



Digital Identity Representation in Contemporary Arabic Novels: A Posthumanist Study

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the representation of digital identity in contemporary Arabic novels through a posthumanist perspective. It addresses how advances in digital technology, social media, artificial intelligence, and virtual spaces influence the construction of identity, social relations, and the meaning of human existence in modern Arabic literary narratives.

Design/methods/approach – This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The study applies posthumanist theory as its main analytical framework. The data consist of textual elements from contemporary Arabic novels that present themes of digital technology, cyberspace, and identity transformation. Data were collected through documentary study and analyzed using close reading and thematic analysis.

Findings – The findings show that digital identity in contemporary Arabic novels is represented as fluid, hybrid, and multidimensional. Characters are no longer portrayed as subjects with single and stable identities, but as individuals who continuously negotiate between physical and virtual selves. Digital technology is also depicted not merely as a communication tool, but as an active agent that shapes consciousness, memory, power relations, and self-construction.

Research implications/limitations – This study is limited to textual analysis of selected contemporary Arabic novels, so its findings are interpretive and context-specific. Future studies may expand the corpus or compare Arabic literary works with other literary traditions.

Originality/value – This study contributes to Arabic literary studies by offering a posthumanist reading of digital identity and highlighting contemporary Arabic novels as important sites for understanding human transformation in the digital era.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has brought fundamental changes to how humans construct identity, interact, and interpret their existence in social spaces (Nagy & Koles, 2014). The presence of social media, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and various digital platforms has created a new space that allows individuals to continuously display, modify, and even reconstruct their self-identity (Lin & Latoschik, 2022). In this context, identity is no longer understood as a fixed and singular entity, but rather as a dynamic, fluid construction connected to the surrounding technological systems. Ideally, the digital transformation is expected to expand spaces for individual expression, strengthen social participation, and create new, more inclusive forms of human existence in global society (Nagy & Koles, 2014). This phenomenon has become a concern not only in social and cultural studies but has also gained an increasingly significant place in contemporary literature as a reflection of the changes in modern human life.

However, reality indicates that the development of digital technology also gives rise to various new issues regarding human identity (Nagy & Koles, 2014). Digital spaces frequently present identity fragmentation, anonymity, self-image manipulation, and the blurring of boundaries between physical and virtual realities. Individuals can possess multiple distinct identities within the same digital space, rendering the concept of subjectivity increasingly complex and unstable. In the context of Arab society, these changes occur concurrently with social, political, and cultural transformations influenced by digital globalization. Consequently, digital identity serves not only as a means of self-representation but also as an arena for negotiation between tradition, modernity, and technological advancements. This very complexity is widely represented in contemporary Arabic novels as a medium of reflection on the changing nature of human existence in the digital era (Bani Issa, 2025).

Studies concerning the relationship between literature and digital technology have expanded rapidly in recent years. Research conducted by Tambling & Hayles (2001) asserts that the advancement of information technology has altered how humans understand the body, consciousness, and identity in a digital society. Meanwhile, Donna Haraway, through her concept of the cyborg, demonstrates that the boundary between humans and technology is becoming increasingly blurred, thereby giving rise to hybrid forms of identity that transcend classical humanist paradigms (Hassan et al., 2025). In literary studies, a number of researches have found that contemporary fictional works increasingly feature characters whose existence is shaped by interactions with digital technology, virtual networks, and global information systems (Kianpour et al., 2026).

Within the domain of Arabic literature, several prior studies have examined the representation of technology and modernity in contemporary Arabic novels. Some of these studies focus on the impact of digital media on changes in the social and cultural relations of Arab society, while others highlight the representation of cyberspace as an arena for identity formation among the youth. These studies demonstrate that contemporary Arabic novels are increasingly responsive to issues of technology and digital transformation. Furthermore, there is also research utilizing cultural studies and digital humanities approaches to analyze the influence of technology on narrative structures and characterization in modern Arabic literature. These findings prove that digital issues have become an important theme in the development of 21st-century Arabic literature (Rofiqi et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, most prior studies still focus on social, cultural, and technological representation in general, while studies specifically examining the construction of digital identity through a posthumanist perspective remain relatively limited (Iapaolo & Lynch, 2026). Existing research tends to position technology merely as a social backdrop or a communication instrument, without exploring how technology acts as an agent that participates in shaping the subjectivity, consciousness, and existence of characters in literary works (Levin et al., 2025). Moreover, the study of contemporary Arabic literature is still dominated by sociological, structural, and postcolonial approaches, leaving the posthuman dimension regarding human-technology relations without adequate attention (Panigrahi & Padhi, 2026).

