

THE SAUDI MONARCHY @KINGSALMAN LEADERSHIP ON VIRTUAL SPACE

HANEEN MOHAMMAD SHOAIB

University of Business and Technology, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

E-mail: haneenmohammadshoaib@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand how social media facilitate leadership development on virtual space through Twitter. It addresses the impact of virtual space in the re-conceptualization of the Saudi online monarchy identity. This paper explores different facets of the Saudi Arabian leadership reflected in its Monarchy-online identity that is manifested through virtual space on Twitter. The research design builds on a dramaturgical approach and virtual ethnography to analyze the official Twitter account @KingSalman of King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud and how social media affected the Monarchy-online identity in comparison with front stage and backstage script. The research incorporates multidisciplinary perspective to understand the role of virtual space on the construction of identity from the perspective of culture, religion, gender and international relations. The findings depict that virtual space provide opportunity to Saudi Monarchy's King Salman in order to have easy access to general public and support in formation of leadership identity. This paper contributes in a way to compare virtual and face-to-face leadership identity, contribution of virtual space in constructing leadership and the ethical consequences of identity-disclosure in Saudi Arabia through Twitter.

Keywords: *King Salman, Saudi Arabia, Monarchy-Online, Virtual Space, Dramaturgical Approach*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media plays a significant role in shaping and influencing identities in relation to the amount and depth of self-disclosure. Virtual space provides alternative ways of socially constructing and performing leadership. Social media is phenomena that impacts and influences identity construction on virtual space worldwide [1]. Social media growth and impact on identity formation has been an important subject of scholarly work internationally [2] and has led to its utilization by leaders around the world. Social actors' engagements on virtual spaces are not straightforward and are part of a cultural background that shapes them and gives them meaning. They are indeed complex and not easy to pin down to a specific explanation. Virtual space interactions accelerate the speed information is shared, increases the reach of messages, impacts the construction of identity, and strengthens the ability of different individuals to unify [3]. Social media sites have metamorphosed the way information is utilized, shared, and viewed online from just delivery to actual influence and change. Among all social media sites, Twitter has become most popular social media space with 330 million monthly active users, and therefore has a strong impact on political change in the regions. Twitter is

most powerful social media spaces in which associations communicate with participants [4], this extends to governments, as it is a crucial form of organization. Uysal et al [5] research states that governments need to make use of social media spaces to improve tactical communication and to form relationships with their domestic and international audiences. Virtual space provides opportunity to people to reflect emotionally about certain issues and popular opinion leaders [6-8]. The speed of posting and getting immediate feedback instantly has participated in creating a virtual space that has changed the work style of leaders. It has also helped in creating virtual identities parallel to real-world formed ones [9]. It is a result of immense engagement in social media networks that helped users to construct identities as a result of other users' inputs. The construction of different self-disclosed identities is a natural outcome of such online activities. Therefore, virtual space plays a significant role in shaping and influencing these identities in relation to the amount and depth of a person's self-disclosure online.

A case in point is Saudi Arabia, and how its population has been a point of critical consideration globally because of how its people are immensely engaged on virtual spaces and reflect on Monarchy

identity. Saudi Arabia is considered one of the top countries in its use of social media, and that immensely affects its people. Even though Saudi Arabia is based on strong cultural and traditional roots, it still holds some of the highest rankings of social media penetration worldwide on platforms such as Twitter and YouTube. As per Global Web Index (2019) and We Are Social (2019) reports, 23 million social media users, 83 percent internet penetration rate, 49 percent of people use social media to stay up-to-date with news and current events, popular social media platform YouTube (73%), Facebook (62), Instagram (60) and Twitter (56%) in Saudi Arabia [10-11].

However, regardless of the prominent role of social media platforms in constructing individual identity, there is a scarcity of dramaturgical research approach to understand the influence of frontstage and backstage Monarchy leadership. Existing research studies focusing on capturing social media interactions and mapping issues raised in the particular region [9,12-14]. These studies hardly addressed the leadership role and manifestation of backstage scripts on social media platforms [1,8,13,15]. Keeping in view the significance of social media influence on constructing identity, this study explores the virtual space identity of Saudi Monarchy “King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud” in Saudi Arabia and across the world.

The structure of this paper is as follows: First, dramaturgical approach reviewed in the context of monarchy-online leadership identity using the multidisciplinary framework for this research. Along with that virtual ethnography approach explained to support the study methods for analyzing the Twitter data. Second, defines the Saudi Arabian monarchy in connotation with virtual space. Third, overview of Saudi Monarchy @KingSalman, pros and cons of identity disclosure in Saudi Arabia and worldwide. Last section covers the transition of culture, gender and manifestation of religion and its impact on Saudi monarchy-online identity.

2. DRAMATURGICAL PERSPECTIVES

This paper embraces Goffman’s dramaturgical framework theoretically and methodologically, in which components of drama are used to understand social interactions, including, actors, scripts, and staging [16]. The choice of dramaturgy is related to its emphasis on the aspects of identity, scripts, staging, and social interactions. The main elements

in dramaturgy is identity formation through face-to-face interactions and the emphasis on embodiment. Combining dramaturgy and frame analysis is a complementary methodological approach that is a necessity to understand incidents that are culturally sensitive [17]. This will enable a focus on the collective knowledge schemes that people are drawing upon in understanding social performances [18]. Some scholars focus on the front stage interactions [19,20], and some focus on the backstage primarily [21], and some on both [22]. The former is referring to backstage where guards and restrictions are supposedly low according to Goffman [16], however it is not always the case, as sometimes both stages can still be unified [23]. The latter emphasis is perceived as closer to highlight the depth of analysis that can be achieved through a dramaturgical perspective. The micro analysis of social virtual interactions is enhanced by Goffman’s [24] frame analysis that utilizes micro incidents through the bigger cultural and societal elements that govern them. This study extends the use of aspects of this theory to online virtual space social interactions, and building identity through social media posts.

