one of the most distinctive characteristics of the modern era, where technology is no longer merely an auxiliary tool, but has transformed into parallel social and cultural spaces that reproduce consciousness, shape patterns of interaction, and influence the construction of identity. In the context of Arab societies, university youth stand out as the group most engaged with digital media, and the most exposed to the cultural plurality offered by global platforms.

Ibrahim (2013) defines cultural identity as a set of values, symbols, meanings, and traditions that enable individuals to perceive themselves within a particular group. Identity has become more dynamic and less homogeneous; it is no longer tied solely to local heritage, but now interacts with global symbolic systems that transcend traditional affiliations. Al-Dabbe (2006) discussed the impact of globalization in creating a type of overlap between identities, making youth face the challenge of "adhering to authenticity" versus "openness to modernity." In this context, cultural identity faces multiple pressures, most notably the competition between local cultural discourse and globalized digital discourses spread through international platforms.

University youth are the most sensitive group to digital transformations due to their age characteristics and their connection with knowledge and communication. Sherif (2021) points out that youth do not passively receive cultural content; rather, they reproduce it and reshape its meanings according to their perceptions and needs.

Rashdawi (2025) emphasizes that cultural studies highlight the ability of youth to reshape social consciousness and formulate new representations of identity, especially when they face environments with multiple sources of culture. Therefore, university youth at Khorfakkan University represent a model of a social group rebuilding their identity through coexistence between Emirati national culture and global digital spaces.

Digital plurality refers to the multiplicity of platforms, information sources, and cultures available in the digital space, which provides youth with broad opportunities to interact with diverse cultural patterns. Studies show that digital identity is now constructed through complex communicative processes that include reception, participation, and cultural recycling. Nugraha et al. (2024) found that interaction through social media contributes to reshaping youth identity through ongoing processes of cultural comparison between the local and the global.

Condemayta and Soto et al. (2023) revealed that university youth employ social media to present "cultural performances" that reflect a mixture of local and global affiliations simultaneously, reinforcing the concept of multiple or hybrid identities.

Khorfakkan University is distinguished by being a modern educational environment that embraces students from diverse backgrounds and interacts daily with digital transformation initiatives in the United Arab Emirates. Within this environment, the educational process itself becomes a field for producing and exchanging culture, where academic values blend with social values derived from digital communication. Higher education indicators in the region indicate that Gulf universities have become spaces for cultural openness and high-density digital communication, making them environments conducive to shaping cultural identity through multiple sources, some institutional (such as academic activities) and some informal (communication platforms, digital interactions between students).

Thus, Khorfakkan University represents an important model for understanding how cultural identity among youth is reformulated in the context of digital plurality. Against this background, it is clear that the cultural identity of university youth in the context of digital plurality is constructed through continuous interactions between three variables: traditional cultural identity, which provides the referential framework; university youth as agents who reshape this framework; and digital plurality, which provides new and diverse cultural sources. The literature reveals that identity is no longer static or closed, but rather an ongoing process of negotiation between authenticity and openness, between the local and the global, and between traditional values and emerging digital practices. Therefore, Khorfakkan University represents a distinguished model for studying this interaction, given its modern educational environment and cultural and digital openness, which contributes to shaping more flexible and plural youth identities in the digital age.

Research Problem

Previous literature indicates that the cultural identity of university youth is experiencing clear transformations due to intensive engagement with the digital environment, yet these transformations have shown varied interpretations and limited impacts. Rashdawi (2025) emphasized that interaction with digital cultural discourses contributes to reshaping social consciousness and opens the way for flexible identities that transcend traditional boundaries; while Sherif (2021) focused on the fact that youth's use of social media produces variable patterns of cultural identity ranging between promoting local belonging and adopting foreign cultural symbols.

The study by Aqel and Hijazi (2023) showed that digitalization contributed effectively to rebuilding identity through processes of selection and reintegration of cultural symbols, while the study by Koulah and Kibbar (2021) showed that virtual spaces such as Facebook promote new social bonds that sometimes surpass real-world bonds. Muhammad (2023) confirmed that digital technology has had direct impacts on identity, some of which strengthen cultural specificity and others which push toward adopting culture-transcending elements. Madkour (2023) showed that digital transformation imposes new challenges that require strengthening educational culture among university students to face value and behavioral pressures. Despite the contributions of these studies, they often focused on Egyptian or general contexts without addressing modern Gulf university environments like those represented by Khorfakkan University and their specific cultural, social, and digital characteristics.

The researcher believes that the cultural transformations experienced by university youth in the context of digital plurality are characterized by considerable complexity, due to the ongoing interaction between Emirati local culture and global digital spaces that present multiple and sometimes contradictory cultural patterns. There is an urgent need to understand how Khorfakkan University youth perceive their cultural identity and how they reshape or negotiate it in light of a continuous flow of new digital symbols and values.

