

Transforming Traditions: Youth and the Digital Evolution of the Emirati Majlis

Asma Al Shaibah

College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dubai Campus, Zayed University, Dubai, UAE

Email: Asma.Obaid@zu.ac.ae

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Abstract

This paper investigates the cultural significance and evolving dynamics of the Majlis in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), focusing on both traditional and digital manifestations of this pivotal social institution. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative data from 138 respondents collected via an online Survey Monkey survey with qualitative insights from interviews published in local newspapers. The primary purpose of this study is to explore how different demographic segments—particularly Emirati youth—engage with and perceive the Majlis amidst the rising prevalence of digital platforms. The findings reveal significant generational, gender-based, and geographic variations in engagement and attitudes toward Majlis culture. While traditional Majlis continue to play a crucial role in fostering community ties and cultural preservation, there is a notable shift among younger demographics towards digital Majlis. Approximately 68% of survey participants express openness to future engagement with digital Majlis, highlighting its potential to complement traditional forms in terms of accessibility and convenience. However, 29% of participants express significant reservations, noting that digital platforms cannot replicate physical gatherings' cultural depth and interpersonal dynamics. These findings underscore a complex interplay between maintaining cultural heritage and embracing technological advancements. This paper contributes to understanding how traditional cultural practices adapt to modernity, offering insights into the potential for digital platforms to enhance or transform traditional cultural engagements. The study's mixed-methods approach exemplifies the value of integrating diverse data sources to achieve a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena.

Keywords

Emirati Culture, Traditional Majlis Engagement, Digital Majlis Adaptation, Cultural Continuity, Digital Transformation, Youth Engagement

1. Introduction

The Majlis, with its origins in the Arabic word “Ja-La-SA,” meaning to sit, has long been a cultural mainstay in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a literal and symbolic gathering place, or “Majlis” for community engagement. Majalis is the plural of the singular word Majlis. This traditional forum is where individuals come together to sit and share in the many facets of communal life. It is where conversations ignite, heritage is celebrated, and collective wisdom prospers.

Amidst the UAE’s societal fabric, the Majlis serves varied functions, from arbitrating disputes to hosting vital social functions like wedding celebrations and condolences. These gatherings, typically set against a backdrop of carpets and cushions, offer warm hospitality with the customary preparation of coffee. This ritual reinforces the Majlis’s role as a welcoming space for discourse and camaraderie. Here, the community’s elders impart their wisdom on nature, genealogy, and tribal history, while judges and religious sheiks guide discussions on social and religious duties and rights.

Castells (2001) contends that society is now rapidly entering the “Internet Galaxy”, a new era characterized by both excitement and uncertainty as the Internet increasingly influences key areas of life, such as work, politics, media, and social interactions. Emirati youth, like their global counterparts, have eagerly embraced this digital shift. This paper will examine the enduring significance of the Majlis in the UAE and how it has adapted to remain a space of unity and intellectual exchange, even as society undergoes widespread digital transformation.

Recognizing women’s essential role, separate Majlis gatherings for them also exist, though women’s presence is increasingly significant in academic and literary Majlis settings. Thus, the Majlis becomes a critical conduit for passing down oral traditions, from folk tales and songs to the intricate verses of “Nabati” poetry. Open to all generations, these settings serve as informal educational spaces where the young learn by observing their elders’ decorum, ethics, and conversational skills.

The initial mention of relevant information regarding the Majlis likely originates from historical texts, ethnographic studies, cultural documentation specific to the UAE, and possibly UNESCO reports. In your literature review, you referenced works by Al-Makadma (2017), Cubbon (2013), UNESCO (2015), Al-Sayed (2009), and Almahmoud (2015), which provide foundational insights into the Majlis’s role and evolution.

This paper delves into the rich tapestry of the Majlis in the UAE, exploring its endurance amidst digital transformations. As a symbol of unity and intellectual exchange, the Majlis is recognized by UNESCO as an invaluable part of humanity’s intangible cultural heritage. It remains a dynamic locus for civic dialogue, adapting to the digital age while preserving its traditional ethos. This study highlights the cultural sustainability of the Majlis and its evolving practices, ensuring that its timeless role in fostering community and upholding Emirati identity continues in the digital future.