This study attempts to examine the backstage scripts of the Saudi Monarchy-online identity via Twitter to understand the social choice of communication on virtual space among the Monarchy, Saudi people and global audience. This research design builds on a dramaturgical approach that analyze the tweets to and from King Salman since the time of rule. The focus will be on the popularity of the scripts used on the backstage of communication on social media through Twitter account @KingSalman over the front stage scripts limited to communication through traditional media. This analysis scrutinized the elements of culture, gender, religion, and power throughout all tweets using hashtags. Scripts can be any vocabularies or phrases that are used to ensure alliance and unity used by the Saudi Monarchy in its virtual space communication with its nation. The main focus will be on the scripts channeled by the Saudi Monarchy-online identity through King Salman’s official Twitter account and linked post from people, to understand the importance of such scripts on a backstage virtual space.

3. VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY APPROACH

This approach is developed by Christine Hine to collect and analyze the online data in the multiple discipline including sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology and

intercultural communication [25]. Virtual ethnography is used by academicians and researchers as an appropriate method to explore the online content posted by users on different social media and websites [26]. This method has become important to know how users make sense of the virtual realities and their associated possibilities.

It further incorporates the observation, interviews and note reflection of internet users on the particular issues [27]. Added to this, it includes the process to describe and observe cultures, public opinions and concerns in the online communicative contexts. This paper explores virtual ethnography of Twitter account @KingSalman and aligned with the dramaturgical perspectives to compare the frontstage and backstage script.

4. SAUDI ARABIAN MONARCHY AND ONLINE-IDENTITY

King Salman, was proclaimed the 7th King of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia immediately upon the death of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz. The stable transition of power took place on the 23rd of January 2015, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, after the passing away of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud. His reign began by overcoming his people's grief on the loss of the former King Abdullah by generously gifting his people (state employees, soldiers, students, pensioners, professional associations and clubs) around 31 Billion US Dollars. Some private sector companies followed King Salman's generous gifts and paid out two months' salaries to their employees to match the king's gifts to state employees [28]. This took place by official decrees screened live on the official Saudi Channel 1 in Arabic.

Due to the limited direct access of the King to his people (front stage), through physical face-to-face real life interactions, national television channels, and mainstream media outlets, it became necessary to opt for other channels of communication in this case the virtual space of Twitter. The Saudi Monarchy did not waste time, and directly communicated with its nation through King Salman's official twitter account. King Salman's Twitter account existed first before he became King, on February 23rd, 2013 through his twitter account as Crown Prince, under the username @HRHPSalman then it was changed immediately upon taking rule to be @KingSalman. This has resulted in Saudi Arabia's new king having the fastest-growing Twitter profile in the world, in a country where high access to social media is mediated by a conservative society [29]. This is to

ensure connectivity and serve part of the face-to-face interaction performance by creating online instances of scripts personally channeled towards individuals to create a sense of cyber interaction. The Saudi Online Monarchy identity clearly established its primary goals and guidelines in timed responses in their tweets. The Monarchy on Twitter's space has created for itself an online identity and presence which, is an important part of the virtual leadership role and can be seen in the use of media artifacts represented by symbols such as the King's profile picture, words, and photos.

The utilization of social media by the Saudi Monarchy is an unmitigated novelty in the history of Saudi rule that was triggered by the need to reach segments of society who would have been inaccessible if not for virtual space interactions. The need of having them onboard and in synchronization with those who follow traditional front stage media is an immense factor in facilitating such connections. It got Saudis to reconnect with the national traditional media (front stage scripts) as a source of reliable news about the country and its ruler's decrees in addition to popular social media sites. It reached out to segments of society that were previously disengaged but became empowered and very active on social media, the young generation and females. This virtual space is a new territory that the Monarchy took in steady and stable steps to participate, interact, and communicate with its people. However, such an action has put it on the spot nationally and internationally to be directly accessed by any online user to share whatever they think and feel. Baker and Rowe [30] state that social media platforms provide power and voice to people who were usually bared from traditional media participation. Twitter provides a platform for those who do not hold any power to become powerful. It is a position that can be vulnerable and risky at times, however the Monarchy-online identity is constructed of the utmost power and it was willing to take the risks associated with social media to connect to its people.

In taking the initiative and directly connecting to people through an official account in the name of King Salman the Monarchy identified its connectivity and transparency to the people. It also gave reliability to an online social media network that might not always be a reliable source of news. It affected people by stepping within their common communication spaces and speaking to them where they mostly are, online. The impact of this action

by the Monarchy not only swept Saudi nationals by surprise but the whole international world as well was caught in analyzing an action that was not expected within a society that is highly conservative and traditional in many ways. Yet, King Salman's Twitter account showed the world that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is progressing with the times to reach out to a wider audience nationally and internationally in the virtual space they are comfortably participating within. Uysal et al., [5] state that governments need to make use of social media to improve tactical communication and to form relationships with their domestic and international audiences. This is what the Monarchy-online identity has done in taking that first step in creating its Twitter account. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the real time significant power of Twitter and its implication specifically in this study in relation to the establishment of an online Monarchy identity in Saudi Arabia.

In this paper, the sequence of events in relation to the transition of the Monarchy is analyzed to highlight the theoretical and practical implications of the use of power of social media on virtual space within critical times. These tweets were analyzed in terms of their cultural and gender elements, then a closer lens focused on the role of religion and the power of the medium itself was considered. King Salman's identity at virtual space also analyzed with Google search trends, keywords and hashtags.

5. MAPPING SOCIAL MEDIA

Mapping of social media is a systematic approach to understand how social media facilitate individuals' efforts to persuade others about politics, status and personality influence. This paper explores different facets of the Saudi Arabian leadership reflected in its Monarchy-online identity that is manifested through virtual space on Twitter. Several steps performed to map the social media for better understanding the Saudi Monarchy online identity of King Salman is as follows.

