Arabic Literature in the Shadow of Social Media

Eman Younis

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Chapter One

Social Media Literature

**Social Media as an “End”**

Social network platforms are websites or software applications specifically designed to provide registered users the ability to communicate with one another. These platforms, which can only be used when connected to the internet, are accessed via a unique username, phone number, or email address. The most notable social network platforms are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter[[1]](#footnote-1).

Dave Parrack defines “social media” as a type of website that connects members from all over the world. These sites bring together members with similar interests by allowing them to join “groups” centered on a wide range of topics such as commerce and medicine, amongst others[[2]](#footnote-2).

Marie Laure-Ryan claims that these platforms create a two-sided reality for the user: the first side is an “illusion” and aims to be fun; as we are aware that it is not real, we do not fall victim to its deception— the user is aware that it is merely an illusion and he can return to reality whenever he wants. The second side is “the challenge” and aims to shape the world according to our preferences and desires; we, by using social networks, fulfil dreams and hopes that we would otherwise be unable to fulfil in the real world[[3]](#footnote-3).

Social networks have become a tangible reality in our daily lives with all the great services it provides (especially at the social level). It has become a world in and of itself wherein people from different countries and cultures are able to communicate and share personal information with each other and everyone has a cohort of “virtual” friends.

Social media has granted people the opportunity to build many different types of relationships, including familial and social relationships, as well as relationships between individuals with similar interests. Some even depend on them for romantic relationships and marriage. These networks have become an electronic substitute for face-to-face visits and meetings, and political parties even use them as primary and accredited platforms through which to communicate with, and disseminate their ideas to, their supporters.

Additionally, social media has prompted people to transition from the real world to a virtual one, just as it has also led to a special type of social relationship between people (“virtual relationships”). It has changed daily life, social relationships, culture, and peoples’ mindsets, so much so that some researchers liken the changes brought about by social networks to those brought about by the invention of the telephone in the early 20th century or the emergence of television in the 1950s and 1960s[[4]](#footnote-4). Some researchers even go so far as to equate it with the changes brought about by the invention of the writing system[[5]](#footnote-5).

This unprecedented technological dominance has undoubtedly influenced Arab culture, thought, and literature. We can say that online networks have become a strong obsession among authors, and this is manifested prominently in their literary creations, poetry, and narration. What leads us to this claim is the large quantitative accumulation of literary texts inspired by the internet, technology, and social media. The number of these texts is increasing significantly (especially since the beginning of the century), indicating a substantive transition in the literary phenomenon. Many critics and authors have been interested in this phenomenon, including, for example, the Jordanian author, Muḥammad Sinjāla who coined the term “digital reality” (i.e., the narration of form and content) in “The Novel of Digital Reality” (2006).

A noteworthy Arabic study on this topic is “The Internet and the Poetics of Intertextuality in the Contemporary Arab Novel”[[6]](#footnote-6) by Muḥammad Hindī. However, it only explores narrative texts. We now turn the reader’s attention to the many other studies and articles whose titles are exceptionally misleading, such as “Social Media Literature”[[7]](#footnote-7) (2019) by Wafā’ Khayrī and “Social Media Paints a New Map for Literary Writing”[[8]](#footnote-8) (2018) by Mu’min Aḥmad. These articles shed light on the phenomenon of social media of texts, focusing on topics completely unrelated to their titles.

Our definition of “Social Media Literature” prompts a number of questions emanating from the perspective of the realism school: how has literature addressed the topic of social networks in Arab societies? What are the most important issues explored? Can we rely on literature to trace the path of online networks’ penetration in Arab society? In order to answer these questions, we sifted through many literary texts about Social Media Literature that were published from the 1990s to the present day. We observed that some of the content, ideas, and issues related to social media were recurring. Therefore, we sifted through the texts and then divided them into groups according to their common contents. Due to length and time constraints, we only referenced a selected number of texts. After a careful screening and classification process, we uncovered the most popular and widely discussed topics in Social Media Literature which we will discuss below.

**Risks of Electronic Publishing**

It is well known that literature’s transition to cyberspace has many positive aspects that have benefited authors and their audiences. Among the most important of these benefits is that social media literature overcomes the barriers of time and space, allowing for expedited and cost-effective publishing. Additionally, books and dictionaries can now be easily obtained for free through various websites. That said, in spite of these positives, there are no doubt negatives that have serious implications for literature in both the short and long term.

Of course, the existing literature does not overlook the negative aspects of electronic publishing. Many writers have focused on these negatives and shared their concerns about them. In “A Sill of Wires” from *Tweets of the Robotic Bird*[[9]](#footnote-9) (1996), Egyptian poet, Aḥmad Faḍl Shablūl, expresses the possibility of electronic texts suddenly disappearing due to a device malfunction or the site on which they are published getting removed. He compared it to paper publishing which guarantees the preservation of texts. He views electronic publishing negatively and expresses his lack of confidence in computers. We find him questioning a computer’s ability to preserve human memories and feelings, and arguing that, even if it could preserve them, it cannot be trusted, since it could malfunction at any moment and all the emotions, feelings, and beautiful memories would be erased. He says:

*My friend the computer betrayed me. Because I didn’t give him the signal. I didn’t exchange the letters for numbers. I didn’t program his feelings. I didn’t execute his commands.*

*The computer that I taught affection and security. He betrayed me. Because I gave him languages and magnetic notes. The compassion of flowers, trees, rivers. The story of the eyes at daybreak. The story of branches, dreams, and rain.*

Thus, the Palestinian writer *Suhayl Kīwān* underscores in his story, *I am Happy That They Are Robbing Me*[[10]](#footnote-10) (2013) another dangerous phenomenon preventing electronic publication: literary copyright infringement, insecure publication rights, and the loss of intellectual property. The story follows a writer who incidentally discovers that a young woman has been stealing his work and publishing it under her own name for the past three years. She has amassed fans and followers in the global diaspora. When the writer sends a cease-and-desist order to her publisher’s administrative personnel, he is surprised to find that they accuse him of trying to steal and claim credit for their “gifted writer’s” work.

In *A Beautiful Place to Steal*[[11]](#footnote-11) (2009), Egyptian writer Sayyid Nagim deals with the phenomenon of literary theft and the exploitation thereof for immoral purposes, such as gaining fame at the expense of another’s reputation. In cyberspace, every wrong is permissible without censorship, as the narrator in the story says: “Among them are those who think that I oppose their political party, or that I don’t want to reveal my secrets…“

**The Virtual World and Self-Realization**

Self-realization through refuge in the hypothetical world is one of the issues that has dominated a considerable range of Social Media Literature, compelling us to shed light on it and its importance. In his book, *Obstacles of the Age of Information*[[12]](#footnote-12),Egyptian critic Nabīl ʿAlī considers cyberspace a realm in which the writer can break free from his earthly shackles and social conventions, making it the refuge of choice for those who feel a void from the overwhelming gap between their aspirations and their abilities.