2. Literature Review

The concept of the Majlis has been a cornerstone of Arab culture, integral to the social and cultural dynamics within the Arabian Peninsula. Initially, these gatherings served as pivotal community hubs within the Bedouin tribes, providing settings for critical discussion and conflict resolution. This tradition has not only persisted but also evolved architecturally and functionally with the transition from nomadic to urban lifestyles, symbolizing a sanctuary for dialogue, unity, and hospitality (Al-Makadma, 2017). The Majlis' diverse physical and functional manifestations throughout the Arab world demonstrate its adaptability and the region's cultural nuances. In Oman, Majlises are adorned with traditional art elements, while in the UAE, they feature luxurious settings that reflect the nation's prosperity. The rise of digital platforms has expanded the boundaries of the Majlis, enabling its communal spirit to persist across both physical and virtual gatherings (Al-Makadma, 2017; Cubbon, 2013).

In the United Arab Emirates, recognized by UNESCO, the Majlis transcends its role as a venue for social interaction to embody the ethos of Emirati life, extending into governance and exemplifying a democratic ethos where consensus is sought over decree (UNESCO, 2015). These gatherings serve as educational platforms, instilling values, and conversational skills in youth (Al-Sayed, 2009). However, the rise of the digital age presents challenges in balancing cultural preservation with digital modernity. The Majlis has shown resilience, adapting to these demands, and embodying the nation's ability to maintain cultural heritage while embracing progress. Distinctly, the Majlis tradition in Kuwait has also been a vital aspect of its civil culture, transforming from a political and economic forum to a broader social gathering place (Segal, 2012).

Almahmoud's (2015) study provides an in-depth look at the Majlis as a cultural symbol, noting its reflection of a household's socioeconomic status and its role in Qatar's architectural, societal, and cultural landscape. The research highlights the evolution of the Majlis post-oil discovery, noting shifts in social structures and economic prosperity. In the United Arab Emirates, the Majlis Ghorfat Umm Al Sheif and the Mohamed bin Zayed Majlis serve as prominent symbols of the nation's dedication to cultural heritage and modern diplomacy.

The Majlis Ghorfat Umm Al Sheif is a notable historical site located in the Jumeirah area of Dubai. Originally built in 1955, this Majlis was the residence of the late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, The ruler of Dubai. Its traditional architecture, with high ceilings, arched doorways, and a "Barjeel" in English wind tower, was designed to provide a cooling effect in the hot climate. After a restoration in 1994, the Majlis Ghorfat Umm Al Sheif was opened to the public as a museum. Today, it serves as a cultural landmark, offering insight into the life of Dubai's ruling family and the region's past, displaying artifacts and photographs that showcase the emirate's historical lifestyle and the role of the Majlis in governance and social life (Al Habtoor Information & Research, 2007).

The Mohamed bin Zayed Majlis, on the other hand, is a contemporary forum established by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the current

President of the UAE. This Majlis is known for hosting international figures and fostering intellectual exchanges on a wide range of topics, from politics to innovation and education. It functions as a modern incarnation of the traditional Majlis, embracing the age-old values of hospitality and dialogue but within a contemporary context that encourages global discourse and the sharing of



Source: The Majlis Ghorfat Umm Al Sheif Dubai Culture.
<https://dubaiculture.gov.ae/en/>

diverse perspectives. The Mohamed bin Zayed Majlis not only facilitates local governance and social affairs but also positions the UAE as a hub for international diplomacy and cultural exchange (Sebugwaawo, 2024).



Source: Majlis Mohamed bin Zayed
<https://emiratitimes.com/Majlis-mohamed-bin-zayed-to-organize-a-series-of-lectures-during-ramadan/>

In her article “Hospitality in the Arabian Gulf: The Cultural Significance of the Majlis,” Bristol-Rhys (2010) explores the central role the Majlis plays in the social and cultural life of the Gulf region. She emphasizes its importance as a communal space where people gather to discuss critical issues, share news, and engage in social bonding. The Majlis serves as a meeting place for individuals of different social standings, reinforcing traditional values of hospitality and generosity. Rituals such as serving coffee and dates exemplify the host’s hospitality, a core value of Gulf Arab societies.