Based on these conditions, there is a research gap in the underutilized integration of posthumanist theory with the analysis of digital identity representation in contemporary Arabic novels. In fact, a posthumanist perspective offers a conceptual framework capable of explaining the shifting relations between humans, technology, the body, and consciousness in the digital era. Therefore, this study proposes a posthumanist approach as a theoretical solution to understand how digital identity is represented in contemporary Arabic novels, while simultaneously uncovering new forms of subjectivity arising from the intensive interaction between humans and technology. This approach is expected to expand the scope of contemporary Arabic literary studies and contribute to the development of digital literary and posthumanist studies at a global level.

Based on the aforementioned elaboration, this study aims to analyze the representation of digital identity in contemporary Arabic novels through a posthumanist perspective, identify the forms of digital subjectivity construction displayed in literary narratives, and explain how the relationship between humans and technology shapes new meanings of human identity and existence in the digital era. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of contemporary Arabic literary studies and enrich the academic discourse on posthumanism in modern literary studies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design focusing on the analysis of literary texts. The qualitative approach was selected because this study aims to understand deeply the representation of digital identity constructed in contemporary Arabic novels and to interpret the meanings embedded within them through a posthumanist perspective. In contemporary literary studies, a qualitative approach enables researchers to uncover the complex relations between humans, technology, and identity construction represented contextually and interpretively within literary texts. Furthermore, the posthumanist paradigm emphasizes the importance of understanding the entanglement between humans and technology in the formation of modern subjectivity (Cissey Usman et al., 2025).

The material object of this study consists of contemporary Arabic novels that address themes of digital technology, social media, cyberspace, artificial intelligence, and human identity transformation in the digital era. Meanwhile, the formal object of the research is the representation of digital identity emerging within narrative structures, characterization, inter-character relationships, as well as various symbols and discourses related to technology. The

selection of novels was conducted purposively (purposive sampling) based on three primary criteria: (1) the novel was published during the 21st-century contemporary Arabic literature period; (2) it features the representation of digital technology as an essential part of the narrative; and (3) it portrays issues of identity, subjectivity, or human existence associated with virtual spaces.

The research data sources comprise both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data consist of the textual elements of the contemporary Arabic novels under study. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from books, articles in internationally reputable journals, dissertations, scientific proceedings, and various literature discussing posthumanism, digital identity, digital literature, and contemporary Arabic literary criticism. This literature was utilized to strengthen the theoretical foundation while providing an interpretive framework for the analyzed data (Im et al., 2023).

The data collection technique was conducted through documentary study using the reading and note-taking technique. The researcher performed an intensive reading (close reading) of the novel texts to identify parts representing digital identity, human-technology relations, subjectivity transformations, and posthuman forms of existence. The discovered data were then classified based on major themes relevant to the research focus. A close reading approach allows for a deep analysis of meaning structures and representational strategies within literary texts (Lim, 2025).

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis model integrated with a posthumanist reading. The analytical stages include: (1) identifying data units related to digital identity; (2) coding the themes emerging within the texts; (3) categorizing themes based on the core concepts of posthumanism; (4) interpreting the relationships between humans, technology, and identity within the narratives; and (5) formulating a synthesis of the research findings. In this process, the researcher applied diffractive reading, which involves reading the texts through a dialogue between literary data and posthumanist concepts to generate a more comprehensive interpretation regarding identity transformation in the digital era (Ropiah et al., 2023).

The theoretical framework of this research utilizes posthumanist theory developed by thinkers such as Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti. This theory is used to analyze how the boundary between humans and technology is represented in contemporary Arabic novels, and how technology functions not merely as a tool, but also as an agent that participates in shaping the characters' subjectivity, consciousness, and identity. A posthumanist perspective enables an analysis that transcends the classical humanist paradigm by positioning humans and technology in a mutually influencing relationship that shapes one another.

To ensure research validity, theory triangulation and source triangulation techniques were employed. Theory triangulation was conducted by comparing various concepts within posthumanism, digital identity studies, and contemporary literary criticism. Meanwhile, source triangulation was performed by examining the research findings through various relevant academic references. Through these procedures, the research results are expected to achieve adequate levels of credibility, dependability, and confirmability, thereby offering a scientific contribution to the development of contemporary Arabic literary studies, digital identity studies, and posthumanist discourse in literary research (Tang & Li, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that digital identity in contemporary Arabic novels is represented as a form of new subjectivity born from the intensive interaction between humans and technology. In contrast to identity construction in classical as well as early modern Arabic novels, which generally rests on genealogical, social, religious, and national aspects, the contemporary Arabic novel presents identity as an entity in constant motion and change, following the dynamics of digital space. Characters in the novels no longer construct identity solely through direct interaction with their social environment, but also through social media, virtual platforms, algorithms, and digital communication networks that have become an integral part of everyday life.