By seeking refuge in cyberspace, the individual tries to expound upon the sense of alienation resulting from this gap, to achieve the perpetual human inclination to recreate the world with their thoughts and art.

According to Marie-Laure Ryan, virtual reality has two elements. The first is “illusion,” which aims to please, and since we realize that it is not real, we cannot fall victim to its deception. The reader consciously realizes that this world is merely make believe and that he can return to reality whenever he wants. The second is “interactivity,” whereby we seek to form the world according to our taste and desires. Indeed, in virtual reality, we achieve the hopes and dreams that we are unable to fulfill in the real world.

It is not strange, then, that this is one of the important topics that has seized the attention of these writers, each of whom has elaborated upon it in their own unique style. Among the literary texts which have dealt with the subject in detail is the poem “The Screen is Upon You”, from the poetry collection *And I Have Other Spiders in It*[[13]](#footnote-13) (2007) by Moroccan poet Taha ʿAdnān. In this poem, the writer extols the internet’s many positive qualities, while simultaneously acknowledging that he can no longer live outside of its virtual reality, in which he achieves all that he covets, rebuilds his life as he pleases, and moves from scene to scene speaking with Arabs and foreigners at the same time. They discuss social, political, and economic issues with complete freedom through social networks in all of their varieties. He says:

*Good morning, Mr. Spider.*

*A pleasant morning to you, humming of electricity.*

*Take me to my world of light,*

*For I have wonderful neighbors on Hotmail,*

*Companions on Yahoo!*

*A secret lover on CaraMail.*

*I have friends here and there,*

*Old friends*

*Inundating my email with angry sayings,*

*Fiery statements,*

*A flood of condemnations.*

*I have girlfriends from adolescence,*

*With whom I argue maliciously,*

*To defend the cultural rights of the Eskimos.*

*Good morning, Ellis!*

*Good morning, Muhammad!*

*Bonjour, Karen!*

*Good morning, Peter550!*

*Have a good day, Abdu M.M.!*

*Good morning, big brother!*

*Oh, sleepless eye of the net!*

*Good morning, pilferers of light!*

*I’ll bring you your morning coffee,*

*In my blue pajamas and the comfort of my bed.*

*I’ll peel the orange,*

*Spread butter and ketchup on my toast,*

*Then I’ll meet you.*

*I’ll have breakfast with you.*

*As befits a happy virtual family.*

*…*

*Let’s continue prattling about Afghanistan, Fawaz!*

*And you, Caroline—you didn’t finish your discussion yesterday,*

*About the white, electric bliss.*

*No, Gilbert, don’t believe everything you hear,*

*As polygamy isn’t verified sunna.*

*Take it easy, Kareem. Take it easy, hacker.*

*My email isn’t a trash can,*

*So keep your lewd messages to yourself,*

*And the dirty viruses you spew forth like venom,*

*And your lustful thoughts.*

*As for you, Rustam,*

*Did you find a solution to the electricity outage in Erbil?*

*No, Natalie,*

*No, my dear, my hair is light brown,*

*And my eyes, of course, are blue.*

*Shut up, you loathsome outsider,*

*You dimwitted amateur beyond the smart screen, get away from me,*

*For my life is too short to spend on invoices.*

*Damn taxes and the weather,*

*And those who feign stupidity like the elderly out of fear,*

*And the effect of the Euro on inflation!*

*…*

*Oh, citizens of the square world!*

*Oh, tribe of navigators!*

*With you, I am a free, happy citizen,*

*Light like foam,*

*Free like a rabbit in a prairie,*

*Running from place to place,*

*From one gathering to another.*

*I follow the wave of secrets.*

*I knead the dough with my hands, my heart*

*To create an interactive form of life:*

*I chat and sleep electronically.*

*I love and hate electronically.*

*I am loyal, and I betray electronically.*

*I sell and gamble electronically.*

*I flirt and fight electronically.*

*I demonstrate my solidarity with the intifada electronically.*

*I convict Sharon electronically.*

*I dream of liberating Palestine electronically.*

Thus, the poet admits that the internet has turned him into a “virtual being”, isolated from his real world, which has become abhorrent and weary. His old life is swapped out for a life full of excitement and adventure in a new virtual world in which lives however he pleases with simplicity and freedom. The idea of reformulating the world according to our desires, which has intrigued many philosophers and theorists for a long time, is now more achievable thanks to new scientific and technological developments. It is interesting to note that writers started paying attention to this benefit of the internet when it first started permeating the Arab world, welcoming it with great enthusiasm.

The novel *Towards My Emancipation*[[14]](#footnote-14) (2011) by Saudi writer Rīm ʿAbd Ar-Raḥman sheds light on the issue of finding oneself through virtual reality. The novel’s heroine, Asrar, finds herself by establishing a literary women’s forum in which she communicates with intellectuals and raises literary and social issues for discussion, giving her a feeling of contentment and self-fulfillment.

**Anonymous Users and Falsifying Facts**

What we mean by “anonymous users” here is the impossibility of identifying the individual involved in virtual interaction on online networks—the individual can enter the virtual world under the guise of a fake name and false identity.

*A Great Fighter’s Departure* (2013) by Suhayl Kīwān is one of many important stories shedding light on the deception that results from the desire for anonymity. The story talks about an elderly man who lost his memory two years before his death. After his death, his family gathers at the funeral home to accept the condolences of the families in their village. Everything goes normally the first day, but on the second day something strange happens: a huge number of mourners from abroad pour in and condolences from prominent politicians arrive via telegram. The funeral hall is unable to accommodate the sheer magnitude of mourners, and the police erect roadblocks to manage the road traffic brought about by all the mourners. The sound of the mourners’ chanting fills the streets: “oh, great fighter!” and “oh, unwavering fighter against colonialism!”

The head of the delegation proposes a memorial service for the deceased, shocking and embarrassing the deceased’s relatives who try to explain there is certainly a huge misunderstanding. After a long discussion, it is clear that the deceased’s grandson had created a virtual life for his grandfather on social networking platforms, promoting him as a great fighter, and painting him as a virtual Arab hero. The story ends with the grandson responding to his father’s accusations and threats by saying “what does it mean… it’s forbidden for this country to produce a fighter… what do they want to happen then?... they want to destroy the world!”