The Majlis has also historically played a significant role in governance, particularly in the pre-oil period, when tribal leaders and sheikhs would gather to make decisions, resolve disputes, and address political and community issues (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). Additionally, while traditionally a male-dominated space,

women have their own versions of the Majlis, where they engage in social and familial discussions. Bristol-Rhys also discusses the evolving structure and role of the Majlis in modern times, noting that although it remains a symbol of tradition, societal changes have influenced its function, particularly in urban settings.

Ultimately, the Majlis represents more than just a physical space; it reflects the deeply rooted values of hospitality, community, and social interaction that are integral to Gulf Arab societies. Its ability to adapt and remain relevant in the face of modernization underscores its enduring cultural significance. These two Majlises, while distinct in their historical and contemporary orientations, both illustrate the integral role of the Majlis in Emirati culture. They underscore the UAE's commitment to preserving its cultural identity while adapting to and shaping the global narrative.

In conclusion, the Majlis represents the UAE's commitment to heritage and unity, balancing tradition with innovation. As digital platforms open new avenues for cultural expression, the future of the Majlis looks vibrant. However, more research is needed to fully understand the impact of the digital revolution on this tradition and to ensure its sustainability in the future. Studies focusing on the interplay between digital socialization and traditional gatherings are particularly critical to maintaining the relevance of the Majlis in contemporary society.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the cultural significance and evolving dynamics of the Majlis in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), focusing on both traditional and digital manifestations. The methodology was designed to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives from Emirati nationals, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between cultural practices and digital innovation.

Survey Design and Distribution

The quantitative component was a structured online survey developed using the Survey Monkey platform. The survey comprised 17 closed-ended questions that measured respondents' frequency of participation in traditional and digital Majlis, their preferences, perceived benefits, and the impact of demographic factors such as age, gender, and education level on their attitudes and practices. The survey was distributed through social media platforms and email, targeting a diverse demographic profile of Emirati nationals. A total of 138 responses were collected, ensuring a representative sample of the population.

Ensuring Representativeness and Validity amid Gender Disparity

To address the significant gender disparity and ensure the representativeness and validity of the study's results, efforts were made to include a balanced representation of both male and female participants. This was achieved through targeted recruitment strategies, such as outreach through women's organizations and social media groups focused on female audiences, to encourage more female participation. Data were analyzed separately for male and female participants to identify any gender-specific trends or differences, providing a nuanced understanding of how each gender engages with the Majlis. The survey and interview

questions were designed to be inclusive and sensitive to gender dynamics, allowing both genders to share their perspectives freely. Multiple methods of data collection were used to cross-verify the findings and enhance the study's validity, including combining quantitative data from the online survey with qualitative insights from interviews published in local newspapers and focus groups conducted to gather in-depth perspectives.

Justification for Representativeness and Validity Considering Gender Disparity

To ensure the representativeness and validity of the study's results, it is essential to consider the cultural context and practical realities of Majlis participation in the UAE. The survey was conducted via Survey Monkey, where a higher response rate from men was observed. This disparity is attributed to men being more frequently engaged in visiting Majlis gatherings, while women are less involved in these settings. Hence, in terms of sample representativeness, the predominance of male respondents provides valuable insights into the traditional male-dominated Majlis culture.

However, it is important to recognize that historically, women have had their own separate Majlis gatherings. These women's Majlis served as vital social and cultural hubs where women could discuss various topics, share knowledge, and strengthen community bonds. In contemporary times, there has been a shift towards more mixed-gender Majlis gatherings, particularly within family settings, such as villas or houses where women can mingle with male family members like cousins. Despite this shift, traditional male-only Majlis still exist and play a significant role in Emirati culture.

The survey aimed to capture the opinions of both male and female participants to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics of the Majlis. By targeting both genders, the study sought to reflect diverse perspectives and ensure a balanced representation of the community's views. Although the higher response rate from men aligns with their more frequent participation in Majlis, efforts were made to include women's voices to highlight their unique experiences and contributions to this cultural practice.

In conclusion, while the survey results predominantly reflect male perspectives due to their higher participation rates, the study also acknowledges and incorporates the evolving role of women in both separate and mixed-gender Majlis settings. This approach ensures a more holistic view of the Majlis' cultural significance and contemporary dynamics in the UAE.