A fundamental problem exists in the fact that the digital experiences undertaken by youth are not always managed with sufficient cultural awareness, making identities susceptible to fragmentation or duality. The researcher also recognizes that the specificity of the university environment in Khorfakkan, given its openness, the

diverse backgrounds of its students, and its adoption of modern digital practices, requires precise scientific treatment that reveals the features of identity resulting from this interaction, and clarifies whether identity is moving toward integration, assimilation with digital culture, or reproduction of an evolved local cultural model.

Thus, a research gap emerges represented in the absence of analytical field studies addressing how the cultural identity of university youth in Khorfakkan is formed in the context of digital plurality, analyzing the dimensions of this formation, its directions, and the level of impact of digital platforms on it. Therefore, the current study seeks to fill this gap through more focused and in-depth examination of this phenomenon.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of cultural identity representation among university youth at Khorfakkan University in the context of digital plurality?
2. What is the nature of patterns of digital platform usage among university youth at Khorfakkan University, and what is the extent of their impact on the components of their cultural identity?
3. What are the differences in the features of cultural identity among university youth at Khorfakkan University according to their demographic characteristics (gender, college, academic year, level of digital use)?

Research Importance

Theoretical Importance

The theoretical importance of this study stems from its treatment of cultural identity in the context of digital plurality as one of the most complex topics in cultural sociology and contemporary media studies, contributing to broadening the knowledge framework related to the relationship between digital transformations and representations of identity among university youth.

The study also provides a scientific foundation for understanding how cultural patterns are reshaped in digital environments, and fills a gap in Arabic literature, which remains limited in addressing this issue within the Gulf context in general and the Emirati context in particular. This supports intellectual accumulation that contributes to the development of social and cultural theory related to youth and digital transformation.

Practical Importance

The study derives its practical importance from its ability to present results that can be utilized in developing university programs and cultural initiatives aimed at promoting cultural identity among youth within educational institutions.

Its results help decision-makers and universities, including Khorfakkan University, in developing awareness and media plans that take into account the impact of the digital space on shaping students' cultural consciousness, and enable the design of digital strategies that promote affiliation and national and cultural identity. The study presents practical indicators that can be used in preparing digital cultural policies that invest in the positive aspects of digital plurality and reduce its risks to the identity of university youth.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the level of cultural identity representation among university youth at Khorfakkan University in the context of digital plurality.
2. To analyze the nature of patterns of digital use among students at Khorfakkan University and demonstrate the extent of their impact on the components of cultural identity.
3. To reveal differences in cultural identity among students at Khorfakkan University according to demographic variables such as gender, college, academic year, and level of digital use.

Key Terms Definition

1. Cultural Identity

Ibrahim (2013) defines cultural identity as "the set of values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and symbols that distinguish a particular group and shape individuals' awareness of their belonging to it."

Al-Dabbe (2006) defines cultural identity as "a framework that determines the individual's relationship with their society through shared culture, and reflects affiliation and adherence to collective norms and values."

Operational Definition: It is the set of characteristics, values, and cultural practices displayed by Khorfakkan University students, measurable through a questionnaire about components of cultural identity and personal interviews to understand their attitudes and cultural affiliation.

2. University Youth

Arabi (2006) defines university youth as "the age group that usually falls between 18 and 25 years old, enrolled in higher education, and capable of being influenced by cultural, social, and technological transformations."

Sherif (2021) defines university youth as "individuals receiving university education, representing an active social segment in interaction with digital culture and the local community."

Operational Definition: Students enrolled at Khorfakkan University from whom data are collected through a questionnaire about their digital use and cultural practices and interviews to explore their views and positions.

3. Digital Plurality

Hijazi (2011) defines digital plurality as "the multiplicity of digital platforms, information sources, and cultural resources in which individuals participate, allowing them to access diverse perspectives and cultures."

Yaseen (2001) defines digital plurality as "the ability to access a diverse range of digital discourses that provide multi-dimensional interaction with different cultures and values."

Operational Definition: It is the scope of students' interaction with social media and various digital platforms, measurable through a questionnaire about usage patterns and frequency and interviews to understand its impact on components of cultural identity.

4. University Environment

Harb (2008) defines the university environment as "the social, cultural, and institutional context where students and professors meet and produce shared knowledge and culture."

Shaarawi (2001) defines the university environment as "the set of values, educational and social activities that determine student behavior and their cultural and social relationships."

Operational Definition: It is the set of norms and educational and social activities at Khorfakkan University, measured through a questionnaire about student interaction within classrooms and digital platforms and interviews to explore how the university environment affects students' cultural identity.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Muhammad (2023): This research paper attempted to study the impact of digital technology on Egyptian identity among university youth, in a world where cultural openness and successive technological applications and developments that permeate all sectors of human activity through the Internet and enormous technological progress have spread, which contributed to changing the concept and significance of national identity. Its manifestations include impacts on language, religion, clothing, education, and others. Today's youth are the most connected to its innovations, either achieving scientific and technical gains or reaping failure and disappointment. Many studies have addressed the issue of identity, but have not paid attention to how the use of modern technology affects youth by changing their social behavior and being influenced by ideas from the West that contradict the nature of our societies, and may negatively or positively affect the relationship between youth and their communities. The issue of identity has become a major research thesis imposing itself forcefully on the research agenda in many fields of knowledge, representing a central issue for numerous local, regional, and international seminars and conferences.