The above story sheds light on many of the characteristics of the virtual relationships that social networks have spawned. It also explains why people, especially the new generation, want them. Sociologist Ḥelmī Sārī explains this phenomenon in “Internet Culture”[[15]](#footnote-15) (2005):

*Virtual communication allows individuals to present themselves to others without restrictions. This freedom affords them the opportunity to portray themselves however they want, to live multiple lives, and to reveal certain aspects of themselves that they are not comfortable revealing in the real world. Additionally, the nature of virtual communication yields a degree of anonymity that makes one lose himself. This means people become anonymous not only to others, but to themselves, as well. This prompts such individuals to highlight fake, exemplary personality traits.*

Additionally, virtual communication allows one to expand his network of relationships at the local, regional, and international levels. He can connect with people from all different political, economic, ethnic and social backgrounds who share similar ideas, common interests and hobbies. Returning to the story, it seemed clear to us that the writer is fully aware of all these aspects of virtual communication, as he worked to highlight them clearly in his story, referencing the power of these hypothetical worlds to sway the audience, especially politically. In this context, one of the researchers says: “Many do not see any meaning in the real world, let them be heroes in the virtual world. Not all of us prefer being heroes over working in a fast food restaurant!”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Despite the benefits of anonymity (such as self-realization), anonymity results in “victims of virtual reality”. The grandson sought to create a virtual fictitious and militant figure in order to achieve, even if only virtually, his dream that “a fighter might emerge from this country”. Thus, he stole his grandfather’s identity and wore a mask to conceal his features. He portrayed himself how he wanted to, without caring about the consequences of his lies.

Among the other texts on this issue (although they treat it indirectly) is the short story collection entitled *Internet Talk[[17]](#footnote-17)* (2007) by Syrian writer Nada Ad-Dānā. In the third part of the series (entitled “Disappointment”), the author talks about a young man who meets a girl named Rania. He is very attracted to her, so he sets a date with her. When he goes to the specified location, he is shocked to see a young guy like himself there. As for the fourth story, “Riot”, the writer talks about a young man who meets a beautiful girl online. He is excited and asks to meet her in person, as he intends to ask her to marry him, but he is surprised to find out that she is actually a ten-year-old girl. The girl apologizes to him by saying that she was only joking. The same topic is repeated in the collection of very short stories entitled *Stories Net[[18]](#footnote-18)* by Fāṭima Būzīyān.

We also find that the repercussions of these “anonymous users” are highlighted in Social Media Literature, such as in *Contact Lines*[[19]](#footnote-19) (2006) by Jordanian writer Ghaṣṣūn Riḥāl. The novel talks about three men who receive an email invitation to meet a woman named Hurriya whom they all met online. As all three have been invited to meet her at the same place and time, they all arrive at the meeting place and sit at the same table, each of them thinking the others are there to meet other women, perhaps a spinster suffering from loneliness, a hard-working nursing student, or a Christian painter.

The dialogue between the three men begins and progresses into a heated debate wherein each of them claims that he deserves the table and agreed to meet his “wife” here! At the height of their discussion, the waiter comes and tells them that each of them is delusional! Other accounts that dealt with this issue also include *One Man and Five Women*[[20]](#footnote-20) (2010) by the Saudi writer ʿAbdullah Nāṣir, *Places in the Eyes of Jumana*[[21]](#footnote-21) (2006) by Saudi Nada Al-ʿArifi, and *The Day We met and the Day We Parted*[[22]](#footnote-22) (2009) by Khālid Ash-Shaykh and others .

Our reading leads to the various texts that shed light on the issue of “anonymous users” whom writers see as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, writers have shown that “anonymity” enables an individual to fulfill his dreams that cannot be fulfilled in the real world and protects him from censorship. On the other hand, however, “anonymous users” deceive readers by providing false information, victimizing them with conspiracies and lies.

**Electronic Romantic Relationships**

Some researchers specializing in electronic communication view the internet as one of the most important channels for electronic romantic relationships, as it has incorporated tangible changes in romantic relationships. This is because online communication has special, free, communicative features that attract users. Additionally, users can build altruistic friendships that have all the qualities of a real-world friendship[[23]](#footnote-23).

It is axiomatic that young men and women would take advantage of these features and capabilities (particularly members of Arab society wherein such topics are taboo). It is also logical that “Romantic Relationships on Social Media” has become one of the most prominent topics attracting the attention of authors since the issue first emerged in the Arab world. Perhaps the novel *The Girls of Riyadh*[[24]](#footnote-24) (2005) by Saudi writer Rajā’ Al-Sāniʿ is one of the first texts to deal with the subject so audaciously, instigating a huge media hype when it was first released. The novel in question explores the life of four female friends who are part of Riyadh’s social elite. It follows their secret lives, revealing to us their diary entries. The author utilizes modern technology in the body of the text by numbering and dating the chapters to resemble emails to make the reader feel like s/he is actually reading “emails” instead of a book. Each chapter begins just like a standard email:

*To: seerehwenfadha7et@yahoogroups.com*

*From: “seerehwenfadha7et”*

*Subject: An Unforgettable Adventure*

*Date: 16-7-2004*

In this novel, the author uncovered the social and romantic lives of girls in Riyadh. She expressed the feelings and desires that consume them despite living in a staunchly conservative society, and she further uncovered how they utilize the internet to vent about their issues. The computer screen transformed into a means to express taboo topics, as the author realized that, due to the nature of its content, her book would not pass Saudi censors. As for the main characters of the novel, they too wrote about their repression and desire for freedom, as expressed in the following quote:

*Telephone wires extended further in this country than in any other in order to handle the tales of love and sorrow and the exchange of love and kisses that they cannot, or do not want to, exchange in public, on account of religious teachings or social norms.*

The author made computer and cellphone screens a safe haven wherein the pain of the girls of Riyadh was quelled and through which they were able to continue meeting boys:

*Lamis met Ahmed, a student at her university, on the internet. Their relationship moved from the computer screen to phone calls. She also used chat rooms to escape from the stress of her pending divorce. Little by little she became addicted to chatrooms, spending all day and all night talking to one boy or another.*

Another text worthy of mention is *The Email’s Lover*[[25]](#footnote-25) (2007) by Moroccan author ʿAbd An-Nūr Idrīs. In this book, Idrīs describes the intensity of the electronic communication between a man and his two lovers, saying: “I spent a long time waiting in front of my computer screen and finally I saw her beautiful eyes… before I start sweet talking, I must admit that when I’m with her I forget my own name… and sometimes I feel like I’m floating on air and I land on her emails like a bee lands on yellow petals.”

