

## The discourse surrounding Saudi women's attire on Reddit: A critical discourse analysis

Arwa Alquayb\*

**Abstract.** This study analyzes a Reddit thread discussing Saudi women's attire choices and explores the discourse surrounding modesty on social media. The thread reflects a complex negotiation of cultural norms, religious values, and societal expectations. Participants debate the concept of "modesty," with conservative views advocating for strict adherence to traditional dress (e.g., abayas and hijabs) and liberal perspectives challenging the notion that modesty is solely tied to clothing. The creator's post constructs modesty as a central virtue, linking it to moral integrity and societal values, which reinforces a dichotomy between "modesty" and "immodesty." This moral framing is further reflected in the thread's use of language to express judgment and social critique. Notably, the term "Death Note" is metaphorically used as a euphemism for "cuckold," drawing on its phonetic resemblance to the Arabic word 'ديث' (deeth). This linguistic play demonstrates how users creatively manipulate language to convey culturally resonant meanings and social commentary. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study examines how language constructs social relations, power dynamics, and ideologies. It addresses two main questions: (1) How is "modesty" constructed in the discourse on Saudi women's attire? and (2) How do linguistic features shape moral judgments within these discussions? The analysis reveals three patterns: comments engaging in defamation through morally loaded language, comments opposing or critiquing defamation, and comments dismissing its significance. Some argue that women should anticipate and manage negative reactions by adhering to traditional norms, while others emphasize Islamic principles condemning slander. Religious references highlight moral consequences, while critical voices address the toxic social media atmosphere. In essence, the study uncovers how language, culture, and ideology intertwine to shape perceptions of modesty and morality. It also emphasizes the digital sphere's role in both reinforcing and challenging societal norms and offers a window into the ongoing negotiation of values and identities online.

**Keywords:** modesty, Saudi women, Reddit discourse, CDA, moral judgment, cultural norms

**1. Introduction.** The discourse surrounding Saudi women's attire on social media, particularly as reflected in the Reddit thread under analysis, reveals a complex negotiation of cultural norms, religious values, and societal expectations. Women's dress codes in Saudi Arabia have long been a site of public and private contention, which symbolizes broader debates about modesty, morality, and gender roles. This study examines how language is employed within the discourse to construct and contest notions of modesty and sheds light on the intricate power dynamics and ideological struggles at play. The analyzed Reddit thread captures a spectrum of views, from those defending traditional dress norms as essential for upholding moral integrity to others challenging the notion that modesty can be solely defined by clothing choices.

Through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1995), this study investigates how linguistic strategies, such as lexicon, tone, and metaphor, are used to construct moral judgments regarding Saudi women's attire. By focusing on online discourse, the study explores how social media platforms like Reddit become arenas for both reinforcing and resisting dominant gender ideologies. The key research questions guiding this analysis are: 1) How is the concept of

"modesty" constructed and negotiated in the discourse surrounding Saudi women's attire choices on social media? and 2) How do linguistic features such as lexicon, tone, and metaphor contribute to the construction of moral judgments in these discussions? This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on gender, discourse, and digital communication by offering insights into how online platforms mediate cultural debates about women's dress and autonomy within the Saudi context.

**2. CDA as a Framework for Online Discourse.** CDA examines the structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as reflected in language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Interdisciplinary by nature, CDA draws on theories from sociology, psychology, management, economics, and anthropology to deepen the understanding of complex social practices, especially in the context of social media's growing influence. While CDA does not adhere to a single methodology, it encompasses several distinct approaches, each with unique theoretical positions, methodological goals, and data sources (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Approach	Key Proponents	Focus and Methodology
Dispositive Analysis	Siegfried Jäger & Florentine Maier	Examines how discourse shapes reality through social actors, using dispositive analysis of existing texts.
Sociocognitive Approach	Teun van Dijk	Explores the link between social systems and individual cognition by developing context models and social representations, grounded in text analysis.
Discourse-Historical Approach	Ruth Wodak & Martin Reisigl	Investigates connections between fields of action, genres, and discourses, combining text analysis with fieldwork and ethnography to address social problems.
Corpus Linguistics Approach	Gerlinde Mautner	Enhances linguistic analysis within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly effective for large text corpora.
Social Actors Approach	Theo van Leeuwen	Examines how individuals construct and reproduce social structures through linguistic operationalization at the actor level.
Dialectical-Relational Approach	Norman Fairclough	Analyzes how language and broader social practices interact, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between discourse and social structure.