Qualitative Interviews

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative insights were gathered from interviews published in local newspapers. These interviews provided personal narratives and expert opinions that enriched my understanding of the cultural nuances and individual experiences associated with the Majlis. Key themes from these interviews were identified and analyzed to add depth to the survey findings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics to

determine frequencies, averages, and distribution patterns. This analysis helped in identifying trends and relationships within the data. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted to extract and synthesize key themes from the interviews. This involved coding the text and identifying patterns related to the use and perception of Majlis in a contemporary setting.

Ethical Considerations

All research activities were conducted following ethical standards prescribed by Zayed University's research ethics board. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality with which their responses would be treated. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the survey.

4. Findings and Discussion

Based on the data gathered from 138 participants in an online survey conducted via the Survey Monkey platform, the age distribution of respondents can be described as follows:

Demographic Profile

This research leverages the demographic profile of survey respondents to deepen the understanding of the socio-cultural landscape of the United Arab Emirates. By analyzing age, gender, and emirate of residence, I discovered the diverse fabric of Emirati society, capturing variations in engagement and viewpoints that reflect generational, gender-based, and geographic distinctions. Such insights are crucial for interpreting how different demographic segments interact with the traditional and evolving Majlis culture. This comprehensive demographic analysis helps understand current cultural dynamics and predict future trends in cultural engagement within the UAE.

Table 1. Q1 Please specify your age group.

Answer Choices	Responses
18 - 24	16.30%
25 - 34	27.41%
35 - 44	43.70%
Prefer not to say	12.59%
Total	100.00%

The age distribution among the 138 survey participants, as shown in **Table 1**, provides a valuable generational cross-section crucial for the study titled "Digital Versus Traditional: Emirati Youth Engagement with Majlis Culture." This diverse age range, from young adults to middle-aged respondents, offers a broad spectrum of perspectives integrating traditional Majlis practices with modern digital platforms. The younger age groups (18 - 24 and 25 - 34 years) are crucial to understanding how digital technologies influence cultural engagement among

Emirati youth, while the significant representation of the 35 - 44 age group provides insights into the traditional aspects of Majlis culture and its evolution in response to digitalization. This mix of views highlights the shifts towards digital mediums and the enduring value of traditional settings, offering a comprehensive view of how different generations navigate the intersection of tradition and modernity in the UAE's Majlis culture. Including participants who prefer to withhold their age adds complexity to the data, pointing to privacy concerns that might affect perceptions of the digital versus traditional debate. This rich inter-generational dialogue captured in the survey is essential for understanding and predicting the future trajectories of Majlis culture in the UAE.

Table 2. Q3 What emirate are you currently residing in?

Gender	Responses
Male	69.12%
Female	30.88%
Total	100.00%

The gender distribution in **Table 2**, with 69.12% male and 30.88% female respondents, underscores the enduring cultural and historical norms of the Majlis within Emirati society. Traditionally, the Majlis has served as a male-dominated forum where men gather to discuss governance, share stories, and reinforce social bonds—practices deeply rooted in Arab customs and the cultural landscape of the UAE, where gender roles are distinctly delineated. Conversely, women have their unique gatherings known as “Majlis for women,” which operate within their own set cultural norms and social etiquettes while parallel to male assemblies. These gatherings are crucial in maintaining the gender-specific nature of social structures, reflecting the traditional roles that continue despite progressive shifts towards gender inclusivity. The predominance of male participants in this survey reflects the traditional gender roles still prevalent in many aspects of UAE society.

An illustrative example of the significance and role of women's Majlis comes from an interview at the 2020 Expo in Dubai, where Ghaya AlDhaeri shared anecdotes about her mother's Majlis in 1966. She described these assemblies as vital communal and educational hubs, where women from the neighborhood would gather in the morning to discuss various subjects ranging from science and finance to medicine and conflict resolution. The Majlis was a social event and a learning environment where women taught each other crafts such as sewing, weaving, lace embroidery, and even medical practices. Each woman would bring dishes and share food, fostering a strong sense of community and support. These narratives highlight the educational and social functions of women's Majlis, paralleling their male counterparts while fostering unique spaces for women to engage and contribute significantly to their communities.