In the realm of poetry, we find many poems expressing feelings about electronic romantic relationships and virtual love. It would suffice us to point out the volume *Ruptures of Digital Literature*[[26]](#footnote-26) (2007) by ʿAbd An-Nūr Idrīs which is replete with such poems, as well as the book of “The Virtual Lover”[[27]](#footnote-27) (2005) by Ghāda As-Samān, which is a different text that mixes thoughts, prose poems and very short stories. Here is an excerpt of the book entitled *Love within Virtual Time* as a last example of our topic:

*On the thirtieth of February I loved you*

*I loved you until I hallucinated*

*Beyond the calendar and traditions*

*Bitter facts of life and social stereotypes*

*I loved you and strived to remember you with all of my being*

*A palace better than the Taj Mahal*

*Every night is the thirtieth of February*

*I celebrate in outer space with love exceeding time*

**Electronic Sexual Relationships (Cybersex)**

Social media has enabled users to have virtual sexual relationships known as “cybersex” or imaginary sexual relations between two people on the internet in real time communication, describing their imaginary actions and reactions through text, the microphone, or webcam, for sexual satisfaction[[28]](#footnote-28).

Cybersex allows users of social network platforms to express their carnal desires in an unprecedented manner. Today, one can find hundreds of sites that allow users to dive into a three-dimensional world of sexual entertainment. Additionally, one can watch pornography, listen to fiery conversations, or utilize other sexual services. David Delmonico claims that there are three types of cybersex relationships, namely: online pornography, sex, and sex via software.

Delmonico adds that there are several main reasons prompting people to engage in these relationships, asserting that the self-isolation from which an individual suffers may encourage him to seek out these relationships. Furthermore, the anonymity of these relationships encourages people to partake in such experiences, reducing their embarrassment or fear of being seen. Moreover, many sites offer virtual sexual services for much cheaper than the real world. Several authors have either described this phenomenon as “virtual sexual relations” or have focused on the factors prompting the participation in such activities by different age groups and genders in society[[29]](#footnote-29).

In “Love in the Yahoo Era”[[30]](#footnote-30) (2013), the author, Egyptian poet ʿAzzat Al-Ṭīrī, describes the romantic moment between him and his lover in which they used the video call feature on on online platform to see each other and to engage in the third type of cybersex that Delmonico mentions—sexual exchange through different forms of media and software programs. Al-Ṭīrī writes:

*Lie with her*

*On messenger*

*The Yahoo mattress*

*Simplicity and sheets*

*Do it*

*One of the newest camera lenses*

*Wedding nights*

*Connected*

*... and wedding seasons*

*Orbiting the universe roaring and rumbling*

*Quaking*

*The Virtual Hero*[[31]](#footnote-31) (2006) is about a married man who felt suffocated, so he decided to create a new, idealistic life for himself by seeking refuge in the internet and building a virtual country he named “Dreamland”. The author points to the idealism and hope that many can only expect to find in the virtual world. For many, the virtual world is a utopia in which they can live their lives freely, as the virtual hero said in the poem: “this is my country. I am completely free here, as I have always wished. No one asks me anything. I am the only one who asks. I am the only one who speaks.”

But what exactly is he searching for in his virtual world? He is looking to satiate his sexual desires, taking advantage of his wife and kid’s busy schedules to visit his virtual world wherein he meets and deceives dozens of women with his sweet talk. He takes advantage of what he sees as a woman’s Achilles’ heel (yearning for affection). He tells each woman she is his only lover. At the end, he says, “don’t ask me why I do it. It’s my seduction. Just like a poem. Every woman is like a glance at a poem, and I don’t want her any more than that.”

In this way, he toyed with all the women solely for his own sexual pleasure. He loses interest as soon as he has his way with them, saying “here the rivers begin to flow. After sex, I only think about getting rid of the woman, because I’m bored, and I don’t like plowing just one field. I’m so bored! I like to drink from every river.” ... and he continues, “Of course, as soon as she revealed to me her life story, it was easy for me to manipulate her. Her defeat begins and I successfully escape, just like I had planned from the beginning. Of course, I already have a list of other women to move on to.”

Through this, Nasrallah sheds light on the phenomenon of cybersex that some men from Arab society turn to in order to satiate their sexual desires by exploiting, disrespecting, and blackmailing women without any regard for their feelings. We find a different concept of these relationships in the novel *Chat*[[32]](#footnote-32) by Jordanian author Muḥammad Sinjāla who approached these relationships from a different perspective compared to previous texts. He describes the virtual sexual relationship between the two protagonists, Nizar and Lillian, as a normal and legitimate relationship and an inevitable consequence of the nature of emotional relationships through virtual reality:

*Nizar: I want to undress you… take your clothes off… piece by piece… I’d start with your blouse… undoing the buttons one by one… I’d press my nose between your breasts… I’d make them smile at me… I’d bury myself deep in them… I’d smell your naked breasts, remove your pink, silk undergarment, so your naked breasts glow… I’d grab the tips of your two stiff nipples, rub them with my fingers, and seek joy in my little tongue smoothly touching them… I’d devour them like two red cranberries.*

*Lilian: Oh, sweetheart. Hold me… kiss my neck…. Bite me and leave marks… pull me to you… be rough… brutal… I want you… release your spear from its sheath and shoot it into me… here in my hands… erect as a god… bow to him… put it close to my burning lips… I circle my tongue around it… and put it into my mouth.*

The quote above shows, in practice, one of the types of cybersex Delmonico spoke about, namely, pornographic exchange, or the exchange of fiery texts written by the two parties leading to sexual arousal. If we compare the three texts about electronic sexual relations we discussed, we find that Al-Ṭīrī, for example, treated cybersex without clearly stating his stance on it. Nasrallah, on the other hand, took an honest stance on the topic, claiming these relationships are a way to satiate one’s sexual desires without mutual love or respect. Sinjāla emphasizes that people have to love and have sex virtually, because this is the direction in which technology is moving, documenting relationships day to day[[33]](#footnote-33).

**Marital Infidelity through Social Media**

The sexual relations we covered in the previous section piqued our interest in another related topic, namely marital infidelity through social networking platforms and its manifestations in literature. Different studies have confirmed that the increased divorce rate in Arab and non-Arab societies has resulted from the increase in marital infidelity on social media. These studies focused on the most important factors prompting married people to search for such extramarital affairs.

This topic has made its way into Arabic literature, as well. In *E-Mail*[[34]](#footnote-34) (2008), Fāṭima Būzīyān talks about a man who sends emails to an artist he admires. He informs her that he first became enticed by her website, and then by her. He professes his love for her and tells her she is the most beautiful woman in the world. He later confesses that he is happily married but says “who doesn’t lack something?”. Through this quote, it is as though the author is confirming that the atmosphere in which married people seek extramarital relationships through online networks stems from the need to compensate for something their significant other lacks.