Aqel (2023): This study aimed to identify the reality of cultural identity, especially for youth in Egyptian society in the era of digitalization and technological development, given the various risks and challenges this era poses to national culture; where the danger of these challenges lies in what might affect the fundamental components of Arab culture represented in religion, the Arabic language, and values of authenticity and affiliation, based on the descriptive-analytical method using a questionnaire applied to a sample of (300) Egyptian university youth. The study results concluded that the entire sample uses social networks, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, with usage density ranging from two to five hours daily, due to their desire to keep up with technological development, using them primarily for communication with others, searching for information, and entertainment through watching exciting videos. Their view is that they are successful methods helping the world advance and develop, and they confirmed they cannot do without them. Regarding the effects of social networks, the majority of youth believe they have contributed to undermining their social communication skills, and most confirmed that they do not help strengthen adherence to customs and pride in Egyptian traditions. They also promote negative values contrary to our Egyptian and religious traditions such as debauchery and moral decline, spread extremist ideas, and diminish the value of marriage and marital life. They also affect classical Arabic as youth prefer to speak in colloquial language.

Madkour (2022): The study aimed to understand the role of digital transformation in cultural reshaping of society—particularly university youth. It used the descriptive survey method with a questionnaire applied to a sample of youth from Tanta University colleges. The study reached several results, most notably: modern digital communication media have become a double-edged sword with both positive and negative characteristics, especially regarding the pillars of cultural identity of society. On one hand, they were considered an important means of discovery and communication; but on the other hand, they were accused of reinforcing passive spectatorship. It also reached several dimensions of cultural shaping of university youth: that the digital dimension

has created several cultural changes, reshaped personality and identity, reshaped values, behaviors and attitudes, reshaped social relationships, and shaped life patterns and styles. In its field framework, it reached several results, most notably: digital transformation and its multiple media have positives reflected in shaping the culture of university youth: such as meeting new friends, learning about the latest societal developments and experiencing events, self-expression and developing and enriching aspects of personality. On the other hand, they reinforced several negatives, most prominently: regression of societal and family bonds in light of virtual relationships, reinforcement of material and consumerist values, value conflict resulting from contradictions between the real and virtual worlds, psychological illnesses resulting from prolonged existence in the virtual world. Regarding the dimensions of cultural shaping of youth in light of using digital communication media, most notably: youth adoption of new behaviors and ideas, which provided several methods for (communication and interactivity and participation, new practices for reading and writing, identity formation and building virtual relationships with others, entertainment and leisure, obtaining information and knowledge, presence and observation).

Koulah (2021): This study attempts to highlight the relationship between using the most popular social network, Facebook, for social communication, and its role in forming and strengthening virtual social bonds among youth. In this research paper, we attempted to address the concept of social network sites and identify their services and the most important technical and digital functions they provided to individuals, then their relationship in supporting an individual's real and virtual network of bonds, considering that Facebook is not merely new technology, but rather a system of social and human relationships that changed concepts of human existence and many socio-cultural foundations and unified many spatiotemporal dimensions. We used qualitative and comparative methodology and our research sample population consisted of analyzing the content of posts, comments, and wall posts on Facebook, collecting these posts from 107 pages on the site. Results confirmed that using Facebook primarily aims to help individuals form social bonds in order to enable them to achieve mutual social recognition between individuals and groups through sharing experiences and cooperation among themselves, thus allowing individuals to achieve themselves and their identity within mutual relationships contingent on achieving three distinct normative models of recognition according to "Axel Honneth's" theory, namely: trust, rights, and social solidarity.

Sherif (2021): This study examined the topic of uses of social media and features of cultural identity among youth in Egyptian society, aiming to answer the following questions: 1) To what extent do youth adhere to using authentic data that express their identities in their social media use?; 2) What are the reasons that push youth to falsify their identities used through social media?; 3) To what degree does cultural identity formed through social media match the actual cultural identity of youth?; 4) To what degree do social media respect the cultural components of Egyptian society?. The researcher relied on social survey method by sample, using the questionnaire tool in a field study on a sample of (290 male and female students). Study results revealed that youth who are users of social media tend to falsify their identities used on social networks, and the main reasons behind this are attributed to the desire for privacy and freedom. Results also revealed that the cultural identity of youth formed on social networks is completely different from their authentic identities.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Research Methodology

This study adopts the descriptive-analytical method as being most suitable for achieving the study's objectives and answering its questions. This method allows the researcher to study phenomena as they exist in their natural reality, while analyzing relationships between variables and explaining the extent of the impact of digital plurality on cultural identity of university youth at Khorfakkan University.

The descriptive-analytical method relies on collecting field data from the target community and analyzing it using quantitative methods to achieve deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. It also allows for comparing results with previous studies and deriving scientific conclusions related to cultural identity and digital plurality in the university environment.