- Step 1 – Google trend analysis to know keywords used for King Salman (See figure 1 to 3)
- Step 2 – Identified keywords, hashtags and account ID (See table 1)
- Step 3 – Identified Saudi Arabian News channels and their Twitter page (See table 2)
- Step 4 – Data collected from Twitter account @KingSalman, posts and hashtags
- Step 5 – Data cleaning and translation as most of the posts were in Arabic language
- Step 6 – Data analysis using NVivo 12 software

Step 7 – Formation of word clouds and tree related to online identity of King Salman

Table 1: Keywords, hashtags and account ID

Authentic account and hashtags	Total Tweets linked to hashtags/account
@KingSalman [in English and Arabic language]	13061
@KingSalman [in English]	3442
#KingSalman	123
Total Tweets	16626

Table 2: Saudi Arabian News channels and their Twitter page

Channels	Twitter pages
Al Arabiya English	https://twitter.com/AlArabiya_Eng
Arab News	https://twitter.com/arabnews
Al Ekhbariya	https://twitter.com/alekhbariyatv
Saudi tv	https://twitter.com/saudiatv
SabahAlSaudiiah	https://twitter.com/SabahAlSaudiiah
SBC channel	https://twitter.com/SBC_Channel
mbc4	https://twitter.com/mbc4
Al Jazeera News	https://twitter.com/AJENews

6. OVERVIEW OF THE MONARCHY'S IDENTITY IN SAUDI ARABIA

The messages behind King Salman's initial tweets were twofold, first to provide information to social media locally and abroad and second to create relationships with the Saudi people.

Refer to table 3, the Monarchy's first tweet was a religious prayer to condole the nation's people for its grief on losing the former King Abdullah. This initial means of communication from the new ruler reflected a strong religious inclination and connection on bonding with the people themselves, as religion holds a prominent position in the Saudi Arabian culture.

The second tweet as well started with a prayer to God in helping the King serve the nation's people and ensure the country's security and stability. Then the prayer transitioned into a promise to protect the nation and people from all evil at the end of the tweet. The social fabric of the diverse society of the Kingdom was addressed with 'dear nation', representing equality for both men and women in addition to the inclusion of all generations.

The third, fourth and fifth tweets all touched upon the issue of King Salman's welcoming the USA's President Obama. It started with a tweet in Arabic then following by two tweets in English in addition to two attached pictures of King Salman with President Obama. The different uses of

languages are ways of expressing, connecting, and recognising the various social identities people have. The Arabic tweet was first posted and was aiming to reach all Arabic speakers in the country. It is establishing power through emphasizing ‘*the strategic partnership and strengthening cooperation between the two countries*’.

On the eighth day of King Salman’s rule came the sixth tweet that addressed the nation’s people for the first time in a direct way. Thus emphasising to the people that the King realizes their importance and wants to give them what they deserve. The tweet proceeded with a prayer to God to help the King and his people serve religion and their country. Again the religious discourse importance is emphasized, however here it is as important as serving the country. Once more, highlighting the importance of the interconnectedness of religion and culture in the Saudi Arabian society.

Table 3 Assessment of King Salman Initial Tweets

No	Date	Original tweet	Translated tweet
1	23-Jan-2015	رحم الله عبدالله بن عبدالعزيز وجزاه عن شعبه خير الجزاء، وأحسن عزاء الشعب "السعودي في فراقه"	May Aallah (God) bless Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and may he be rewarded the best of rewards for what he did for his people, and my condolences to the Saudi society on his passing away.
2	23-Jan-2015	أسأل الله أن يوفقني " لخدمة شعبنا العزيز وتحقيق آماله، وأن ليبلدنا وأمتنا يحفظ الأمن والاستقرار، وأن يحميها من كل سوء ومكروه "	I ask Aallah (God) to help me serve my dear nation and realise their hopes, and to persevere our nation's security and stability and to protect it from all evils.
3	27-Jan-2015	سعدت بلقاء الرئيس " أوياما ويبحثنا معاً الاستراتيجية الشراكة وتعزيز التعاون بين البلدين، وخدمة "السلام العالمي"	I had the pleasure to meet with President Obama and together we discussed the strategic partnership and strengthening cooperation between the two countries, as well as serving world peace. (Posted with a picture of King Salman with President Obama)
4	28-Jan-2015	A pleasure to host President @BarackObama We discussed our nations' historic ties & strategic partnership to support world peace. (Posted with a picture of King Salman with	None

No	Date	Original tweet	Translated tweet
		President Obama)	
5	28-Jan-2015	King Salman welcomes President @BarackObama today in Riyadh. (Posted with a picture of King Salman with President Obama)	None
6	30-Jan-2015	" أيها الشعب الكريم تستحقون أكثر ومهما فعلت لن أوفيقكم حقكم، أسأل الله على أن يعينني وإياكم على الدين والوطن، خدمة ولا تتسولوني من دعائكم "	Dear people, you deserve more and whatever I do I will not be able to give you what you deserve, and I ask Allah (God) to help me and you the people to serve our religion and country, and do not forget me from in your prayers.

Thus, ensuring virtually online that both dispositions are of immense importance to the Monarchy and its people. This reflects how the Monarchy-online identity mirrors the main ideals of its nation’s people. The tweet ends with a request from King Salman that people not forget him from their prayers. Again, the importance of relying on God in all spheres of social life is the main guidance of actions for the King and his people. The Monarchy-online identity reiterated the importance of religion in all aspects of life, emphasising the main foundation of the Saudi Arabian people.

These first six tweets of King Salman, establishes the grounds on which this Monarchy-online identity is built. Religion, nation’s people, the country’s safety and stability are the most important matters handled by the Monarchy. This is the emphasis that all six tweets are building upon. Even though the three tweets on Obama reflect exterior matters, it is done in the spirit of ensuring ‘*strengthening cooperation between the two countries*’ and sharing a vision of ‘*servicing world peace*’. All these factors put people at the forefront in all types of communication, indicating a humanistic approach to the virtual dialogue. The importance of religion stems from people themselves and their belief, which in turn will empower King, people, and country to be secure and stable. All these mirror the three sources of main power that the Monarchy relies on, religion, people, and country.

Refer to figure 4, the network diagram indicated the connection of tweets with Monarchy’s activities and leadership reflection by people and news channels. The strong establishment of the new

rule in times of transition that the Kingdom is backed and partnering with one of the most powerful nations in the world.

The tweet was posted in English reflecting a dialogue that was targeting a worldwide audience rather than just Arabic speakers. This is based on the fact that English is the global language of communication and the major language in international business, science and politics [31]. As a means of global communication social media has a great impact on language use and the degree and purposes that different languages are utilized either for economic, cultural or social value [23]. The whole world was part of these English tweets, which were viewed through words (backstage scripts) and pictures (symbols) that established the relationship between Saudi Arabia and America as strong allies. These tweets have anchored the power of the Monarchy through its strategic partner and emphasized to the world their presence and power through using the English language.