Table 1. Summary of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Approaches

Operationalizing these approaches ranges from macro-level analysis to micro-level linguistic techniques. Corpus Linguistics, with its software-driven methods, is ideal for analyzing large datasets. Dispositive Analysis, the Sociocognitive Approach, the Social Actors Approach, and the Dialectical-Relational Approach focus on existing texts, while the Discourse-Historical Approach integrates ethnographic methods to offer a broader contextual understanding (Wodak and Meyer, 2008). The rise of social media data makes these methods increasingly relevant, as Maunter (2014) notes: “[b]ecause the medium is so dynamic and flexible, it reacts with unprecedented speed and precision to social change; because it is more widely accessible than print media it is inherently more democratic” (p. 821).

Building on CDA, Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) expands the analysis of language, power, and ideology. Rather than aligning with a single theoretical framework, CDS operates within a critical research paradigm influenced by the Frankfurt School, Marxism, neo-Marxism, gender studies, and Foucauldian thought. It focuses not only on describing communicative interactions but also on critiquing and transforming power relations by exposing structural dominance. CDS adopts a materialist perspective, which recognizes that language both constructs and is constructed by historical processes. This approach emphasizes intertextuality and interdiscursivity, which show how texts interact with other discourses over time. Methodologically, CDS draws on interdisciplinary tools, combining linguistic analysis, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with sociological and psychological critiques.

Ideology and power are central to CDS. Ideologies are seen as discursively constructed, shaping and being shaped by social practices. While Foucault conceptualizes power as diffused through society, neo-Marxist critiques highlight institutional structures' role in maintaining discursive power. Thus, CDS acknowledges that power operates through knowledge production, subject positioning, and social regulation. To ensure validity, Gee (2014) proposes four criteria for CDS research: convergence (multiple sources support the interpretation), agreement (analysts reach similar conclusions), coverage (the analysis accounts for most of the data), and linguistic detail (interpretations are grounded in language use). These principles help maintain theoretical consistency and empirical rigor, which reinforces the materialist view that discourse is embedded in social practices and influences power dynamics.

Ultimately, both CDA and CDS offer valuable frameworks for analyzing how language reflects and reinforces social hierarchies. By selecting appropriate approaches and integrating interdisciplinary insights, researchers can uncover the complex interplay between language, society, and power.

**3. CDA and Social Media.** Discursive systems consist of multiple perspectives, often referred to as universes of discourse (Strauss, A. et al., 1964). These universes of discourse emerge through communicative acts, particularly visible within social media interactions. In these digital spaces, individuals engage in dialogue and interpretation and negotiate shared meanings. Social media platforms facilitate this interaction by offering structural features that promote ongoing discussions between content creators and their audiences, which makes them inherently more dialogic than traditional websites (Dickey & Lewis, 2010).

Such dialogic exchanges within social media enable various discourse actions, including relationship-building, the construction of social situations, and the reinforcement or challenging of power dynamics. These processes can influence or even drive social issues. For instance, social movements, cyberbullying, and online sexual predation are all phenomena shaped by the discourses that unfold on social media platforms. Social movements often seek to empower marginalized groups, and social media amplifies this by providing a space where individuals can engage in collective textual discourse. This aligns with critical approaches to discourse that seek to reveal and challenge structural inequalities.