We find this very idea in *The Seduction of Chat[[35]](#footnote-35)* by the Egyptian author Al-Sayyid Nagim, in which the husband meets a woman called Julia and spends hours chatting with her because she loves to read and discuss poetry, in contrast with his wife who neither likes poetry nor understands it.

*He Wears a Shirt with Large Checkers*, by Moroccan author Malīka Mistaḍarf, explores the topic in question in more depth. In this story, the author claims that individuals do not engage in marital infidelity solely to fill a void in their relationship, but because their marriage is not founded on love, respect, or mutual understanding. Rather, their relationship is merely a routine in which each partner carries out his or her social or religious obligations. The main character tells his lover, “when we meet, don’t wear a bra. Let your hair flow freely on your shoulders like in the picture. I want to darken my eyes with eyeliner by looking at you, because I’m a Bedouin and my eyes are big.”

*The woman’s hair is naked. His head is like a piece of old ivory, his beard like a broom. His head is like an old ivory, his beard is like a broom. One day she will wax his beard off, throw it in the toilet, and dump a bucket of water on it. She’ll yell at him: your beard is naked. You’re bald… and… naked.*

*Do you want to make love?*

*Her husband does not ask her. She fulfills his wish however he wants, whenever he wants, and wherever he wants. Even if it is daytime during Ramadan. Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah says: “Whoever fears the bursting of his testicles, it is permissible for him to have intercourse in Ramadan. She obeys her husband and obeys Ibn Qayyim. So that her husband’s testicles do not burst and she is not forbidden from Paradise.*

*She took the keyboard and wrote: Does the love you make online have a different taste? Of course, it’s delicious like home-cooked couscous. She licked her lips. On Friday, she will go eat couscous at her mother’s. Her husband will accompany her, of course. She will wear her black dress that resembles a moving tent, her brothers call her a “ninja”. The tent suffocates her, her husband suffocates her, and “Jupiter 1960” writes to her: The woman is not just a body!*

**Social Isolation and Losing Touch with Reality**

Among the other topics that Social Media Literature encompasses is the phenomenon of social isolation. The great discrepancy between the rate of dramatic and ever-increasing developments in the field of communication and the accompanying steady increase in the rate of estrangement among individuals stirs up controversy and curiosity. This is the main topic of *Virtual Reality and an Alley*[[36]](#footnote-36) (2014) by Jawdat ʿĪd. The story talks about a young woman who works in an accounting office and is used to getting home from work every day at 5pm, parking her car in the same spot, and then walking to her little house in a narrow alley. On her walk from her car to her house, she would bump into children, some of whom were playing ball, some hopscotch, and others roaming around the alley on their bicycles. She was often bothered by these children and the racket they caused. As the days passed, she noticed that the alley had changed, it was quiet and empty. The author describes this by saying:

*You no longer hear the song the children would sing while playing and running around the alley: ‘knock knock knock knock, ring ring ring the bell, turn around and see the horse’. As much as the racket had annoyed her, she yearned to hear those songs again, the soundtrack that played as she walked to her home, her sanctuary.*

Thus, the neighborhood children no longer play games or sing as they did before, because they found an alternative reality in which they can accomplish things they never before dreamed of:

*The children have disappeared behind their new world that snatched them off the streets and took them on a never-ending journey to discover an exciting and challenging new world every day. They no longer have time for what is going on in the alley or within their community. They have virtual playgrounds and special areas to vent their anger, express their joy, and act on their impulses with just a click of a mouse! They can do the impossible. Their options are endless. The whole world is at their fingertips. They went into their homes and left the sounds of them playing wandering around the alley like ghosts. They built a huge tower from an exciting world and left the alley and its residents quivering in silence...*

Through this excerpt, the author maintains that virtual reality contributes to social alienation and causes people to be completely isolated from their communities. This raises concerns about the future of the sense of belonging to a society.

Some social scientists emphasize that the members of the virtual world still alternate between isolation and communication. Those who take the time to reflect on the ramifications of virtual reality realize that their continued participation in it leads to social isolation, as virtual relationships lead to the deterioration of their real world relationships by consuming their time and causing them to lose touch with reality.

Walīd Zaki[[37]](#footnote-37) (2013), quoting Albert Borgman, believes that virtual relationships have contributed to the deterioration of traditional social relationships at the global level, because these groups are not associated with a single identity or a specific nationality, but rather unite individuals comprising different cultures and nationalities and all that unites them are their common interests. Consequently, it became easy for people to sever ties with those close to them in order to communicate with a stranger with whom they have more in common. This is what happened with the children who played in the alley and even with the young woman, as she started forming virtual relationships and seeking refuge in her computer.

Zaki adds that these relationships lead, in turn, to what is known as “individuality”, or social isolation. An individual involved in virtual interactions, even if those interactions are collective, only enters it as an individual in front of a special computer screen that transports him from his real world to a virtual world, leading to a manifestation of psychological alienation. This is exactly what we find in the novel *Bad Cats*[[38]](#footnote-38) (2009) by Shahid Al-Ghalāwīn. The heroine of the novel, Raghad, finds her misfortune in her virtual world, where she can live her life isolated from the customs and traditions that abhor her reality. She says: “I was freed from all restrictions and lived my life how I wanted. Just me, my writing, and my ideologies. I was alone in a secluded world.” Thus, Raghad isolates herself, and her world becomes reduced to a small screen!

Among the poetic texts centered on social isolation is “The Satire of the Internet”[[39]](#footnote-39), in which Yemeni poet Muqbil Aḥmad Al-ʿAmarī focused on the many different aspects of the internet, such as social isolation caused by online networks. According to him, social media platforms have caused such complete social isolation in people to the point that they become like zombies:

*To his misfortune I find him like a tomb that is eternally silent*

*As if you were walking on top of the world and those six-feet under sat up*

*“Hail!” you told them but they feel like zombies*

*Don’t pay them any attention and keep addressing them by their tomb stones*

**The Virtual World and Alienation**

This leads us to the topic of the alienation which may be induced by social networks. Such feelings stem from the enormous digital gap that separates Arab and Western communities, resulting in cultural differences and difficulty adapting to these virtual communities.