Virtual ethnography of tweets linked with the Twitter account and hashtags of @KingSalman evaluated and presented using word clouds. It indicates that people from several locations has brought attention of King Salman towards certain issues and seeking support using the social media platforms. Saudi Arabian news channels also supported in recognizing the efforts of King Salman by using his name tags. Refer to figure 5, word symmetry appeared in the tweets by King Salman and Saudi news channels on Twitter.

Refer to figure 6 and 7, word symmetry appeared in the tweets linked to hashtags and twitter account of @KingSalman worldwide. It also indicated that people highlighted the Monarchy identity towards particular issue and linked his leadership role to address global issues

7. PROS AND CONS OF MONARCHY'S VIRTUAL IDENTITY DISCLOSURE

The establishment of the Monarchy-online identity on social media and specifically through King Salman's official Twitter account has resulted in many outcomes some positive and others negative. To understand it more, a feminist ethics of care applied that incorporates elements of understanding and cooperation that are not available in other ethics theories. To consider ethics from this point builds on the construct that "morality is a matter of care" and not being violent and hurtful towards others [32]. This perspective of

ethics values relationships and keeping them in the optimum way possible [33].

This type of care, confirms with how the Monarchy-online identity is constructed in a way that it is reaching out to all people, national and internationals on the basis of care. Traditional media is already utilized and exhausted, the choice to move into social media on virtual space is seen as care in reaching out to the young generation who are the future youth of the nation. Through this type of virtual communication they are being recognized as worthy of the dialogue and included within it. This agrees with Held's [34] ethics of care that includes practice and value ethics; Held argues that what needs to be done is to be done sensitively to others' needs in a relational way.

In this sense, the Monarchy-online identity is bringing the nation together around a unified stable source of power that is comforting in a time of transition. In such a responsible way of relation, people will be brought together rather than being pulled apart [32]. In this broader sense of ethics, other forms of ethics are naturally constitutes parts of it, including ethics of virtue, utility and justice [34]. This ethical position can be used to enable more participation and engagement between the people and the Monarchy-online identity, because it provides open access for communication at all times.

Even though, the Monarchy-online identity is not fully utilizing a communication dialogue with the public where it is currently a one-directional communication process, it has the potential to engage with people locally and globally in two-way form of communication. Thus, being more approachable to the nation's people. However, this comes with a lot of risks that need to be assessed before taking a step that opens-up a two-way dialogue, which can stigmatize [35] the Monarchy-online identity. As it is in defiance of the social norm in communication with the Monarchy, however by venturing into a new space new rules might apply.

However, putting the Monarchy-online identity on the spot openly means that it can be reacted to instantly in all kinds of forms. Its virtual existence means that people can engage in their own scripts reacting to any of the Monarchy's tweets. This openness of communication although can be perceived as positive, it still holds a lot of threats to the Monarchy-online identity, as it can gather live

feeds of critiques that are saved online for all other people to see. It might encourage also negative comments and invites people from different political views to attack it online. Furthermore, a Twitter account, as all online programs, is always under the threat of being hacked. As such online security issues are one of the most important matters to control online. This brings back to attention issues of power shifting and the stigmatization [35] that can affect the Monarchy by a simple act of online intrusion.

The Saudi Monarchy identity took an innovative and radical step in utilizing virtual space specifically Twitter in how it considered its relation to the local and global environment, gender, time, and generation. This required a heightened level of awareness in how the online monarchy wanted to be perceived in virtual space. It is surly important to note that such online activities and social actors engagements on virtual spaces are not straightforward and are part of a cultural background that shapes them and gives them meaning. They are indeed complex and not easy to pin down to a specific explanation. However, this culture-based understanding of gender, religion, and power in understanding the Monarchy-online identity led to a better understanding of the virtual choice of the Monarchy communication. Examining such aspects of virtual existence and questioning what is taken for granted is a first step toward understanding this situation. Frequently, this context is recognized but never questioned for what it is worth because of its political sensitivity.

8. TRANSITION OF CULTURE AND GENDER IN SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia's fusion of Islamic and Arabic cultural influences, contribute to the defined gendered roles that are prevalent in Saudi culture [17,36]. The Quran serves as the holy book that Muslims refer to in all sectors of life, yet it did not take away Arabian tribal society customs that existed prior to Islam. The firm rooted cultural norms of Saudi Arabian culture give superiority and authority to the male gender [37]. In Saudi Arabia social roles are strictly defined. Women tend to act out traditional feminine stereotypes to preserve the normative gender order [38]. In patriarchal Saudi families, women are always dependent on men and operate within fixed roles, which are deeply embedded in the family as a social structure [38]. Under this culture, Saudi women experience many forms of discrimination that limit their rights, many of which derive from conservative traditions rather

than religion [39]. Although some of these regulations might stem from a strong tendency to abide to strict religious interpretations that, to protect women's modesty, require that unrelated men and women be segregated [38]. These strict regulations on women's social interactions in public mirror the cultural norms that originates from a principally patriarchal system [39-40].

However, breaking away from this is possible when gender is forgotten in social interactions (Kelan, 2010) in spaces like the internet and its social media networks. In the past decade and so, changes in the world economy have opened-up more public spaces including the Internet which allowed Saudi women to interact freely on a virtual space. These changes come at the time when the Kingdom is undergoing various political and economic pressures to conform to international standards on gender issues. The United Nations committee on the elimination of discrimination against women have urged Saudi Arabia to enact gender equality laws that would bring Saudi in line with the standards of globally developed countries [41]. These initiatives are perceived as part of a comprehensive political and economic reform program that would enable Saudi Arabia to help women shape a modern identity based on new social roles [42]. Moreover, women in Saudi specifically in the Western region are gradually moving away from traditional gender roles and developing a modern identity [17]. This happens to be the case even for women in Saudi Arabia who participate on social media networks.