Conversely, the darker aspects of online discourse, such as cyberbullying and moral policing, are crucial to understanding how social media mediates negotiations of social issues, particularly for marginalized groups. Cyberbullying refers to the intentional and repeated infliction of harm through digital communication (Gradinger et al., 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2011), often exacerbated by the anonymity and wide reach of social media, which lowers the risk of accountability for perpetrators (Snakenborg et al., 2011). In the context of this paper, online

discussions frequently blur the line between discourse and harassment, as moral policing — where users impose their views of modesty on women — can manifest as defamation, shaming, or dismissive rhetoric. These interactions not only reinforce existing gender hierarchies but also highlight how social media becomes a contested space where cultural norms and individual agency are publicly negotiated, as seen in Reddit discussions where users debate whether women's attire reflects personal freedom or communal values. Understanding the linguistic patterns in these interactions is essential for analyzing how social values, norms, and power relations are negotiated in digital arenas.

These social issues reflect distinct universes of discourse and highlight how social media becomes a site for public negotiation of cultural values and identities. With social media's affordances enabling both empowerment and exploitation, understanding these discursive systems is vital for addressing their unintended consequences and fostering more just online environments.

**4. Power in CDA.** CDA centers on how discourse shapes power dynamics, reinforcing or challenging social hierarchies (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). Rather than viewing language as a neutral communication tool, CDA scholars argue it legitimizes or contests power structures, echoing Foucault's (1975) concept of "technologies of power," where discourse both reflects and molds societal norms and individual behavior. Power, within this framework, is systemic and embedded in social structures, not merely a resource wielded by individuals (Kellerman, 1986; Kieserling, 2019). Discourse become sites of ideological struggle and capture competing perspectives on social issues.

Applying CDA to online discourse reveals how language use can either reinforce or disrupt dominant ideologies, exposing broader socio-political dynamics in digital spaces. Baker et al. (2008) highlight how Corpus Linguistics complements CDA by offering data-driven insights into linguistic patterns, such as keyness and collocation, which can then be interpreted through the lens of power dynamics. This quantitative approach adds depth to CDA's qualitative focus and fosters a more comprehensive analysis of how language operates within power structures.

Wodak and Reisigl (2015) further examine how discourse perpetuates prejudices and stereotypes, showing how racist ideologies are reproduced through language by categorizing social groups, reinforcing biases, and institutionalizing discrimination. Their work underscores how discourse not only mirrors but actively constructs social realities, which align with CDA's broader goal of unveiling hidden power relations. Shirazi (2013) extends this perspective by analyzing how authorities strategically employ discourse to maintain power and suppress dissent. Using a four-part validity test—comprehensibility, truthfulness, legitimacy, and sincerity—Shirazi dissects the rhetoric of state officials in the MENA region, demonstrating how leaders use threatening language and dehumanizing metaphors to frame opposition as a security threat. Terms like "enemies," "criminals," and "outlaws" serve to delegitimize protesters and consolidate authority, which reinforce the CDA view that discourse is never neutral but ideologically charged (Wodak & Meyer, 2008).

Within online communities, power dynamics can be further explored through Foucault's concept of power/knowledge, which refers to the idea that power is not only enforced through institutions but also produced and maintained through discourse. Language, in this framework, plays a central role in shaping what is accepted as truth and in defining whose voices are heard or silenced. Van Dijk & Teun A. (2013) illustrates how online racism operates through discursive strategies that marginalize minority voices. Dominant groups use derogatory language and stereotypes to dehumanize marginalized individuals while manipulating discourse structures, such as privileging

certain narratives or withholding platforms, to silence dissent. Van Dijk also highlights "othering," a discursive practice that portrays minorities as fundamentally different or inferior and legitimizes their exclusion. These strategies work to sustain social hierarchies and reinforce power imbalances within digital spaces.

Therefore, CDA provides a powerful framework for uncovering the subtle ways language perpetuates inequality, whether through state rhetoric, online discourse, or the reproduction of stereotypes. By integrating insights from Corpus Linguistics and drawing on the work of scholars like Wodak, Shirazi, and van Dijk, researchers can more effectively trace the intersection of language, power, and ideology.