The reasons for choosing this research methodology are:

1. **Its suitability for the research topic:** Since the study aims to describe the level of cultural identity of university youth, analyze their patterns of digital media use, and understand the impact of the university environment on their cultural practices.
2. **Its ability to combine quantitative data:** The method allows the use of questionnaires to obtain quantitative data about identity components and digital interaction.
3. **The possibility of identifying relationships between variables:** The method helps analyze the relationship between digital plurality and cultural identities, as well as the impact of demographic variables (gender, college, academic year) on this relationship.

Research Population

The research population includes students of both genders from various academic years, who regularly use digital platforms and participate in the university's academic and social activities. This population is representative of the multicultural university environment affected by digital plurality, making it suitable for studying cultural identity of university youth and the impact of digital interaction on its components.

University Disengagement a'nd The Impact of Digital Interaction on its Co-mpo-nents

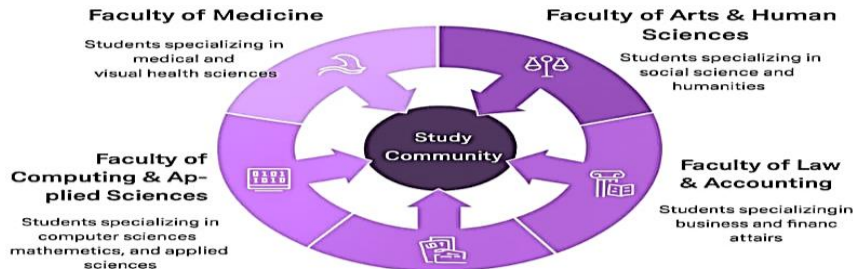


Figure (1) Distribution of the study community by the faculty to which they belong

Research Sample

The study sample was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation of all colleges and students' academic backgrounds. The sample represents an appropriate proportion of the total research population, including:

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables of the Study Sample (n = 150)

Variable	Categories	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	75	50.0
	Female	75	50.0
College	Faculty of Law	30	20.0
	Faculty of Arts and Humanities	30	20.0
	Faculty of Business Administration	30	20.0
	Faculty of Computing and Intelligent Systems	30	20.0
	Faculty of Marine Sciences and Aquatic Biology	30	20.0
Academic Year	First Year	40	26.7
	Second Year	40	26.7
	Third Year	35	23.3
	Fourth Year	35	23.3
Average Daily Digital Use	Less than one hour	20	13.3
	1–3 hours	50	33.3
	4–6 hours	45	30.0
	More than 6 hours	35	23.3

Table 1 shows the distribution of the study sample in terms of demographic variables (gender, college, academic year, and average daily hours of digital use) for a sample of 150 male and female students from Khorfakkan University.

It is evident from the table that the number of males and females is approximately equal (75 males and 75 females), at 50% each. This reflects balanced representation between genders. This result is important as it confirms that the analysis to be conducted on variables of cultural identity and digital plurality will not be affected by gender variation, ensuring fair comparison between different groups.

The distribution of colleges shows that each of the five participating colleges (Law, Arts and Humanities, Business Administration, Computing and Intelligent Systems, Marine Sciences and Aquatic Biology) is represented at an equal rate of 20% for each college. This equal distribution allows the researcher to analyze differences among students according to their academic backgrounds in a balanced manner and provides more accurate results regarding the impact of academic specialization on cultural identity and digital interaction.

Regarding academic year, the table shows that first and second-year students constitute 26.7% each, while third and fourth-year students constitute 23.3% each. This distribution indicates good representation of all

academic years, allowing study of differences between different stages of university education in the extent to which students are affected by cultural identity and digital plurality as they progress in their studies.

The table shows that most students use digital platforms moderately to heavily, with 33.3% using them 1–3 hours daily, 30% using them 4–6 hours, 23.3% using them more than 6 hours, and 13.3% using them less than one hour. This indicates that the vast majority of the study sample is digitally active, reflecting the importance of analyzing the impact of digital plurality on their cultural identity, as intensive use of digital platforms can be a factor influencing the shaping of their cultural identity features.

Study Tools

Questionnaire Objective:

The questionnaire aims to measure the level of cultural identity representation among university youth, their patterns of digital use, and the impact of the university environment on their cultural identity, according to the study's operational definitions.

Questionnaire Structure:

The questionnaire was designed on four main dimensions:

1. **Demographic data:** Including gender, college, academic year, and average daily hours of digital use.
2. **Level of cultural identity representation:** A 5-point Likert scale to assess students' sense of belonging, appreciation for local culture, and respect for cultural diversity.
3. **Patterns of digital platform usage:** A 5-point Likert scale to assess frequency of digital platform use, type of digital activities, and their impact on cultural identity.
4. **University environment and its impact on cultural identity:** A 5-point Likert scale to assess the extent of university support for cultural interaction, use of digital media in cultural education, and promotion of affiliation.