All these changes that gripped the Saudi culture including the transformation of gender roles and the high technological engagements online motivated the Saudi Monarchy to participate on online social media when Saudis were ready to welcome such engagement on virtual space. It is through King Salman's Twitter account, the Monarchy ensured that it is reaching those who represent the future of the Kingdom, the young generation. Even though the Monarchy is established strongly through traditional media (front stage scripts), it still thought to expand through social media, choosing the most active network in Saudi, Twitter.

This virtual expansion by the Monarchy has formed an online identity that is respected as being a reliable source of information among various sources that might be fake or unreliable. Such recognition reflects a mature kingdom that is still

very modern in its way of handling and engaging its people on a virtual space that they are so active on. This virtual expansion also established that the Monarchy is respectful of this younger generation and their new styles of self-presentation within social media networks. Moreover, it has empowered women by reaching out to them to where they are already powerfully participating freely online. This expansion from traditional media to new media by the Monarchy has established for itself an online identity that is forward thinking, respected, and reliable.

9. MANIFESTATION OF RELIGION

Religious belief and practice continues to be an important part of daily life for the people of Saudi Arabia. Differing from other Arab countries, Saudi Arabia strictly follows Islamic law [17] due to both the country's political formation links to religion reform and the nation's entrenched observance to traditional Arabian social principles that predated religion. These double cultural bases are why Islam as an influence on Saudi culture must be differentiated from the patriarchal culture that governs social life [43]. The unique mixture of Islamic and Arab traditions in Saudi culture empower traditional norms because they are linked to religious belief [36]. Diverse cultures have produced different interpretations of Islam [44], and one of the firmest interpretations sprang in the 19th Century within the Middle East as a response to many economic and political changes taking place at that time. In Saudi Arabia, religious scholars ensured that all social practices are overseen by a unified conservative understanding of Islam [45] that links back to a school of thought that accepts interpretations of scholars from the first three centuries of Islam [38,46]. This understanding of religion was the basis in the formation of a strict code governing social interactions [47].

It is in these same footsteps that King Salman follows in the way the Monarchy's online identity is presented online. It presents compliance with new technology and modern information communications, the fruit of modernity. However, the scripts used are reinforcing the King's and the people religious and cultural patriotic orientation. This challenge that Saudi Arabia faces in dealing with a modernity that threatens well-established traditional norms is recognized and tackled by the monarchy in a courageous formation of the monarchy-online identity. An identity that continues to emphasize the importance of religion as the main pillar in which brings the King and his

people together at all times but especially in times of transition where there is a need for unity and stability.

10. MONARCHY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has become indispensably important in organizing and sharing information. The power of social media in the Monarchy Twitter sequence of events was also evidenced by peoples' ability to follow, retweet, and actively support the monarchy publicly. These millions of followers became points for sharing updates on the unfolding events, as well as expressing support for King Salman. Ten years before this transition, traditional media (front stage scripts) perhaps would have been the only way to share information, but it would not have been as fluid or as powerful as social media platforms with the ability to share thoughts, images, videos, reactions all in real time, though on virtual space. The ability to share in real time led to considerable momentum that had huge implications for the Monarchy-online identity. This is perceived in the way the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stepped into the virtual space of Twitter in response to the transfer of Monarchy.

Social media also has powerful influence in relationship building and management [48,49]. The strategy behind establishing the Monarchy-online identity is built on this foundation. Thereby it manages and builds a stronger relationship between itself and its people that is particularly interesting because of the novel and unique relational dynamic between the Monarchy-online identity and the Saudi people. Countless social media sites are being utilized in today's technological world that offer platforms for organizations, governments, and leaders to participate in meaningful dialogue with real-time awareness creation. We concur, "that material places and subjectively experienced spaces construct ways of conceiving leadership and can thus perform leadership" [6]. As in this case Twitter plays a role in constructing the Monarchy online-identity on virtual space without the physical presence of the Monarchy.

Therefore, the power of social media is an important force to be recognized by researchers, specialists, politicians, and governments as it can have a huge negative or positive impact on their reputations and identities. As in this case the transfer of Monarchy where the social media site of Twitter transformed a local national event into a global one. The establishment of the monarchy-

online identity can be perceived as a form of power as it focuses on impression manipulation [16] through specified scripts and profile symbols to serve specific goals. Yet, power can be in contrast to the stereotype of it; Clegg et al. [50] argue, “power is not necessarily constraining, negative or antagonistic”. Power can be creative, empowering, and positive. In this view, power takes place within social interactions to maintain the social order and comply with broader cultural frames of social interactions [24].

This study argues that power can be viewed as an interaction within social relations by adopting a dramaturgical lens [16] and expanding it to an online virtual space of social interaction through social networks. Manning [51] argues that power matters can be examined by giving attention to details regarding the “realized context and practices”. Although dramaturgy focuses on the micro-analysis of behaviors within social interactions in this case (backstage scripts), there is a need to understand macro-level cultural issues that direct micro-behaviors within social online interactions. Power here is not resource-based but comes from the actions of the actor; these actions are anchored within cultural frames that give them meanings.

The performance of power and influence within online communication plays a double role in that it points to the concrete micro-effects of power within virtual interactions (scripts), and it also points to the abstract effects of the broader macro-influences (culture); power is not a “constant-sum” phenomenon [52] because there is more than one social actor engaged in such online interactions. According to Clegg et al [50] this duality of micro action and macro cultural frames of analysis exist because power issues ensure the achievement of both individual and organizational goals. In this situation it is the establishing of strong Monarchy-online identity on a macro level through scripts channeled to the nation’s people, and the establishment of stability and social order for the country in general. The latter presents the bigger picture and the ultimate goal for the nation as a whole.

One of the powerful elements of the Monarchy-online identity is that it is representing the King himself virtually. This is still powerful although it is virtual and not a real-time presence, because according to Saudi cultural tradition people defer to senior males in social interactions [53]. In

this case, it is a senior, powerful, and influential male. All this has helped established the Monarchy-online identity to be respected and accepted at all times.