**5. CDA and Gender.** Gender and discourse are intricately linked, with language playing a crucial role in constructing and negotiating gender identities. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013) emphasize that gender is not an inherent trait but rather something individuals "do" through their actions and interactions, a concept rooted in the work of West and Zimmerman (1987) and further developed by Butler's (2014) theory of gender performativity. This perspective is particularly relevant when analyzing online discourse, as these digital spaces become arenas where gender identities are both performed and contested. Gender ideology — the system of beliefs that explains, justifies, and perpetuates the gender order — also shapes how people engage with such discussions (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). The "gender order" refers to the social organization of gender roles and expectations within a given culture, which influence how individuals are judged based on their gendered behavior, including clothing choices. Online platforms often reflect and reinforce these ideologies, with users either supporting traditional gender norms or challenging them.

Robin Lakoff's pioneering work on language and gender highlights how language can reflect and reproduce societal power imbalances. According to Lakoff (1973; 1975), women's language is often marked by features such as hedges (e.g., "sort of," "I think"), intensifiers (e.g., "really happy," "so beautiful"), and tag questions (e.g., "It's a nice day, isn't it?"). These linguistic patterns, she argued, portray women's speech as tentative and powerless and reinforce their subordinate status. In online platforms, similar patterns may emerge, with women's voices potentially being undermined through linguistic strategies that question their authority or reinforce stereotypes.

However, subsequent research has complicated Lakoff's claims. O'Barr & Atkins (1986) found that what Lakoff identified as "women's language" was more accurately described as "powerless language," used by both men and women in lower-status positions. This shift moves the focus from essentialist views of gendered language to a more nuanced understanding of how power and status influence speech; a critical lens for examining how speakers assert dominance or challenge authority when discussing gendered topics. Therefore, gendered discourse in online settings is not static but fluid and can reflect broader societal shifts. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) argue, gender identities are continually produced and negotiated through language.

**6. Methodology.** This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Fairclough's CDA to examine the discourse surrounding Saudi women's attire in a Reddit thread. CDA is a suitable approach as it focuses on how language constructs and reflects social relations, power dynamics, and ideologies. The data for this study consists of a Reddit thread discussing Saudi women's dress choices, with particular emphasis on the concept of modesty and the moral judgments attached to it. The thread includes the creator's original post and a range of comments reflecting diverse perspectives: from defamation and moral policing to supportive and dismissive responses.

The data collection involved selecting a Reddit thread that explicitly addresses the controversy surrounding Saudi women's attire and ensuring the discourse analyzed is rich and representative of varying viewpoints. A total of 31 comments were manually collected, which encompass the original post and subsequent responses. The comments were categorized into three distinct patterns: 1) those engaging in defamation or morally loaded language, 2) those opposing defamation and criticizing such behavior, and 3) those dismissing or downplaying the significance of the debate.

The analysis focused on identifying linguistic features such as lexicon (word choice), tone (attitude conveyed through language), and metaphor (figurative language used to frame concepts). Particular attention was given to how commenters employed religious references, moral evaluations, and rhetorical strategies to construct notions of modesty and immodesty. The study also examined the ideological positions embedded in the discourse and explored how power relations and gender dynamics were negotiated through language. Ethical considerations were central to the research process. Since the study deals with online discourse, only publicly accessible Reddit data was used. To protect user anonymity, no usernames or identifying information were included, and quotes were paraphrased where necessary. This ensures the study adheres to ethical standards for internet-based research.

The findings were then interpreted within the broader sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia, considering how the discourse on modesty and women's attire mirrors ongoing societal shifts where traditional values meet contemporary calls for personal autonomy. This methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how online platforms like Reddit serve as contested spaces where gendered ideologies are both reinforced and challenged.

**7. Findings.** The online debate surrounding Saudi women's attire, as observed in this Reddit discussion thread, provides a compelling lens through which to examine the complex interplay of culture, religion, gender, and societal expectations in contemporary Saudi society. This discourse, centered around the expectations placed on Saudi women regarding their dress choices (particularly the wearing of traditional garments such as the abaya and hijab), highlights the tension between cultural and religious norms, personal autonomy, and the societal policing of women's bodies. The discussion encompasses multiple perspectives, from those who advocate for strict adherence to modesty codes, to those who contest these norms in favor of individual freedom and expression.