Table 3. Q3 What emirate are you currently residing in?

Answer Choices	Responses
Abu Dhabi	8.89%
Dubai	61.48%
Sharjah	15.56%
Ajman	10.37%
Umm Al Quwain	1.48%
Ras Al Khaimah	1.48%
Fujairah.	0.74%
Total	100.00%

Table 3 results indicate that participants reside across all seven emirates of the UAE, providing a comprehensive representation of the region's population. Dubai is the primary residence for most respondents, accounting for 61.48%, followed by Sharjah at 15.56% and Ajman at 10.37%. Abu Dhabi, the capital emirate, is home to 8.89% of the participants. The less populated emirates—Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah, and Fujairah. Although smaller percentages, ranging from 0.74% to 1.48%, are still present within the dataset, ensuring that each emirate's populace is reflected in the survey. This spread across the seven emirates allows for an inclusive and regionally diverse set of responses, offering valuable insights that span the UAE's varied economic, cultural, and social landscapes. The presence of participants from all emirates underscores the survey's capacity to capture a broad spectrum of views and preferences reflective of the UAE's multifaceted society.

Table 4. Q4 What is your highest level of education?

Answer Choices	Responses
High school graduate	23.31
Technical or vocational.	7.52
Some college	42.86
Master's degree	13.53
Doctorate or professional...	6.02
Prefer not to say	3.76
Other (please specify) secondary education	3.01
Total	100.00

Table 4 represents the distribution of educational attainment among survey respondents and reveals a diverse array of educational backgrounds: The largest group of respondents, comprising 42.86%, has attended college. This indicates that a significant portion of the surveyed population has pursued higher education and completed a degree program that mentioned various bachelor's degrees.

Those who have completed high school make up 23.31% of respondents, suggesting that just under a quarter have education up to the secondary level as their highest qualification. The survey data reveals that 7.52% of the respondents have pursued technical or vocational training, reflecting a segment of the population that has opted for skill-based educational pathways following high school. Additionally, the survey indicates that postgraduate qualifications are held by approximately 20% of the participants, with 13.53% possessing a master's degree, denoting a significant engagement with advanced academic and professional studies.

Furthermore, 6.02% of the respondents have achieved the distinction of a Doctorate or professional degree, signifying a noteworthy commitment to the highest echelons of educational attainment. This 20% aggregate of postgraduate holders underscores the pursuit of continued academic excellence and specialization within the surveyed demographic. A modest 3.76% chose not to disclose their education level, which may reflect privacy concerns or other reasons for withholding this information. Lastly, an additional 3.01% of respondents specified another form of secondary education, which could include international baccalaureates or equivalent qualifications not previously listed. This data indicates that the survey reached individuals across a broad educational spectrum, from high school graduates to doctorate holders, offering varied perspectives based on their educational experiences. The substantial representation from some college attendees could reflect a trend of pursuing higher education, in contrast the relatively high percentages of those with Master's and Doctorate degrees suggest access to and completion of advanced education programs among the population. The educational diversity among respondents is critical for understanding the survey's findings, as education level can significantly influence individuals' opinions, knowledge, and responses to survey questions.

Traditional Majlis Engagement: Insights and Perspectives

In this analysis, I explore the rich cultural fabric of the UAE through the lens of both traditional and digital Majlis. The traditional Majlis, a cornerstone of Emirati social, political, and cultural engagement, is examined for its enduring relevance and its interaction with modernization and digital innovation. By investigating a range of questions (Q6 to Q11), this study aims to uncover how participants engage with, perceive, and potentially transform this pivotal institution. I begin by examining the occupational backgrounds of respondents to understand their connection to the Majlis, explore their frequency of attendance, and delve into what they value most about these gatherings. Further, I assess the traditional Majlis's role in cultural preservation and its effectiveness in fostering social bonds and explore the generational gaps in participation. Finally, I consider whether digital Majalis could replace traditional ones in fulfilling their cultural and social roles. This introduction frames our upcoming detailed analysis, honoring the Majlis's legacy while considering its future amidst evolving societal dynamics.

Table 5. Q6 How often do you attend or visit the traditional Majlis?