Table 2: Distribution of Questionnaire Dimensions and Number of Items

Dimension Number	Dimension	Number of Items
1	Level of Cultural Identity Representation	5
2	Patterns of Digital Platform Use	5
3	University Environment and its Impact on Cultural Identity	5
4	Personal Interview (Open-Ended Questions)	4
Total		19

Responses to the items in these dimensions were provided using a five-point Likert scale, according to the following hierarchy: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). This scale helps measure attitudes quantitatively, allowing precise statistical analysis.

Psychometric Characteristics of the Instrument

First: Validity

Expert Judge Validity: The content validity was ensured by presenting the questionnaire to a group of experts in education and digital culture to verify the clarity of items and their appropriateness for measuring study variables.

Second: Reliability

Instrument Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha method was used to verify questionnaire and scale reliability, using SPSS statistical software. Results showed high values indicating high reliability of the instrument.

Table 3: Instrument Reliability Coefficient Using Cronbach's Alpha

Dimension Number	Dimension	Reliability Coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha)
1	Level of Cultural Identity Representation	0.87
2	Patterns of Digital Platform Use	0.85
3	University Environment and its Impact on Cultural Identity	0.88
4	Personal Interview (Open-Ended Questions)	0.82
	Entire Questionnaire	0.89

The table shows that Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all sub-dimensions ranges between 0.82 and 0.88, which is considered an acceptable and high value according to statistical standards (Nunnally, 1978), as values above 0.70 indicate very good reliability for the instrument.

Level of Cultural Identity Representation ($\alpha=0.87$): Indicates that items comprising this dimension are well-related internally, and they measure a unified dimension of students' cultural identity.

Patterns of Digital Platform Use ($\alpha=0.85$): Points to consistency of items related to students' digital behavior and frequency of digital platform use, reflecting reliability of this dimension in measuring the variable.

University Environment and its Impact on Cultural Identity ($\alpha=0.88$): This value reflects strong correlation among items related to university support and student interaction, confirming that measures can represent this dimension accurately.

Personal Interview ($\alpha=0.82$): Although it is a qualitative tool, the reliability coefficient shows good consistency in open-ended questions when analyzing responses using coding and content methods, ensuring reliability of qualitative results.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire reached 0.89, a very high value, indicating that the entire questionnaire has high reliability and reflects strong reliability for measuring the main variables in the study (cultural identity, digital use, university environment).

STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated for the entire questionnaire in preparation for presenting research question results as follows:

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of Questionnaire Items (n = 150)

No.	Item	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage (%)
1	I take pride in Emirati culture and try to adhere to its customs and values	4.32	0.68	86.4
2	I feel belonging to the university community and participate in its cultural events	4.10	0.74	82.0
3	I use local cultural symbols when expressing myself on the Internet	3.85	0.81	77.0
4	I appreciate cultural diversity and respect other cultures during digital communication	4.25	0.66	85.0
5	I benefit from digital information to enhance my knowledge of local culture	4.05	0.72	81.0
6	I use social media to communicate with my university friends	4.15	0.70	83.0
7	I follow digital cultural pages or groups on the Internet	3.95	0.75	79.0
8	I share content reflecting my cultural identity on the Internet	3.80	0.82	76.0
9	I learn about other cultures through digital platforms	4.00	0.70	80.0
10	I use the Internet to obtain information that enhances my awareness of national identity	4.10	0.68	82.0
11	The university provides opportunities for cultural and social interaction among students	4.20	0.65	84.0
12	The university encourages the use of digital media to promote cultural learning	4.05	0.71	81.0
13	I participate in university activities that contribute to promoting my cultural awareness	4.00	0.72	80.0
14	The university environment helps me integrate digital and local identities	4.10	0.70	82.0
15	I find support from my professors to develop my knowledge of digital culture and local culture together	4.15	0.68	83.0

The results of the table show that the level of pride in Emirati culture and adherence to its customs and values came at the forefront of items; the first statement received the highest arithmetic mean (4.32) and a high percentage of 86.4%, indicating that the majority of students have strong attachment to national culture and keenness to represent it in their daily behavior. This is reinforced by statements related to belonging to the university community; the statement "I feel belonging to the university community and participate in its cultural events" scored a mean of 4.10 at 82%, reflecting positive overlap between national affiliation and belonging to the educational institution as a space supporting identity. These results indicate that students' national and cultural identity is firmly rooted and forms a referential framework for their behavior inside and outside the university.

Results reveal a good level of utilizing digital media for expressing cultural identity, though somewhat lower than the level of direct cultural appreciation. The statement "I use local cultural symbols when expressing myself on the Internet" received an arithmetic mean of 3.85 and 77%, while "I share content reflecting my cultural identity on the Internet" scored 3.80 at 76%. While these values remain within a relatively high level, they are lower than statements related to direct feelings of belonging and appreciation, which may suggest that translating this appreciation into sustained and clear digital practices still needs more reinforcement. Conversely, the 77–80% rate

indicates that a large section of students indeed integrates their cultural identity into their digital presence, paving the way for greater possibilities in utilizing digital platforms to serve national and cultural identity.