11. CONCLUSION

This paper took a look at leadership and leadership development in virtual space via the medium of Twitter. The unique circumstance of the change of the Saudi monarchy presented the opportunity to provide insights on the impact of virtual space in the re-conceptualization of the Saudi online monarchy identity. This paper aimed to analyze the construction and publicity linked to the Monarchy-online identity to clarify the importance, significance, and influence of social media in constructing leadership through a dramaturgical lens that emphasized culture. Hence, this study complemented research on leadership as socially constructed phenomenon and surpassed the focus on language to exploring the effect of virtual space through social media by taking a multimodal approach that explores culture, gender, religion and power. The different facets of the Saudi Arabian leadership reflected in its Monarchy-online identity that is manifested through virtual space on Twitter. The Saudi Monarchy unprecedented engagement with the public on social media provide opportunity to Saudi Monarchy’s King Salman in order to have easy access to general public and support in formation of leadership identity. It contributes in a way to establish both virtual and face-to-face leadership identity that influence on public in terms of having more trust and confidence for decisions and future activities.

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Annexure: Figures

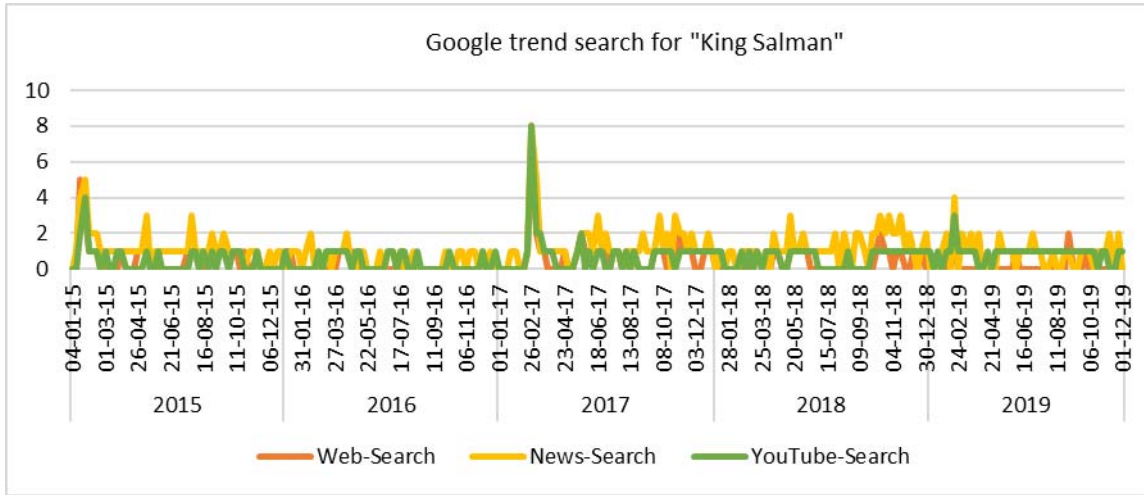


Figure 1: Google trend Search for key word “King Salman” from 1st Jan 2015 to 1st Dec 2019

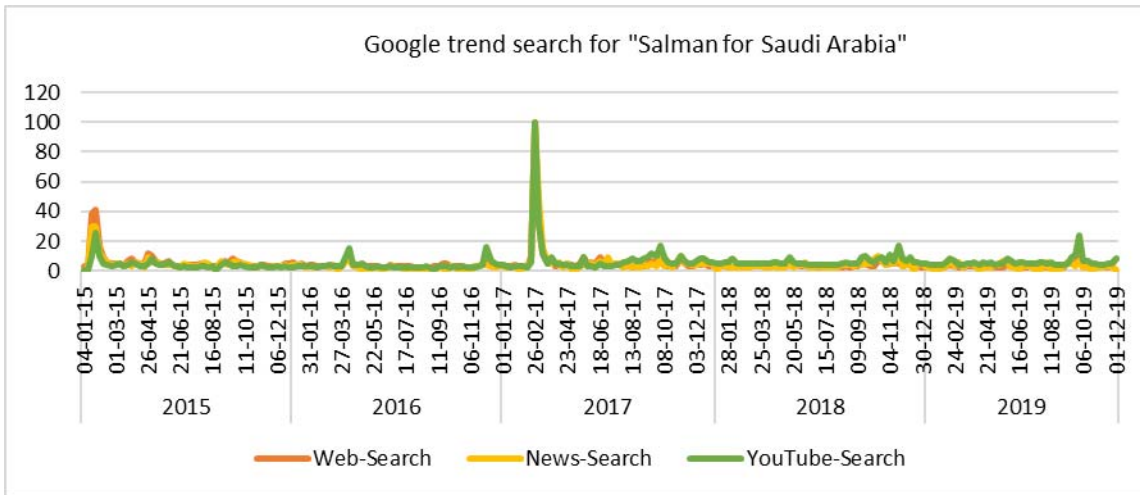


Figure 2: Google trend Search for key word “Salman for Saudi Arabia” from 1st Jan 2015 to 1st Dec 2019