In the novel *Leila and Facebook Nights*[[40]](#footnote-40) (2015), Nizār Dandish attempts to discuss the alienation that many Arabs face as a result of using these virtual sites which conflict with Arab culture. The main characters, Nizar and Leila, meet over Messenger and slowly form a strong romantic relationship. They get married, but their marriage lasts only a few months before ending in divorce. Nizar explains the failure of their relationship, saying:

*Facebook, or whatever will come after it, will solve social media problems, but the world still lives in the trenches of past relationships and will remain under its influence for a long time. It emerged after many religious legends and many scientific advances, and yet our culture still largely depends on it. It seems that Leila is one of the victims of the transitional phase, the intercultural phase, the Facebook culture and the culture of the era that preceded it, and she will pay a huge price in the future as well.*

Dandish put his finger on a fundamental issue: the nature of digitization in the West differs from digitization in the Arab world. Digitization in the West is a logical result of objective social development. It is the result of the desire for increased creativity, aesthetic development, freedom, and enjoyment. In the Arab world, however, digitization is only an application of traditional principles. Unfortunately, we are still in the stage of consumption without production. This makes our interaction with all scientific achievements risky, and we cannot deny the severity of this issue, as all its dimensions affect the future of Arab culture.

 *Virtual Space*[[41]](#footnote-41) by Jawdat ʿĪd illuminates the theme of alienation, describing “virtual space” as a place Arabs cannot inhabit because it is too unfamiliar and different from our culture. It is a place that globalization has imposed on us. The two lovers in this play initially have a tumultuous romance via virtual reality, and they have convinced themselves that they will be able to build the same utopic life in the real world. They soon discover, however, that virtual reality is incongruent with Arab culture, and that it is fake and distorted. The heroine, Ishtar, says to her friend, Odom: “My city lost its identity, lost its money, lost its vibrance. It started to get overpopulated. It became distorted and our once bountiful gardens are now bare.”

Although Jawdat ʿĪd has taken great care to keep the city name anonymous, the fact that she mentions pomegranates, olives, and oranges is enough to indicate that the city is in Palestine.

**Globalization**

The topics of alienation and globalization are linked on social networks, and the world has been transformed into one little village, resulting in many ramifications leading to different responses from intellectuals, politicians, and religious figures. Many consider this phenomenon a threat to culture and society, claiming it amalgamates all cultures into one cohesive “American culture”. Although this convergence has caused some to suffer from intense feelings of alienation, others have welcomed it, as it has torn down barriers between countries and cultures and has transformed the world into one homogenous village where everyone is equal.

As for Social Media Literature, unfortunately only a few texts touch on globalization. However, these texts have convinced us of the significance of globalization as a literary topic. In *Globalization* (2004) the author tackles the topic with his signature satirical style. He asserts that globalization not only affects the mind, but also the “body”. The story’s main character is in a terrible traffic accident, after which he receives countless organ and limb transplants from donors from all over the world:

*On my way back, I was in a car accident and was in a coma for two weeks. The accident completely destroyed me and broke every bone in my body. The insurance company immediately intervened and sent me for treatment in America. I returned 9cm taller than I was before; they gave me legs like a basketball player! Then I went to Britain and got two new arms which looked great, except for the tattoo of a naked woman on the left arm, and I got two kidneys that had previously belonged to an Indian. My genitals came from a Dutch man who had them removed during his gender-reassignment surgery, and my tongue came from a French person. I also got the wonderfully golden eyes that had belonged to a Brazilian samba dancer.*

The main character completely regains his health through these transplants but loses his personal identity. “Abdullah” was stitched together from many different cultures, bringing us back to the subject of alienation.

We would also like to draw your attention to *Love in the Time of Globalization*[[42]](#footnote-42) (2008) in which Subḥī Al-Faḥmāwī sheds light on the identity crisis Arabs face as a result of globalization. He depicts Arab life (the human, social, commercial and sexual prevalence of postmodernism in a wildly capitalistic society) and love in the era of globalization. The novel talks about a traditional Arab city with pure fountains and trees bearing delicious fruit. Its women are innocent and beautiful and its men are simple. The city was abruptly attacked by globalization and infiltrated by gangs and mafias. It was transformed into a city of globalization. Due to the abundance of traffic, urbanization increased. Skyscrapers, factories, and sewers filled the streets, and many sexually-transmitted diseases ravaged the city, the worst of which was AIDS. Arab society became infected with globalization.

**The virtual world as a real world**

Virtual reality has permeated reality to the point that the lines between reality and imagination are blurred. *The Facebook Liberator*[[43]](#footnote-43) (2013) by Suhayl Kīwān is one of many stories which shed light on the constructive risk virtual reality poses to an individual’s life. Virtual reality replaces reality. This story talks about a man who decides to open a Facebook account to keep up with the advancing civilization. He nicknames himself “The Facebook Liberator” and his Facebook activity begins with him posting a picture of a sky illuminated by phosphorus on his page. He was surprised by how much his Facebook friends increased every day. One day “The Facebook Liberator” meets a woman who nicknamed herself “The Blue Star” and their virtual friendship begins to grow. Their friendship continues until he realizes that they have radically different political views. “The Facebook Liberator” says:

*I told her about the death, war crimes, and crimes against humanity happening all around us. She instantly fell silent, closed the chat, and blocked me. It was clear that she does not agree with many of my views. Who I consider a freedom fighter she considers a terrorist. What I call war crimes she calls self-defense. The one I consider a hero, she calls a son of a b\*\*\*\*.*

Through this quote, the author tried to approach the issue of virtual friendships from a different perspective. Some virtual groups try to attract people who share their political and religious views to widen their social circles. “The Blue Star’s” position is represented in her violent attack on and criticism of “The Facebook Liberator” for signing a petition calling for a tribunal for war criminals. Once she discovered the extent of the differences between them, she cut him off completely. Despite this, the author attempted to delve deeply into how these relationships impact one’s personal life. At the end of the story, “The Facebook Liberator” says:

*… but after a few days she began to seek revenge with such malice, I couldn’t believe it! She posted “May The Blue Star win” and ignited a fierce war against “The Facebook Liberator”! Within a few days, a huge number of my Facebook friends unfollowed me. Worse yet, they hacked my messages and started spying on my conversations and sending obscene messages from my Facebook account, destroying my reputation.*

*Honestly, I never imagined that “The Blue Star” would be so influential... Her hackers ravaged my files and distributed naked pictures of me in compromising positions. They also circulated my previous correspondence with “The Blue Star”, even the intimate ones, and started blackmailing me!*

In an attempt to quell “The Blue Star’s” wrath, “The Facebook Liberator” was quick to apologize. He sent her bouquets of flowers and withdrew his signature from the petition demanding the prosecution of war criminals.

 “The Facebook Liberator” lost so many friends and was the victim of so many scandals and insults and so much blackmail that he was ready to denounce his principles and betray his friends to regain his Facebook life, to be forgiven by his “virtual friends” and to regain his “virtual world” that collapsed overnight.