Statements related to cultural interaction and learning from other cultures indicate that students do not merely affirm their local identity but also show clear openness to cultural diversity. The statement "I appreciate cultural diversity and respect other cultures during digital communication" scored a mean of 4.25 at 85%, which is among the highest averages in the table, indicating high awareness of the importance of respecting others in digital space. Similarly, "I learn about other cultures through digital platforms" came with a mean of 4.00 at 80%, reflecting students' use of digital platforms as a means for learning and getting to know others, not merely for daily communication. This balance between adhering to local identity and positively engaging with other cultural identities reflects an aspect of mature digital identity that preserves its specificity while simultaneously interacting positively with the global environment.

Statements related to the university's role show that the university environment clearly contributes to promoting students' cultural and digital identity. The statement "The university provides opportunities for cultural and social interaction among students" came with a mean of 4.20 at 84%, indicating high satisfaction with available opportunities for cultural interaction. The statement "The university encourages the use of digital media to promote cultural learning" scored a mean of 4.05 at 81%, while "The university environment helps me integrate digital and local identities" registered a mean of 4.10 at 82%, and "I find support from my professors to develop my knowledge of digital culture and local culture together" achieved a mean of 4.15 at 83%. These combined results confirm that the university plays an effective role in supporting students to integrate their digital identity with their local identity, through activities, programs, and academic support, promoting the formation of a balanced identity that benefits from digital space without separating from cultural and national roots.

Answering Research Questions

First Research Question

Question: What is the level of cultural identity representation among university youth at Khorfakkan University in the context of digital plurality?

Table 4 (Revisited): Means and Standard Deviations of Cultural Identity Representation Level among University Youth at Khorfakkan University (n=150)

No.	Item	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage (%)
1	I take pride in Emirati culture and try to adhere to its customs and values	4.32	0.68	86.4
2	I feel belonging to the university community and participate in its cultural events	4.10	0.74	82.0
3	I use local cultural symbols when expressing myself on the Internet	3.85	0.81	77.0
4	I appreciate cultural diversity and respect other cultures during digital communication	4.25	0.66	85.0
5	I benefit from digital information to enhance my knowledge of local culture	4.05	0.72	81.0

The data in Table 4 shows that the level of cultural identity representation among university youth at Khorfakkan University in the context of digital plurality was high; questionnaire items recorded arithmetic means ranging between (3.85–4.32) and percentages between (77%–86.4%), values indicating a high degree of agreement on item content. The statement "I take pride in Emirati culture and try to adhere to its customs and values" achieved the highest arithmetic mean at (4.32) with a percentage of (86.4%), reflecting the entrenchment of feelings of pride in national identity and local culture among students and their keenness to translate these feelings into practical behaviors related to adherence to customs and values. The result of "I feel belonging to the university community and participate in its cultural events" showed a mean of (4.10) at (82%), indicating that the university represents a vital field for students to represent cultural identity and practice it through events and activities.

On the other hand, results of statements related to utilizing digital space to promote cultural identity show a positive level as well, though somewhat lower than the level of direct cultural appreciation. The statement "I use local cultural symbols when expressing myself on the Internet" achieved an arithmetic mean (3.85) at (77%), while "I benefit from digital information to enhance my knowledge of local culture" registered a mean of (4.05) at (81%). The statement "I appreciate cultural diversity and respect other cultures during digital communication" came with a high value of (4.25) and (85%), indicating that students do not merely represent their local cultural identity but combine that with openness to cultural plurality and respect for others in the digital environment. Thus, these results reflect that cultural identity among Khorfakkan University students is an active and balanced identity that benefits from digital capabilities in establishing national affiliation while maintaining a spirit of openness and tolerance.

This result aligns with Rashdawi (2025), who argues that cultural studies contribute to reshaping social consciousness of youth in a way that makes them more capable of linking their local cultural references with the requirements of the digital age; these study results show that Khorfakkan University students practice this linking practically through their pride in Emirati culture and their investment of digital content in deepening their knowledge of it.

Results also align with what Sherif (2021) concluded regarding the fact that youth's use of social media in Egyptian society did not necessarily lead to regression of cultural identity, but rather revealed patterns of positive utilization of digital platforms in expressing cultural affiliation with openness to others.

This alignment is also strengthened by what Aqel and Hijazi (2023) pointed out, namely that cultural identity of youth in the age of digitalization does not tend toward dissolution but rather takes the form of a hybrid and balanced identity combining the local and digital, which clearly appears in the high averages of statements expressing pride in Emirati culture on one hand and respect for cultural diversity and communication with other cultures on the other.

Therefore, this study confirms in the context of Khorfakkan University that digital plurality does not weaken cultural identity representation among university youth; rather, it may open the way for its reproduction in a form of greater awareness and openness.

Second Research Question

Question: What is the nature of patterns of digital platform usage among university youth at Khorfakkan University, and what is the extent of their impact on the components of their cultural identity?