Answer Choices	Responses
Frequently	33.3%
Sometimes	26.9%
I don't know	2.2%
Rarely	19.4%
Never	17.2%
Only during Ramadan	1.1%
Total	100.0%

The data in **Table 5** reveals a varied spectrum of engagement levels with traditional Majlis, or Majlis, among the survey respondents. A notable one-third of the participants (33.3%) attend Majlis frequently, underscoring its continued significance in their social and cultural life, where community issues are deliberated, and social bonds reinforced. Another 26.9% engage with the Majlis occasionally, suggesting variable factors like availability or interest may affect their participation. The small group that is unsure about their frequency (2.2%) could indicate sporadic engagement or ambiguity about what qualifies as attendance. Meanwhile, 19.4% attend rarely and 17.2% never attend, pointing to shifts possibly towards digital mediums or other lifestyle changes that distance them from traditional practices. Interestingly, 1.1% participate only during Ramadan, highlighting the Majlis's special role during significant cultural and religious events. This range of participation levels is essential for understanding the evolving role of Majlis in contemporary society and indicates potential shifts influenced by modern lifestyle choices and digital alternatives.

Table 6. Q7 What aspects or benefits of attending the traditional Majlis do you value the most? (Select all that apply).

Answer Choices	Responses
Sense of community and belonging	58%
Opportunity for face-to-face interaction	37%
Cultural and heritage atmosphere	34%
Discussions on topics of personal or community Interest	51%
Opportunities to connect with people and friends	61%
Gathering on social occasions such as Eid and Ramadan	35%
Meeting friends	49%
Other (please specify)	8%

Table 6 reveals a deep-seated appreciation for the traditional Majlis among participants, illustrating the institution's complex impact on social and cultural life. A significant 61% of respondents recognize the Majlis as a crucial platform

for discussions on personal or community-interest topics, suggesting its primary role as a space for substantive exchanges where societal and personal issues are explored. Moreover, 51% of participants appreciate the cultural and heritage atmosphere, indicating that the Majlis offers an immersive experience that connects individuals to their heritage. The Majlis also serves as a pivotal space for reinforcing social ties, with 58% of participants valuing the sense of community and belonging it fosters and 49% appreciating the opportunity it provides to meet friends. These gatherings are seen as essential elements of social life, enhancing solidarity and camaraderie among attendees. Additionally, 34% of respondents cherish the opportunity for face-to-face interaction, and 35% value gatherings at significant social events like Eid and Ramadan, emphasizing the Majlis's role in facilitating direct engagement and celebrating cultural and religious occasions. An additional 8% of participants highlighted other benefits, underscoring the preference for in-person meetings over virtual interactions, which points to the unique value that physical presence and direct communication hold in building meaningful connections. Collectively, these findings depict the traditional Majlis as a cherished venue that nurtures community spirit serves as a cultural hub, enables in-depth discussions, and acts as a central gathering place for social and ceremonial functions. The emphasis on face-to-face interactions further suggests a general preference for physical meetings, possibly reflecting the limitations of digital platforms in replicating the nuanced experiences offered by traditional Majlis settings. Notably, a small percentage view these gatherings as having similar effectiveness to contemporary social platforms, while an even smaller fraction perceives them as less effective, possibly indicating a shift towards modern communication technologies that provide alternative ways of interaction.

The narratives from Muhammad Abdullah Al-Buraiki and Ahmed Ubaid enrich our understanding of the Majlis as a dynamic intellectual and social platform¹. Al-Buraiki portrays the Majlis as a vibrant space where cultural discussions, poetry, and learning thrive, emphasizing its role in nurturing friendships and cultural enrichment. Ubaid's recollections affirm the inclusivity and diversity of discussions within the Majlis, covering topics from trade and culture to social issues, highlighting its role in community engagement and social mediation. These insights are pivotal for discussions on Q7 regarding the valued aspects of attending the Majlis. By incorporating these detailed accounts, I highlight not only the functional aspects of the Majlis in fostering social cohesion but also its profound cultural and educational impact. This holistic perspective underscores the Majlis's enduring relevance and adaptability, serving as a foundational element of community life and a guardian of Emirati heritage and identity.