The creator's post reflects a discourse that constructs "modesty" as a central virtue associated with specific dress codes for Saudi women (particularly abayas and hijabs). The repeated lexical choice of terms like "virtue," "morality," and "integrity" constructs modesty as a symbolic boundary between acceptable and deviant behavior. This discourse portrays adherence to traditional attire norms as essential for upholding moral integrity and societal values. The emphasis on modesty in the context of women's attire suggests a negotiation of cultural and religious expectations within Saudi society. By contrasting "modest" versus "immodest" identities, the discourse uses binary oppositions—a classic CDA feature—to reproduce ideological divisions. The discourse presents a dichotomy between "modesty" and "immodesty," framing those who deviate from traditional dress norms as challenging established societal norms. This negotiation reveals underlying tensions and debates surrounding gender roles and religious interpretations. Lexical items such as "despicable," "immoral," and "shameful" signal strong negative moral evaluation, reflecting the way language constructs social identities and regulates behavior. Interestingly, the term "Death Note" is employed metaphorically as a euphemism for 'cuckold,' drawing on its phonetic resemblance to

the Arabic word 'ديث' (pronounced 'deeth'). “Death note” is originally a name of an animation series. This metaphor functions as a sarcastic and indirect insult, illustrating how intertextual references can be used to reinforce social shame.

**7.1. Constructing Modesty: Dress Codes and Moral Identity.** At the core of the debate is the concept of *modesty*: a moral virtue deeply embedded in the fabric of Saudi cultural and religious values. Many commenters adopt a rigid understanding of modesty, closely tied to traditional dress codes. The concept of modesty, as expressed by many participants in the thread, is framed in binary terms: those who adhere to established norms (such as wearing the abaya and hijab) are portrayed as morally upright, while those who deviate from these norms are cast as morally questionable. This binary framing reflects the CDA concept of ideological squaring, where opposing sides are linguistically constructed as good/evil or right/wrong.

One commenter expresses a harsh judgment of women who dress in ways that challenge traditional modesty norms, referring to them in derogatory terms, saying: “These terms are accurate and no one disagrees with them. 'Al-Rakhees/Al-Rakheesah' (cheap), 'Al-Aahirah' (prostitute), and 'Al-Fasiq/Fasiqah' (immoral).” This comment uses loaded lexical items that not only reflect but also reinforce gendered moral judgments. It emphasizes how women who choose not to follow prescribed modesty codes are subject to stigmatization and moral condemnation, framing non-compliance with societal norms as synonymous with immorality. This judgment reflects the deep societal pressure to conform to rigid dress codes in Saudi Arabia and equates modesty with virtue and public morality.

The thread creator highlights a “despicable phenomenon” where women who do not conform to traditional dress codes are publicly shamed. The use of emotionally charged adjectives like “despicable” signals the speaker's strong alignment with the moral standards being enforced. These women are often subjected to online slander, accused of tarnishing the reputation of Saudi society. This discourse positions modesty not only as a virtue but as a symbol of cultural and moral identity, which frames women's attire choices as a battleground for the preservation of societal values.

**7.2. Social Media: A Site of Criticism and Empowerment.** One of the key dynamics in the discourse about Saudi women's attire is the role of social media as a platform for both criticism and empowerment. Several commenters express frustration with the judgmental attitudes that prevail online, which suggests that social media magnifies and distorts the significance of dress codes in public discourse. One commenter states, “Get out of social media and enjoy reality,” using dismissive tone and imperative voice to downplay digital criticism. This minimizes the impact of online criticisms and implies that the real world, outside of digital spaces, is more tolerant and free from such scrutiny.

At the same time, other participants point to the toxic culture that pervades social media, especially in relation to how Saudi women are often objectified and criticized for their appearance. One user notes, “Social media is frankly filthy... It's gotten to the point where any girl who takes pictures of herself and posts them anywhere on social media quickly becomes famous, especially if she's Saudi, and finds toxic comments trying to discredit her.” This statement reveals a metaphorical construction of social media as a “filthy” space, emphasizing moral degradation and surveillance. It also underscores the role of digital media in commodifying and objectifying women, which in turn reduces their worth to their adherence to prescribed modesty codes.