The author thus confirms that the virtual world can influence the lives of individuals to the point where the real world becomes virtual, and the virtual world becomes real. On this subject, Ḥusayn Rāshid, President of the Arab Federation for Electronic Media, said in an article: “What was recently called the virtual world became reality... The tools of the digital age are no longer like the predecessors of their virtual era but have become an inevitable reality. The only way to change this is to cut off this network.”[[44]](#footnote-44) This means that virtual reality’s impact on individuals can be more powerful than reality, as it can cancel and replace the latter. Furthermore, it may affect individuals to the point of alienating them, after destabilizing their values ​​and principles, as happened with “The Facebook Liberator” who now doubts everything he once believed in, because of how severely the virtual world impacted his life. This topic opens a door for a discussion of the idea of ​​”virtual citizenship”, which expresses a virtual affiliation of a planetary nature, so that all human beings become equal citizens in a virtual state based on universal values ​​and principles. In *A Virtual Wedding*[[45]](#footnote-45) (2012) by Saudi author ʿĀrif Al-Ḥaysūnī, one of the main characters concludes that virtual reality is real, because it has a tremendous influence on our thoughts and perceptions and makes us view reality differently.

Despite this negative aspect of virtual reality websites, studies indicate that sites that aim to attract specific groups exclusively based on sectarian/ethnic affiliation are few compared to those based on pluralism. For example, there are some Facebook groups whose sole purpose is seemingly to praise religious figures (e.g., groups for those devoted to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), Christ, or the virgin Mary. These groups can have two or three million members, while we find that the number of members in a group supporting Real Madrid exceeds five million, and the number of fans following Cristiano Ronaldo is about 15 million[[46]](#footnote-46).

**How Teenagers Use Social Media Negatively**

An important topic within the realm of Social Media Literature is how children and teenagers use the internet and social network platforms negatively. Are they only interested in entertainment, or are they looking for other, more important and useful topics? *Electronic Messiah*[[47]](#footnote-47) (2007) by Moroccan author Ḥayā Al-Yāqūt sought to answer this question. The story revolves around a young girl who surfs the internet and frequents chatrooms. Every so often she checks her emails, and she is disappointed whenever she finds out that there are “no new messages”. Whenever she gets a message, she rushes to open it without bothering to check who sent it. Here, the author introduces the first topic of the story: the new generation’s desire for knowledge. The speed of the present era has made the new generation want readily available information without going to the trouble of searching for, or reflecting on, it.

When she opens the message, she finds a shockingly terrifying picture of “Dajjal”. She covers the computer screen with a sheet of white paper and runs to tell her mother what happened. Her mother advises her to recite and memorize “sūrat al-kahf” which will protect her from all harm. When the girl begins to write “sūrat al-kahaf”, she realizes it will take a long time, so she decides to just print it out. However, she does not know how to search for it. She asks her neighbor, a third-year Computer Engineering student at university, for help. Her neighbor admits that she, too, does not know a single Islamic website, and asks her to give her some time. The next morning, when the girl opens her bedroom window for some fresh air, she catches a glimpse of the Qur’an on the shelf and “she quickly averts her gaze, pretending she did not see it. She approaches the door, touches her computer with yearning, and exits the room”.

Through this story, Ḥayā Al-Yāqūt wanted to shed light on several topics related to the new generation’s ties to the internet and how they deal with it at the surface level (beyond just spending long hours staring at the screen). At the end, it becomes clear that the new generation will stay the same, drowning in its superficiality and not seeking knowledge through reading or research, favoring the easily-accessible information their beloved computers provide!

Among the novels focusing on the negative uses of social platforms by youth and teens is *Girls of YouTube*[[48]](#footnote-48) (2012) by Saudi author ʿAbd an-Nāṣr al-Dāwūd. The novel follows Ghadeer, a college girl who is fond of reading and loves life. She gets involved in a deceptive love affair with a young man named Haitham whom she meets one day at the public library. She falls head over heels in love with Haitham and convinces herself they will get married. One day, he asks for a picture of her, and she naively gives the wolf three nude photos to sink his fangs into. Haitham uses the photos to blackmail her, threatening to show the photos to her parents and to upload them to YouTube. Ghadeer is terrified and her love for him turns into hate. Her psychological issues intensify, and she falls into a deep depression. She becomes a prisoner of YouTube, spending all day on the site searching for her scandalous photos. In the end, she overcomes her depression, triumphs over her archenemy, and lives happily ever after.

**Using Social Media to Instigate Positive Societal Change**

Moving on from the negative ways teenagers and young people use social networks and applications, let us now consider how these platforms are used positively. Despite the many negative aspects of social networks, which literature has explored from many different perspectives, online social platforms have imposed themselves on our society with such force that they have become an indispensable component of our daily lives. The huge popularity they have gained among individuals and societies is remarkable. Billions of people all over the world have Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts, and millions of people use these sites daily. As a result, social networks have been used to develop and advance all aspects of society.

It was only natural for Social Media Literature to play an important role in instigating societal change generally and within Arab society specifically, despite all the negative aspects we outlined above. *Cats of Instagram*[[49]](#footnote-49) by Kuwaiti author Bāsma Al-ʿAnizi is a great example of this, as it sheds light on how deeply Instagram has penetrated Arab society and how Arab society deals with, and benefits from, it. On the one hand, the author refers to users who hang out on Instagram like “street cats” in order to find out bad news and negative gossip. On the other hand, she points out the users who use Instagram to stay informed about current events.

The book’s main character talks about how she and many of her co-workers were laid off work due to the economic difficulties afflicting their employer. To fill the void she felt after being laid off, she makes an Instagram page for her cat, Spice. At first, she would photograph her cat in different settings and post the pictures, reveling in the “trivial” comments her followers left, saying “the number of followers increased more quickly than I could’ve imagined, especially after the overwhelmingly popular Miss “ASRARI” posted on Twitter and Instagram that she starts her day by checking my Instagram page”.

Here she realizes that she can take advantage of her Instagram fame to disseminate her opinions and thoughts about the economic crisis afflicting her country and to advocate important economic projects and plans:

*Spice is happy that the price of oil increased to $105 per barrel but is sad about losing the little remaining fuel. Why do individual and family companies alone lead big projects? Where are the public joint stock companies listed on the stock exchange?*

This excerpt highlights another important point, namely that one’s virtual popularity and number of followers have become integral parts of one’s identity, especially when one applies of a job. The main character was invited to a job interview, and she thought that she was invited to the interview on account of her relevant investment and consulting experience and her Master’s degree, but she was surprised to find out the real reason she got an interview was because of her Instagram fame. The head of the company told her: “Since you have more than 100,000 followers, we will pay you 5,000 dinars per month. We want Spice to devour the competitors’ mice and make us look good”.The author adds that companies have started hiring on the basis of people’s fame on social platforms, regardless of their professional qualifications or character. The main character continues to use her page to broadcast pamphlets about, and critiques of, corrupt food dealers, unlicensed arms dealers, money laundering, favoritism, election fraud, and other aspects of corruption in an effort to instigate change.