Table 7 overwhelmingly affirms the critical role of traditional Majalis in the

¹Source of the interviews Anonymous. (2009, October 23). The phenomenon of the "Majlis" in Emirati popular culture is a place for the circulation of poetry, stories of history, and world news. <https://www.alkhaleej.ae>.

Table 7. Q8 Do you agree that the traditional Majlis plays a fundamental role in preserving Emirati culture?

Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly agree	65.22%
Agree	23.91%
Neutral	10.87%
Disagree	0.00%
Strongly disagree	0.00%
Total	100.00%

preservation of Emirati culture. A significant majority of respondents, constituting 65.22%, “Strongly agree” that traditional Majalis are fundamental to this effort, highlighting a deep conviction among participants regarding the Majalis’ cultural significance. This strong consensus underscores the belief that traditional Majalis are not merely social forums but also custodians of heritage and tradition. Furthermore, 23.91% of respondents “Agree” with the statement, reinforcing the sentiment that traditional Majalis play an essential role in cultural preservation, albeit with slightly less intensity than those who “Strongly agree”. Combined, an impressive 89.13% of participants recognize the traditional Majalis as an important institution for maintaining cultural identity and practices. The “Neutral” category accounts for 10.87% of the responses, indicating that a small portion of the participants may acknowledge the importance of traditional Majalis but possibly recognize other factors or institutions as also being influential in cultural preservation. Notably, there are no respondents who “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree” with the statement, which is remarkable and suggests a unanimous view among the surveyed individuals on the importance of traditional Majalis in sustaining Emirati culture.

In conclusion, these responses reflect a strong collective agreement on the value of traditional Majalis in Emirati cultural conservation, signifying their undeniable role as a key element in perpetuating and celebrating the nation’s heritage.

Table 8. Q9 Compared to the digital Majlis, how effective is the traditional Majlis in promoting social bonds among Emiratis?

Answer Choices	Responses
Much more effective	56%
More effective	24%
Similar effectiveness	8%
Less effective	11%
Much less effective	2.15%
Total	100.00%

The data from **Table 8** elucidates the significant role traditional Majalis play in fostering social cohesion within the community. A substantial 56% of respondents perceive traditional Majalis as “Much more effective” at strengthening social connections, underscoring their vital role in cultivating a sense of unity and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, 24% of participants deem these Majalis “More effective,” aggregating to an 80% majority who recognize the positive impact of traditional Majalis on social bonds, albeit to varying extents. Only a minority, with 8%, view these traditional gatherings as having “Similar effectiveness” to other contemporary social platforms, suggesting that for some individuals, the Majlis competes favorably with newer forms of social engagement. However, 11% consider them “Less effective,” possibly reflecting shifts in social dynamics influenced by modern communication technologies that provide alternative social interaction avenues. An additional 2.15% find them “Much less effective,” potentially indicating a disconnection from traditional practices or a strong inclination toward modern methods of socialization.

The narratives of ²Umm Saif from Hatta and Shaikha Al Mansoori from Abu Dhabi illustrate the Majlis’s enduring relevance. Umm Saif is renowned for her open-house policy, where her Majlis serves as a dynamic hub for community interaction, reflecting traditional hospitality deeply embedded in Emirati culture. Her Majlis, continually bustling with guests, vividly demonstrates its role as a crucial social institution. Similarly, Shaikha Al Mansoori’s efforts to blend traditional and Western designs in her Majlis highlight its adaptability and evolving nature, making it a modern yet culturally significant gathering place for sharing life’s updates, especially during weekends and festivals like Eid. These examples underscore how the Majlis not only preserves but also adapts cultural identity and heritage within the UAE. By integrating these compelling personal stories into the discussion, the Majlis’s critical role in everyday Emirati life is vividly illustrated, affirming its social and cultural significance as more than just a meeting space but a foundational element of community life.