**7.3. Religious and Moral Language: Slander, Law, and Modesty.** Religious and moral language plays a significant role in shaping the discourse surrounding modesty in the thread. Several comments invoke religious teachings from the Quran to discuss or justify criticism of women who are perceived as dressing immodestly. Interestingly, one commenter references the Quranic injunction against slander: “Adornment is forbidden, but Allah said: 'And those who accuse chaste women and then do not produce four witnesses—lash them with eighty lashes.’” Here, intertextuality, referencing religious scripture, serves as a legitimizing tool for moral arguments. While this verse actually condemns false accusations, its use in the discussion reflects the tension between religious principles and social behavior. This reference frames defamation not merely as a social wrongdoing but as a major religious transgression, underscoring the seriousness with which accusations of immorality are treated within Islamic legal frameworks. By invoking such texts, discussions about modesty and social norms are placed within a broader religious and legal context, highlighting how accusations of immodesty can carry significant consequences under Islamic law.

The concept of "guardianship" is another key term that emerges in the discourse. One commenter attempts to justify moral oversight of women's behavior, stating, “‘guardianship’ is actually enjoining good and forbidding evil which is difficult for you to say it in this way.” This justification ties the practice of guarding women's honor and actions to religious duties, specifically the Islamic principles of enjoining good and forbidding evil. This framing draws on religious discourse to justify patriarchal control and emphasizes how word choice like "enjoining good" aligns with Islamic duty. The commenter seems to argue that while this concept may be difficult to articulate or understand in the context of contemporary social media discussions, it is rooted in deeply held religious beliefs about the roles of men and women in society.

Additionally, there is a recurrent emphasis on personal responsibility in adhering to modest dress codes, with one commenter stating, “Don't post your pictures. Simply. You can't control people's reactions, but you can control what you post.” The use of imperatives ("Don't post", "control") places blame on women, constructing them as agents of their own shaming through their lexical positioning. It reflects a broader societal tendency to place the onus on women to regulate their own behavior and appearance, rather than addressing the root cause of public shaming, which is often tied to societal norms and digital culture.

**7.4. Challenging Double Standards: Cultural Critique and Calls for Freedom.** Among the comments, there are those that challenge the selective application of modesty norms in Saudi society. One comment critiques the disproportionate moral judgment faced by Saudi women, asking: “Is modesty only for Saudi women? And everyone else is free to wear what they like?” This rhetorical question uses contrastive framing to expose inconsistencies in cultural expectations, signaling resistance to normative discourse. This comment highlights what is seen as a double standard in the policing of modesty, questioning why similar behaviors in other cultures do not face the same level of scrutiny. This critique points to a broader cultural and social double standard, where Saudi women are often expected to adhere to stricter norms of modesty than women in other parts of the world. The comment suggests that modesty codes are applied selectively and unevenly, depending on cultural and societal context, thus challenging the notion that modesty is an inherently universal value.

Furthermore, some comments advocate for greater personal freedom and autonomy, calling for an end to the moral policing of women's dress. One comment states: “It's disgraceful, by God,” expressing frustration at the societal pressures placed on Saudi women to conform to prescribed



modesty codes. The emotive tone and religious invocation (“by God”) intensify the speaker’s critique, adding a layer of personal urgency. This perspective critiques the rigid moral framework that governs women’s choices in Saudi society and advocates for a more tolerant and accepting approach to individual expression. The comment points to a desire for greater agency over one’s own body and clothing choices and reflects the evolving attitudes toward personal freedom in Saudi society, particularly among younger generations.

**7.5. Gender, Power, and the Policing of Women's Bodies.** The comments also reveal the ongoing power dynamics at play in the policing of women's bodies, particularly in relation to gender norms. Many of the commenters adopt a paternalistic stance, emphasizing the need for women to adhere to societal and religious expectations in order to preserve their honor and dignity. This reflects the deeply ingrained gender norms that govern women’s behavior in Saudi society, where women are often expected to conform to prescribed roles and standards of conduct. The constant emphasis on modesty serves to reinforce these gender roles, positioning women’s bodies as sites of moral and cultural contestation.