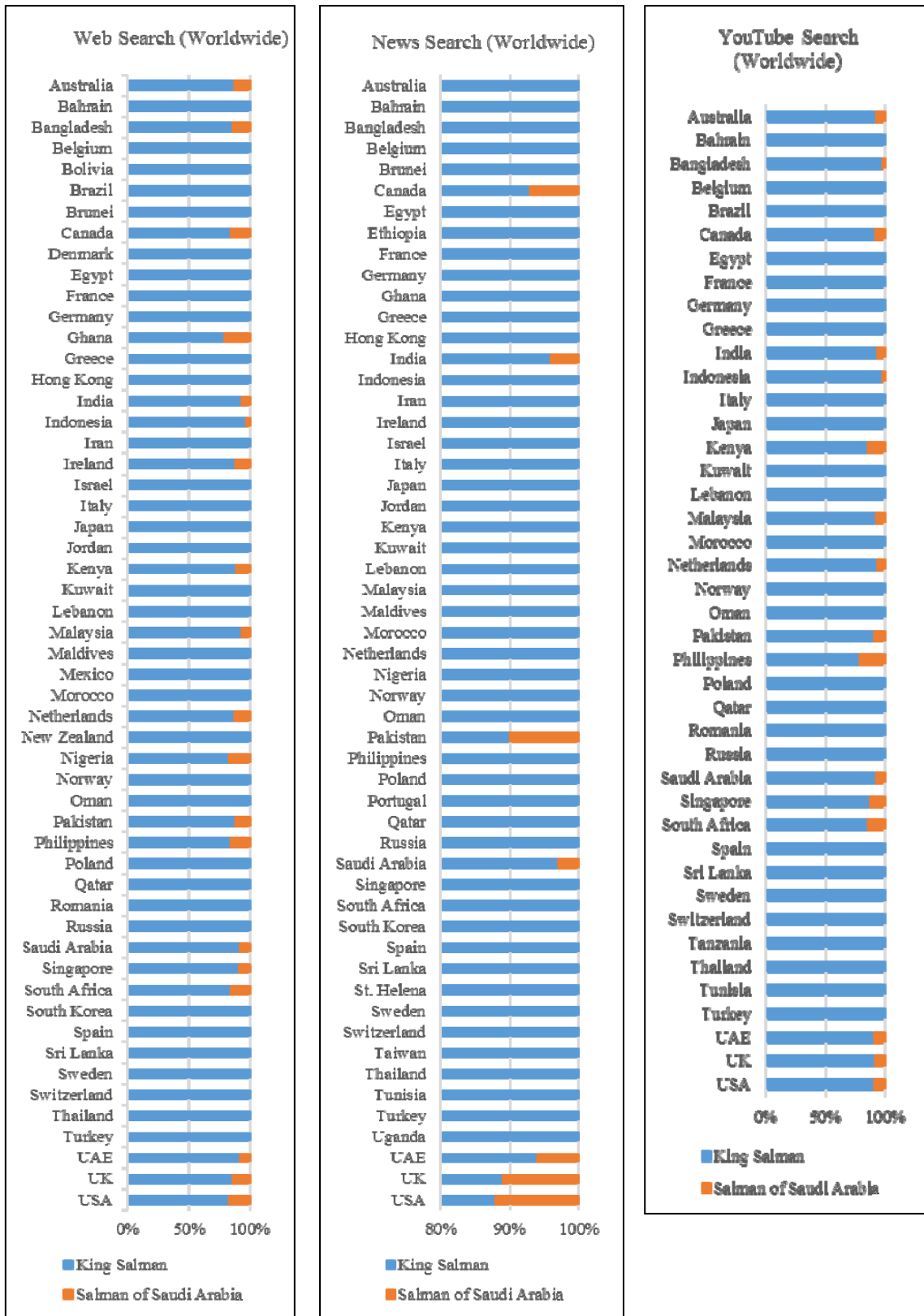


Figure 3: Google trend Search for key word “King Salman and Salman for Saudi Arabia” from 1st Jan 2015 to 1st Dec 2019

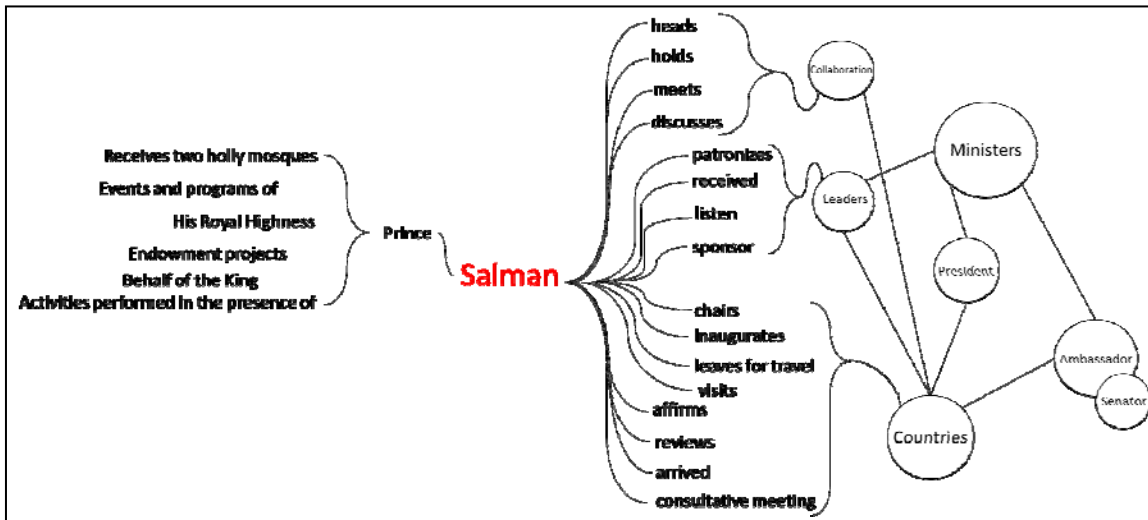


Figure 4: Saudi Arabian people and news channels reflection about King Salman activities and leadership