Another novel that dealt with social networks satirically to instigate change is *Freedom.com*[[50]](#footnote-50)by Egyptian author Ashraf Naṣr. The critic Muḥammad Hindī commented on this novel saying that it was born from the womb of our present reality, depicted through a rebellious youthful tendency. Young people vented their anger about politics, art, sports, literature, meeting, and religion. “Freedom.com” is an expressive and psychological outlet for the satirical rebel characters[[51]](#footnote-51).

Among the poetic texts that touch on exploiting the internet and social networking platforms to reach great achievements, is “The Internet and the Egyptian Revolution” (2011) by Egyptian poet Musṭafa Ḥāmid in which the poet touches on the role internet played in the January 25th revolution against the Egyptian regime and the ousting of Hosni Mubarak:

*Yes my lord, we said*

*We did not count the boy’s account*

*We were putting them to work*

*In the media… movies… games…*

*Terrorism and the inter…*

*The internet the hand of the inter*

*Yes, my lord*

*Accused them*

*Taught them chants*

*And showed them disobedience*

**Discussion and conclusions**

This chapter explored “Social Media Literature”. We analyzed many literary texts by authors from various Arab countries written over twenty years (1996-2016), roughly representing the period in which online social networks began to permeate Arab society until now. It became clear to us that social media literature presents two contradictory attitudes towards these platforms, one negative and the other positive.

After analyzing several texts, it was clear that many authors viewed social media platforms negatively, expressing their worry about virtual reality and articulating their fears about the severe social and psychological damage that online platforms can cause. Social networks make it easy for users to lie to and deceive one another, enabling them to conceal their true identities and to portray themselves however they want. For some, social platforms are a waste of time fraught with safety risks and social and moral issues, as sick and twisted individuals use them to prey on young women and adolescents, brainwashing them with lies and leading them down a road of intellectual, social, and moral corruption.

On the other hand, we found a group of authors who dealt with social networks in a markedly different manner. Their texts reflected a positive attitude towards them, and in many instances they showed the authors’ admiration for the virtual world which they praised for their ability to fulfil dreams and hopes that could not be fulfilled in the real world (especially in an Arabic context). Some authors portrayed social media as a savior that rescued young men and women from the repression of Arab society. Online platforms have allowed young people to meet and communicate and enabled them to partake in bold discussions about social taboos (sex, religion, and politics). Furthermore, these networks have aided them in achieving social and political reform, allowing girls in particular to denounce gender discrimination in the patriarchal Arab world.

It can be said that the main message that authors strived to convey through Social Media Literature is that technology is a double-edged sword, and the effects of this weapon are determined by the intentions of the bearer and how he uses it. We certainly do not agree with writers or others who hold technology responsible for the damages caused to individuals and society as a result of virtual relationships. In our opinion, the virtual reality that exists on social platforms is not the problem. Rather, the problem lies within our society, culture, and inability to adapt to virtual societies. All educational institutions should prepare the new generation to deal with technology data consciously, and to adapt to it in a positive and safe manner that will benefit society.

Social scientists claim that every communicative channel passes through four stages before being adopted by a society. In the first stage, the society views the communicative channel as an enticing “game” but does not adopt a specific stance towards it. In the second stage, the communicative channel faces criticism and the society’s interest in it intensifies. In the third stage, the communicative channel overcomes the criticisms and gains the society’s trust in, and eventually understanding of, it as a technological and artistic advancement. In the fourth and final stage, a large portion of the society recognizes the legitimacy of this communicative channel, allowing it to evolve into an integral and indispensable component of the society. The questions that present themselves, then, are: How can Social Media Literature express these four stages? To what extent can it be said that we have already managed to reach the fourth stage and what degree of awareness is needed to adapt to social networks?

Drawing upon the results of the study, we found that literary texts were in fact able to clearly express every one of these stages. At the beginning of the 21st century some authors began to adopt a new literary perspective, producing texts that deal with social media with a greater awareness. These authors went beyond the critical tradition and started to view social networks creatively and presented important philosophical discussions. For instance, *Leila and Facebook Nights* and *Virtual Space* (2015) discussed the alienation that Arabs feel towards virtual reality. *A Great Fighter’s Departure* (2014) explored how to deal with social media creatively and how to utilize it to build an ideological, multidimensional personality that effectively influences society. “The Egyptian Revolution” depicted the large role the internet played in propagating the revolution, and *Cats of Instagram* (2015) treated online networks as an inescapable way of life and focused on how to use it to combat societal corruption. Additionally, we can conclude that Social Media Literature, with the exception of a few texts and despite the clear progress made in the literary realm regarding how to incorporate social networks into society, has yet to evolve enough to shock us with unprecedented innovative thoughts and insights.

According to Aristotle, literature, like other arts, expresses a markedly different “reality”, a simulation of a superior, yet fictional, reality. Authors modify, rearrange, and delete their drafts as they see fit; they do not depict reality, but rather, their unique concept of reality. Accordingly, we had envisioned a type of literature that catapults us from a realm of hesitation and fear to something much deeper, providing a different creative interaction with social media and contributing to a creative vision. For example, if we consider the story of *A Great Fighter’s Departure*, we can see that the author did not clearly state his stance on this topic. He could, for example, make the masses insist on holding the memorial service despite knowing the truth. This way he could present a deeper message about virtual character and the power of influence.

What distinguishes this character from its realistic counterpart is its spiritual, not material presence, and therefore for the audience the character is real. This indicates a psychological factor represented in the individual’s awareness of the presence of others in virtual reality who work to activate identities and ensure their continuity by default.

We need literature that deals with the phenomenon of social networks innovatively. We are living in a rapidly-changing world, and every day we hear new terms to describe this era and its people (e.g., “the post-humanitarian era”, “the era of the digital revolution”, “the era of information:”, “cyborg”, “the society of knowledge”, and “the society of media”, etc.). Not to mention the terminology referencing the end of the previous era (e.g., “the end of the paper age”, “the end of the paper book” and “the end of the intellectual”, etc.). These are all new topics that exceed our knowledge and expectations. As literature transcends literal transmission of this phenomenon, it is a novelty that accompanies the changes and foreshadows the future of the Arab individual in particular and people in general in light of these rapid transformations.

We gravitate towards literature that conveys the features of the current digital age and the society and people it produced. Arab authors view social media as a way to revive science fiction literature which has yet to permeate Arabic literature. Moreover, in Arabic literature we rarely come across texts in which there is a qualitative leap to the distant future. Literature provides us with insight into where we, as a civilization, may be in a hundred years and transports us to a better future.

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