A key aspect of this discourse is the critique of the role some men in Saudi society take in policing women's attire, often using social media as a platform for moral judgment. The creator mentions that these same individuals "pretend to be righteous and protective while exercising guardianship over people's daughters by defaming them" and further criticizes the apparent inconsistency in these judgments. This lexical contrast, "righteous" versus "defaming", is an example of how evaluative language reveals hypocrisy and power imbalance. This perspective introduces the concept of societal hypocrisy, especially when compared to the behavior of other countries where the same issues are not as pronounced. The creator compares the treatment of Saudi women to that of Egyptian women, noting, "I've never seen an Egyptian man defame his own daughter just because she's pictured in a colored abaya in front of a mirror in a coffee shop," highlighting a contrast in cultural attitudes toward modesty and social propriety.

At the same time, the thread highlights a growing tension between traditional gender norms and the evolving social and cultural landscape in Saudi Arabia. While some commenters continue to defend traditional interpretations of modesty, others call for greater freedom and empowerment for women, advocating for a broader understanding of personal expression and autonomy. These competing discourses are shaped through tone, metaphor, and word choice that either uphold or resist dominant ideologies. This tension reflects broader societal debates about gender, culture, and identity in Saudi Arabia, as the country navigates the complexities of modernization and globalization. Together, these patterns reveal how modesty discourse on Reddit not only reflects societal values but also challenges them, exposing a contested digital space where gender, culture, and religion collide.

**8. Discussion.** This study has revealed a complex negotiation of cultural, religious, and societal values within the discourse surrounding Saudi women's attire on social media. By analyzing a Reddit thread discussing modesty, the study has shown how language plays a significant role in constructing, reinforcing, and contesting moral judgments about women’s clothing choices in the context of Saudi society. Through Fairclough’s CDA, this study has illuminated three major patterns of discourse: (1) defamation through the use of morally loaded language, (2) responses critiquing defamation and calling for more tolerance, and (3) dismissals of the significance of the debate itself.

A key finding in this study is the construction of "modesty" as both a moral and cultural virtue, deeply connected to ideas of reputation, virtue, and religious duty. Comments defending traditional dress codes frequently invoke religious justifications and suggest that adherence to modesty is a divine obligation, while those challenging this view argue for the autonomy of women to define their own expressions of modesty. These opposing viewpoints underscore the ongoing tension between personal freedom and societal expectations within the Saudi context.

The metaphorical use of the term "Death Note" as a euphemism for "cuckold" adds an interesting layer to the discourse. The term, borrowed from popular culture, reflects a deep-seated critique of men perceived as passive or complicit in their wives' or female relatives' online behavior, particularly the posting of pictures on social media. The use of this metaphor highlights how linguistic devices are deployed to express power dynamics, reinforcing gender roles that position men as the gatekeepers of modesty. This reinforces traditional norms that view male authority as central to maintaining female decorum and public reputation.

Furthermore, the study reveals how language is employed not only to assert moral judgments but also to create moral boundaries. Participants in the thread often position themselves in opposition to the perceived "immodesty" of others by labeling certain behaviors as immoral or shameful, thereby policing the boundaries of acceptable conduct. In contrast, those who critique this moralizing language emphasize the importance of respecting individual agency and challenge the notion that women's attire should be the subject of public scrutiny. This reflects broader societal tensions between conservative and progressive views on gender, modesty, and the role of women in Saudi Arabia.

This analysis also sheds light on the toxic nature of some online discourse, where defamation and personal attacks are used to delegitimize opposing viewpoints. The religious and moral undertones that pervade the debate on modesty often serve to legitimize harsh judgments and exclusionary rhetoric. However, some comments push back against these toxic elements, advocating for a more inclusive and respectful discourse that recognizes the diversity of opinions on women's dress.

**9. Conclusion.** The discourse surrounding Saudi women's attire on social media reflects a complex intersection of cultural, religious, and gendered ideologies. The analysis of the Reddit thread reveals the role of language in shaping societal attitudes toward modesty, highlighting the power of linguistic features such as metaphor, lexicon, and tone in constructing moral judgments. The study demonstrates how social media platforms like Reddit provide a space for both reinforcing and challenging traditional norms, offering a window into the ongoing negotiation of values and identities in a rapidly changing social landscape.