These findings demonstrate that digital identity does not merely function as a self-representation in cyberspace, but rather becomes a space for the production of meaning that allows individuals to form alternative self-images. Characters in the novels frequently display different versions of themselves between real life and virtual life. Within the digital space, they acquire the freedom to construct a more flexible identity compared to social identity bounded by cultural, religious, or political norms. This condition indicates that the digital space has become a new arena for the formation of contemporary subjectivity.

A posthumanist perspective views this phenomenon as a process of deconstruction toward the concept of the humanist subject, which has hitherto been assumed to be stable and autonomous. According to posthumanist thought, human identity can no longer be separated from the technological networks that shape their life experiences. Hayles explains that the development of digital technology has altered the relationship between the body, information, and consciousness, thereby interconnecting human identity more closely with information technology systems.

The findings of this study align with research on identity and technology in contemporary Arabic literature, which demonstrates that the development of digital technology has generated more fluid and dynamic forms of identity. However, this study expands upon previous findings by showing that digital identity in contemporary Arabic novels is not merely a social phenomenon, but also an ontological phenomenon that alters how humans understand themselves. Consequently, digital identity in contemporary Arabic novels can be understood as a form of posthuman subjectivity born from the reciprocal relationship between humans and technology. Characters are no longer the sole center of identity formation, but rather part of a digital network that continuously shapes and is shaped by their activities.

The subsequent findings indicate the emergence of an identity fragmentation phenomenon that is highly dominant in digital-themed contemporary Arabic novels. Characters in the novels frequently experience a split between physical identity and virtual identity. They possess various distinct personae corresponding to the digital spaces they utilize. On one social media platform, a character may appear as an ideal figure, whereas in real life, they experience alienation and an existential crisis.

This phenomenon indicates that digital technology does not always generate identity freedom, but also gives rise to psychological tension. Identity becomes an never-ending project because individuals continuously negotiate between the displayed self-image and the

experienced reality. As a result, characters in the novels frequently experience anxiety, uncertainty, and a loss of orientation toward themselves.

In a posthumanist perspective, identity fragmentation is a logical consequence of the loss of traditional boundaries separating humans from technology. Posthumanism rejects the notion of a singular and essential identity. Conversely, identity is viewed as the result of interactions among various human and non-human actors within a complex network (Álvares, 2024; Kavukcu, 2026).

The results of this study reinforce the findings of studies on digital alienation in contemporary literature, which show that digital media frequently create new conditions of estrangement. Individuals appear increasingly connected virtually, yet they conversely experience emotional disconnection in real life. Accordingly, identity fragmentation in contemporary Arabic novels can be understood as a representation of the crisis of the modern subject facing radical changes due to the digitalization of social life. Data analysis shows that cyberspace is represented as the primary arena for the formation of digital identity. In the various novels analyzed, social media, online forums, communication applications, and virtual environments become spaces where characters engage in continuous identity negotiation.

Cyberspace is depicted not merely as a medium of communication, but as a new social environment that possesses its own norms, hierarchies, and power mechanisms. Characters utilize digital spaces to obtain social recognition, build relationships, and express views that they cannot convey in real life (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2026). These findings indicate that digital identity is formed through a performative process. Identity does not exist as a pre-existing entity, but is produced through repetitive digital activities. Every post, comment, interaction, and visual representation becomes part of this identity formation process.

Prior research on the transformation of Arabic literature in the internet era also shows that digital technology has altered communication patterns and cultural representations in Arab society. However, this study finds that these changes impact not only the literary form but also the concept of identity represented within the literary works (Zakarnah & Mahmoud, 2025). Therefore, cyberspace in contemporary Arabic novels can be understood as a symbolic arena that enables an ongoing process of identity reconstruction.

One of the most crucial findings of this study is the shifting position of technology from a mere tool to an actor that participates in shaping human experience. In contemporary Arabic novels, technology no longer functions passively, but plays an active role in determining the actions, choices, and consciousness of the characters. Social media algorithms, artificial intelligence, digital surveillance systems, and virtual communication networks are frequently depicted as significantly influencing character behavior. Characters do not merely use technology, but are also shaped by that technology.

These findings support the concept of technogenesis developed by Hayles, namely the notion that humans and technology develop co-evolutionarily. Technological changes produce changes in humans, and human changes in turn influence the development of technology. Within the context of contemporary Arabic novels, this relationship is reflected through characters whose consciousness and identity cannot be understood without considering the surrounding technology. In other words, humans and technology exist in a mutually shaping relationship. This result expands upon previous research, which generally

views technology as a narrative backdrop. Conversely, this study demonstrates that technology is an integral part of the character's identity construction.