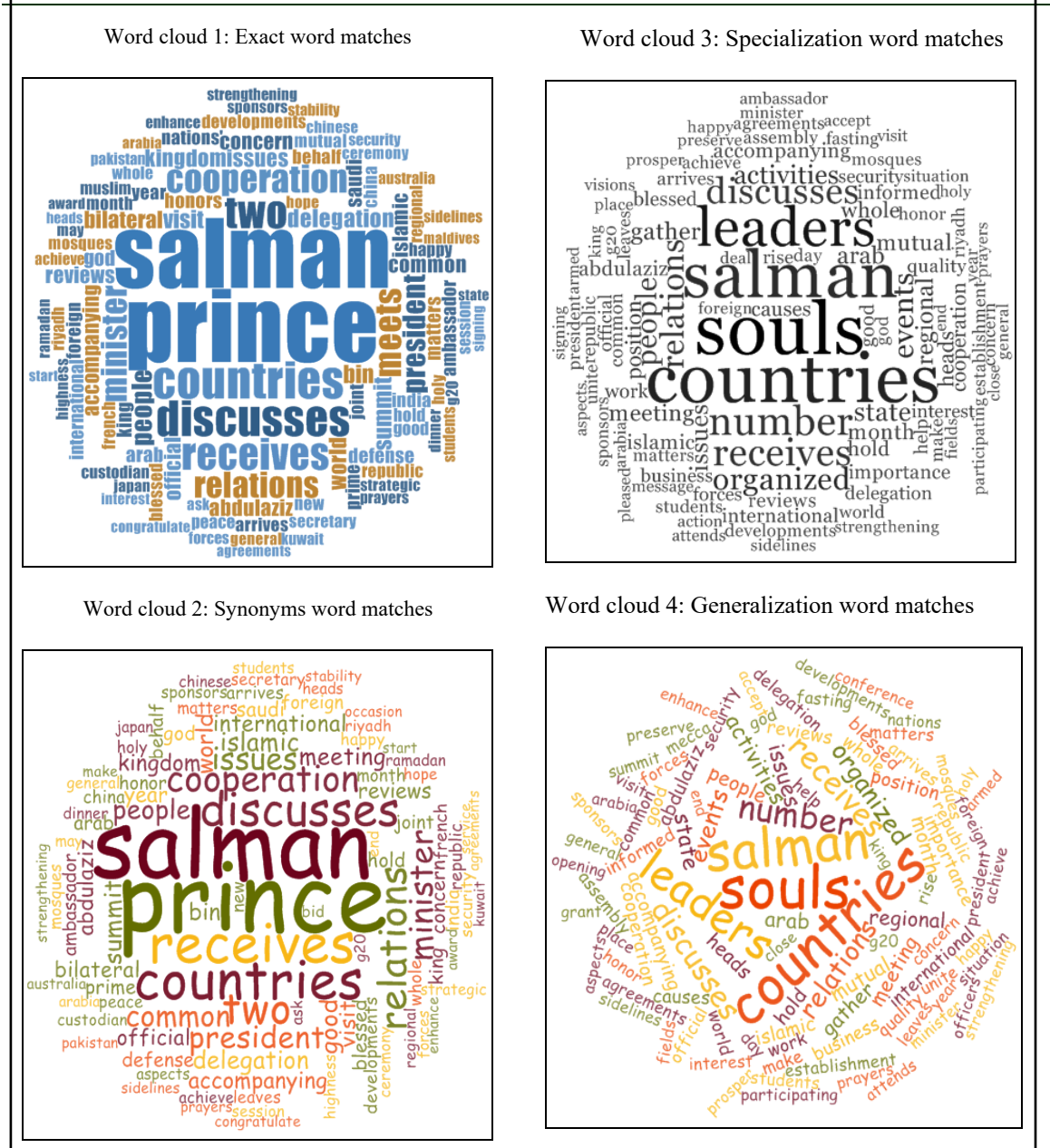


Figure 5: Word Symmetry from Saudi Arabia News Channels and Twitter account @KingSalman (Local)

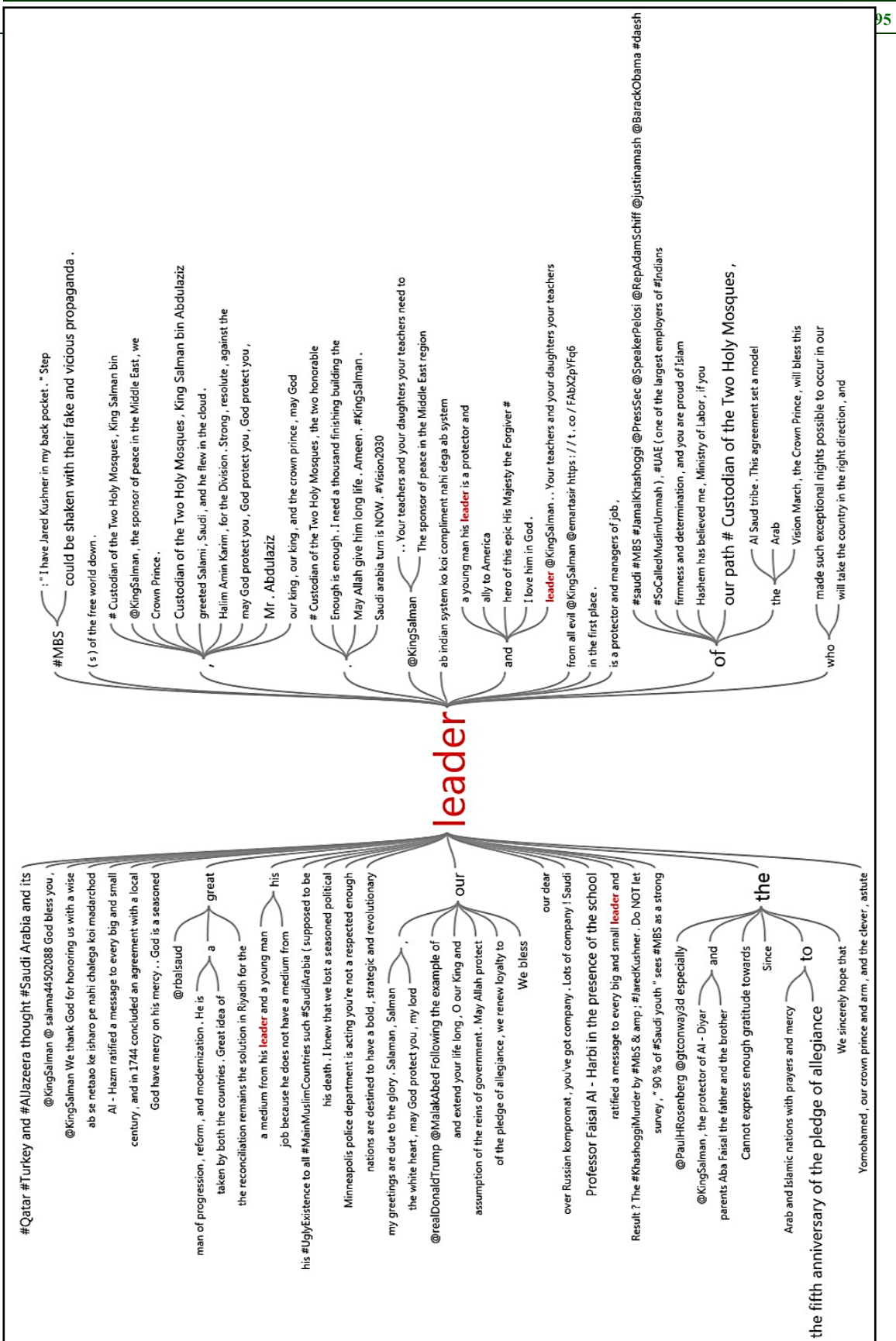


Figure 7: Word Tree for Twitter account @KingSalman as a Leader