Through CDA, this study has illustrated how discourse both reflects and reinforces power dynamics, particularly in relation to gender roles and the control of female bodies. The findings suggest that while some participants assert traditional views of modesty, others challenge these views, advocating for greater individual freedom and autonomy. These conflicting discourses reveal the tension between societal expectations and personal agency, and they shed light on how digital communication is increasingly influencing public attitudes toward women's roles in Saudi society. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the role of language in shaping social norms, particularly in the context of gender and digital communication. It highlights how online platforms serve as arenas for contesting dominant ideologies, offering new spaces for dialogue and resistance in the face of entrenched societal expectations. The broader implications of this analysis suggest that social media has become a key site for shaping perceptions of women's autonomy and moral worth, with real consequences for how gender roles

are understood and enforced both online and offline. The findings underscore the importance of considering both the empowering and toxic aspects of online discourse, as they play a crucial role in shaping the digital public sphere and the ongoing negotiation of gender, power, and identity.

## References

- Baker, Paul, Costas Gabrielatos, Majid Khosravi-Nik, Michal Krzyżanowski, Tony McEnery & Ruth Wodak. 2008. A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press. *Discourse & Society* 19(3). 273–306.
- Butler, Judith. 2014. Performative agency. In *The limits of performativity*. Routledge.
- Dickey, Ian & William Lewis. 2010. The evolution (revolution) of social media and social networking as a necessary topic in the marketing curriculum: A case for integrating social media into marketing classes. *Advances in Marketing: Embracing Challenges and Change - A Global Perspective*. [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/mgt\\_fac\\_pub/32](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/mgt_fac_pub/32)
- Eckert, Penelope & Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2013. *Language and gender*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.
- Gee, James P. 2014. *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315819679>
- Gradingier, Philipp, Daniela Strohmeier & Christian Spiel. 2010. Definition and measurement of cyberbullying. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 4(2). Article 2. <https://cyberpsychology.eu/article/view/4235>
- Kellerman, Barry (Ed.). 1986. *Political leadership: A source book*. University of Pittsburgh Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12381759>
- Kieserling, Andreas. 2019. Blau (1964): Exchange and power in social life. In B. Holzer & C. Stegbauer (Eds.), *Schlüsselwerke der Netzwerkforschung*, 51–54. Springer Fachmedien. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-21742-6\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-21742-6_12)
- Lakoff, Robin. 1973. Language and woman's place. *Language in Society* 2(1). 45–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500000051>
- Lakoff, Robin. 1975. *Linguistic theory and the real world* 1. *Language Learning* 25(2). 309–338.
- O'Barr, William & Bowman K. Atkins. 1986. "Women's language" or "Powerless language"? In *Language, Communication and Education*. Routledge.
- Patchin, Justin W. & Sameer Hinduja. 2011. Traditional and nontraditional bullying among youth: A test of general strain theory. *Youth & Society* 43(2). 727–751. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10366951>
- Reisigl, Martin & Ruth Wodak. 2015. Discourse and racism. In *The handbook of discourse analysis*. Wiley Online Library. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118584194.ch27>
- Shirazi, Faegheh. 2013. Social media and the social movements in the Middle East and North Africa. *Information Technology & People* 26(1). 28–49. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09593841311307123>
- Snakenborg, Jennifer, Richard Van Acker & Ronald A. Gable. 2011. Cyberbullying: Prevention and intervention to protect our children and youth. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth* 55(2). 88–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2011.539454>

Strauss, Anselm, Leonard Schatzman, Renate Bucher, David Ehrlich & Melvin Sabshin. 1964. *Psychiatric institutions and ideologies*. Free.

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/4b325f7026257755a7ad84480ffecaa2/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1816368>

van Dijk, Teun A. 2013. Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society* 4(2). 249–283.

West, Candace & Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender & Society* 1(2). 125–151.

Wodak, Ruth & Michael Meyer. 2009. *Methods for critical discourse analysis*. SAGE Publications.