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations of Digital Usage Patterns (n = 150)

No.	Item	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage (%)
6	I use social media to communicate with my university friends	4.15	0.70	83.0
7	I follow digital cultural pages or groups on the Internet	3.95	0.75	79.0
8	I share content reflecting my cultural identity on the Internet	3.80	0.82	76.0
9	I learn about other cultures through digital platforms	4.00	0.70	80.0
10	I use the Internet to obtain information that enhances my awareness of national identity	4.10	0.68	82.0

The data in Table 5 shows that the nature of patterns of digital platform usage among university youth at Khorfakkan University is characterized by regularity and effectiveness, with a clear tendency toward social and cultural use simultaneously. The statement "I use social media to communicate with my university friends" achieved the highest arithmetic mean (4.15) at a percentage of (83%), reflecting that digital platforms represent an essential tool for students for daily communication and strengthening social bonds within the university community. The statement "I learn about other cultures through digital platforms" came with a mean of (4.00) and (80%), indicating that students do not limit their digital platform use to entertainment or social dimensions alone, but also utilize them as a channel for intellectual openness to other cultures, consistent with the nature of digital plurality that provides broad exposure to cross-border content.

In the same context, results reveal a clear presence of uses supporting components of cultural identity, though to varying degrees. The statement "I use the Internet to obtain information that enhances my awareness of national identity" registered a mean of (4.10) at (82%), indicating that students utilize the digital environment to enhance their awareness of national identity and not merely for transient content consumption. The statement "I follow digital cultural pages or groups on the Internet" scored a mean of (3.95) at (79%), while "I share content reflecting my cultural identity on the Internet" achieved a mean (3.80) at (76%). These figures show a positive inclination toward following cultural content and engagement—albeit to a somewhat lesser relative degree—in producing content reflecting cultural identity. Based on this, it can be said that patterns of digital use among Khorfakkan University students are not culturally neutral; rather, they include uses supporting national and cultural identity components through learning, following, and digital participation.

These results align with what Al-Saify et al. (2024) concluded, emphasizing that use of social media is positively related to national identity among university students. Khorfakkan University results showed that students use the Internet to obtain information enhancing their awareness of national identity and follow digital cultural content, reflecting conscious utilization of digital platforms in service of cultural affiliation.

Results also agree with what Nugraha et al. (2024) pointed out regarding the role of social media communication in shaping youth identity in multicultural contexts; the high averages in items of learning about

other cultures and communicating with university friends reflect that these platforms contribute to building youth identity interactive with its social and cultural environment.

Third Research Question

Question: What are the differences in the features of cultural identity among university youth at Khorfakkan University according to their demographic characteristics (gender, college, academic year, level of digital use)?

Table 6: t-test for Differences between Genders (n = 150)

Variable	Gender	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	Significance Level
Level of Cultural Identity	Male	4.12	0.71	0.45	148	0.65
	Female	4.10	0.73			

Results in Table 6 indicate that the level of cultural identity among university youth at Khorfakkan University does not differ according to gender (male/female). The arithmetic mean for males was (4.12) with standard deviation (0.71), while the arithmetic mean for females was (4.10) with standard deviation (0.73). These are very simple differences not sufficient to constitute statistically significant differences; t-value = 0.45 at degree of freedom (df=148) and significance level (0.65) greater than (0.05). This means that the level of cultural identity representation is high and similar for both males and females, and that gender does not constitute a decisive factor in differences in cultural identity features among sample members, indicating that the university and digital environment affect students in similarly comparable degrees regardless of gender type.

This result aligns with what Hijazi (2011) proposed regarding how challenges of globalization and globalized cultural discourse practice upon society as a whole and do not differentiate between gender groups, making cultural responses of youth males and females generally tend toward similar patterns of adherence to identity and attempts to adapt to digital reality.

Results also align with what Muhammad (2023) concluded regarding technology's impact on Egyptian identity; she showed that gender differences are not the most prominent factor in shaping digital and cultural identity, but rather the nature of use and circumstances of the educational and social environment play the more important role, which is reflected here in the similarity of cultural identity means between genders at Khorfakkan University.

This result also intersects with what Madkour (2023) indicated in her vision for requirements of developing leisure education culture among university students in the digital age; she demonstrated that university programs, activities, and digital environment, if designed comprehensively, affect both male and female students equally and contribute to building similarly convergent cultural awareness among them. Therefore, the absence of significant differences in cultural identity between males and females in this study can be understood in light of the fact that the experience of living in digital and university space has become a shared experience during which patterns of cultural representation converge between genders.

Table 7: ANOVA Analysis for Differences between Colleges (n = 150)

College	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P
Faculty of Law	4.05	0.72	1.12	0.35
Faculty of Arts and Humanities	4.12	0.70		
Faculty of Business Administration	4.08	0.74		
Faculty of Computing and Intelligent Systems	4.15	0.71		
Faculty of Marine Sciences and Aquatic Biology	4.10	0.73		

Results in Table 7 show that the level of cultural identity among university youth at Khorfakkan University does not differ according to college; arithmetic means ranged between (4.05 and 4.15) with closely approximating standard deviations. Faculty of Law registered a mean (4.05), Faculty of Arts and Humanities (4.12), Faculty of Business Administration (4.08), Faculty of Computing and Intelligent Systems (4.15), and Faculty of Marine Sciences and Aquatic Biology (4.10), with F=1.12 value at significance level (p=0.35) greater than (0.05), meaning there are no statistically significant differences between colleges in the level of cultural identity.