Another emerging finding is the shift in the meaning of the body in the digital era. Contemporary Arabic novels illustrate that the biological body is no longer the sole foundation of human identity. Digital data, virtual footprints, and online representations also play a role in determining a person's existence. In various narratives, a character's existence is frequently more recognized through their digital account than their physical presence. Digital presence becomes the primary indicator of someone's social identity. Consequently, the boundary between the physical body and the digital body becomes increasingly blurred.

A posthumanist perspective explains that this condition demonstrates the transformation of the concept of the human from a biological entity toward a hybrid entity consisting of the body, information, and technology. Hayles asserts that the development of the information society has led to an increasingly close relationship between the body and data.

This finding also aligns with posthumanist studies that emphasize the importance of understanding humans as part of a wider material and digital network. Accordingly, the contemporary Arabic novel shows that human existence in the digital era can no longer be understood solely through the biological body, but also through the accompanying digital existence.

Data analysis indicates that contemporary Arabic novels implicitly critique the classical humanist paradigm. In the paradigm of humanism, humans are viewed as the center of rationality and the primary controllers of the world (Busch, 2026). However, in the analyzed novels, this position begins to be questioned. Characters no longer possess full control over their lives because their decisions are influenced by algorithms, digital systems, and massive flows of information. Human intelligence is no longer the sole source of knowledge because technology also participates in the decision-making process.

This phenomenon indicates the occurrence of human decentralization, which constitutes one of the main characteristics of posthumanism. Humans are no longer positioned as the sole center of the world, but as part of a relational network involving technology and various non-human entities. This finding enriches contemporary Arabic literary studies because it demonstrates that Arabic literary works do not merely reflect social changes, but are also engaged in philosophical debates regarding the future of humanity. Based on all the findings, this study generates a model of digital identity representation in contemporary Arabic novels consisting of four main dimensions:

The Dimension of Hybridity, namely the fusion between human identity and technology. The Dimension of Fluidity, namely identity that continuously changes according to the digital context. The Dimension of Fragmentation, namely the emergence of various personae within virtual spaces. The Dimension of Posthumanism, namely the loss of a sharp boundary between humans and technology. These four dimensions form a pattern of identity representation that differs from the identity representation in previous periods of Arabic novels. Digital identity is no longer rooted in fixed social categories, but in continuously evolving networks of digital relations. Overall, the research results indicate that contemporary Arabic novels have become spaces for critical reflection on the transformation of human identity in the digital era. Through a posthumanist perspective, digital identity is represented

as a hybrid, fluid, fragmented construction tightly interconnected with technology. This finding simultaneously confirms that contemporary Arabic literature not only represents the social reality of modern Arab society but also participates in the global discourse on posthumanism, digitalization, and the future of humanity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital identity in contemporary Arabic novels is represented as a fluid, hybrid, fragmented, and posthuman form of subjectivity. The analyzed narratives show that identity is no longer constructed solely through genealogical, social, religious, or national affiliations, but also through digital platforms, social media, algorithms, virtual communication, and technological networks. Characters in contemporary Arabic novels are portrayed as subjects who continuously negotiate between physical and virtual identities, producing multiple forms of self-representation that reflect the instability of identity in the digital era.

Through a posthumanist perspective, this study demonstrates that technology in contemporary Arabic novels is not merely presented as a passive communication tool or narrative background, but as an active agent that participates in shaping human consciousness, memory, behavior, and self-construction. The findings reveal that cyberspace becomes a symbolic arena where identity is performed, reconstructed, and contested. The blurring of boundaries between the biological body and digital presence, the emergence of virtual personae, and the decentralization of human agency indicate that contemporary Arabic literature actively engages with broader philosophical questions concerning the future of humanity, subjectivity, and human-technology relations.

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on qualitative textual analysis, so the findings are interpretive and context-specific. Second, the study focuses on selected contemporary Arabic novels that contain themes of digital technology and identity transformation, meaning that other Arabic literary works with different themes or genres are not covered. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the corpus of Arabic literary texts, compare digital identity representation across different Arab regions, or employ interdisciplinary approaches such as digital humanities, media studies, or comparative literature. Further studies may also examine how readers interpret digital identity and posthuman subjectivity in contemporary Arabic fiction.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used ChatGPT as an AI-assisted tool to support language refinement, clarity enhancement, and improvement of academic expression. The author(s) carefully reviewed, edited, and validated all AI-generated suggestions and take full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

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