The result of Table 7 indicates that belonging to a specific college does not produce fundamental differences in students' level of cultural identity, which can be explained in light of the fact that impacts of globalization and digital space have become discipline-transcending, as Al-Dabbe (2006) pointed out in addressing globalization and cultural identity issues, viewing identity challenges not limited to a specific knowledge field but affecting youth cultural structure comprehensively.

This result also aligns with what Arabi (2006) proposed in his study of globalization's impact on youth culture, showing that cultural responses of university youth converge despite variation in study fields, due to similarity of their communicative and social environments. This result also meets with findings of Aqel and Hijazi (2023), who

emphasized that cultural identity in the age of digitalization is determined more by the nature of digital exposure and the shared university social environment than merely by affiliation with a specific academic specialization.

Table 8: ANOVA for Differences According to Average Daily Digital Usage Hours

Usage Hours	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P
Less than one hour	3.85	0.78	5.23	0.002
1–3 hours	4.05	0.70		
4–6 hours	4.12	0.68		
More than 6 hours	4.20	0.66		

Table 8 shows that average daily digital use hours correlate with significant differences in cultural identity level; the cultural identity mean for the "less than one hour" group was (3.85), the lowest, and gradually increased for "1–3 hours" (4.05), then "4–6 hours" (4.12), reaching the highest level for "more than 6 hours" (4.20), with $F=5.23$ value and significance level ($p=0.002$) less than (0.05), indicating that increased digital use in this sample correlates with elevated cultural identity representation, not its regression.

The Table 8 results, showing elevated cultural identity level with increased daily digital use hours, suggest that digital platform usage among Khorfakkan University students tends to be conscious use invested in serving identity more than constituting an identity threat. This result aligns with Sherif (2021)'s conclusion that social media uses may reinforce aspects of students' cultural identity when directed toward following cultural content and expressing affiliation, rather than limiting use to entertainment.

It also intersects with what Muhammad (2023) indicated, that digital technology's impact on identity is not unidirectional; it can contribute to promoting identity awareness if used within a conscious and directed framework, a situation materialized here in elevated identity means among groups with higher digital use.

This result also supports what Aqel and Hijazi (2023) confirmed regarding youth developing hybrid cultural identities in the digital age that benefit from digital space in reasserting local affiliation, as well as what Koulah and Kibbar (2021) revealed about Facebook's role in building recognized virtual social bonds contributing to collective affiliation and shared identity promotion. Thus, it can be said that these study results belong to the research trend rejecting viewing digital use as an inevitable identity threat, instead highlighting its potential in supporting components of cultural identity among university youth when appropriate environment and guiding values are present.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen university programs and events supporting cultural identity in both real and digital spaces:** Given the high averages of cultural identity representation among Khorfakkan University students, the university is recommended to continue organizing cultural activities and events (seminars, cultural weeks, digital heritage competitions) linking national identity with digital culture, contributing to entrenching and sustainably supporting this high level of affiliation.
- Develop directed digital cultural content on official university platforms:** Given notable use of digital platforms for learning about other cultures and promoting national identity, the university is recommended to produce and publish digital cultural content (short videos, infographics, brief articles) introducing students to Emirati identity and the relationship between local identity and digital plurality, encouraging student engagement and content reproduction.
- Integrate cultural and digital identity topics into curricula and classroom activities:** Since results showed similarity in cultural identity level between different colleges, this suggests the possibility of integrating identity issues in general courses or university requirements (such as life skills courses, general culture, digital communication skills), addressing topics of: national identity, digital culture, ethics of platform interaction, and managing cultural openness.
- Design training workshops for students on conscious digital platform use in service of cultural identity:** In light of the positive relationship between increased digital use hours and elevated cultural identity level.
- Create platforms and periodic competitions encouraging students to produce content reflecting Emirati identity:** Results showed that sharing content reflecting cultural identity came at a good level but lower than following cultural pages. The university is recommended to establish platforms or periodic competitions encouraging students to produce short videos about Emirati identity, posts highlighting local culture symbols, and student digital campaigns promoting national affiliation.
- Build partnerships with national cultural and media institutions:** Since students learn about other cultures through digital platforms, the university is recommended to partner with national cultural and media institutions (libraries, cultural centers, digital channels) to provide reliable and specialized content

about national identity and local culture, making this content available to students through university platforms, directing digital openness toward sources promoting rather than fragmenting identity.

SUGGESTED FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Comparative study of digital cultural identity among students from different UAE universities across various emirates
2. Impact of different social and cultural contexts within the nation on identity representation in digital space
3. Impact of digital platform type (Instagram, Tik Tok, X/Twitter, Snapchat...) on components of university youth cultural identity
4. Qualitative study of student experiences reconciling local and digital identities amid cultural plurality

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