Table 9 offers insights into the multifaceted reasons why young people might be less inclined to attend traditional Majalis. Each response sheds light on different aspects of contemporary lifestyle choices and societal changes impacting this trend. Time constraints emerge as the most significant factor, with 54.55% of respondents citing it as a reason for not attending traditional Majalis. This highlights the fast-paced nature of modern life, where young individuals may find it challenging to allocate time for traditional gatherings amidst their busy schedules. The preference for digital communications is noted by 23.38% of participants, reflecting a generational shift towards online interactions. This indicates that digital platforms may be more appealing or convenient for young people, offering a form of engagement that traditional Majalis do not. Lack of interesting topics and issues related to transportation or mobility are cited by 19.48%

²Source of the interviews Al Hameli, A. (2016, January 26). The UAE Majlis: A treasure to be cherished. The National News.

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/the-uae-Majlis-a-treasure-to-be-cherished-1.204083>

Table 9. Q 10 In your opinion, why do young people not want to attend the traditional Majlis? (Select all that apply.)

Answer Choices	Responses
Time constraints	54.55%
Preference for digital communications	23.38%
Lack of interesting topics	19.48%
Issues related to transportation or mobility	22.08%
Preoccupation with social media	37.66%
Frequent visits to malls	19.48%
Far from my friends' homes compared to mine	18.18%
Preference for socializing in cafes	19.48%
Playing electronic games with friends	16.88%
Financial burden on Majlis owners	10.39%
decreased number of traditional Majlis	25.97%

and 22.08% of respondents, respectively. These factors suggest that the relevance of the discussions and logistical challenges play roles in the decreased interest in attending Majlis. Preoccupation with social media is a significant reason for 37.66% of young people, indicating a diversion of attention towards digital platforms that offer endless content and interaction opportunities, which might be perceived as more engaging or accessible than traditional settings. Other noted reasons include the preference for socializing in more modern venues like cafes and malls, highlighted by 19.48% of respondents for each, and engaging in electronic games with friends, cited by 16.88%. These preferences point towards changing social habits and the allure of contemporary entertainment and socializing options over traditional gatherings. A smaller yet noteworthy percentage (18.18%) feels that traditional Majalis are far from their friends' homes compared to theirs, hinting at the importance of convenience and accessibility in determining social choices. The financial burden on Majlis owners is considered a deterrent by 10.39% of respondents, suggesting that the cost of hosting such gatherings might impact their frequency or appeal. Interestingly, 25.97% of respondents perceive fewer traditional Majlis, which could indicate concerns about the diminishing presence or accessibility of such cultural practices. In summary, the survey illuminates a complex array of reasons behind young people's waning interest in traditional Majalis. From lifestyle constraints and digital preferences to logistical challenges and changing social habits, these factors collectively suggest a shift in how young generations engage with cultural traditions amidst the influences of modernity and globalization.

Digital Majlis Engagement: Insights and Perspectives

This section delves into the realm of digital Majlis, assessing its potential to complement or even substitute traditional Majalis within the UAE's cultural and social framework. Through an array of targeted questions (Q11 to Q17), I aim to explore the community's familiarity with, participation in, and perspectives on

digital Majalis. We'll examine the extent to which individuals believe digital platforms can fulfill the roles traditionally reserved for physical Majlis, their personal experiences with these digital formats, and the factors influencing their engagement and satisfaction.

To contextualize this shift, Henry Jenkins' concept of "Convergence Culture" offers a valuable lens through which we can understand the integration of digital Majalis into modern social practices. Jenkins' framework highlights the merging of old and new media, where media content flows across multiple platforms and users become active participants rather than passive consumers. This participatory culture, in which communities engage in meaning-making and collaboration, mirrors the dynamics of digital Majalis, where traditional social and cultural interactions are adapted into digital spaces (Jenkins, 2006).

This analysis provides insights into the evolving dynamics of Majlis engagement, highlighting shifts towards digital adaptation in preserving and enhancing cultural and social interactions. As the Majlis has long been a cornerstone of Emirati cultural life, facilitating discussions, decision-making, and social bonding, this study aims to evaluate whether digital platforms can uphold these traditional functions. Much like the convergence described by Jenkins, the digital Majlis represents a cultural shift where audiences co-create and sustain cultural practices through new technologies. By examining the community's participation in and attitudes toward these platforms, we gain insights into the evolving nature of Majlis engagement, uncovering how digital formats may help preserve and enhance cultural and social interactions in a digitally connected world.

Table 10. Q11 Can the digital Majlis substitute traditional Majalis in fulfilling their cultural and social roles?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes, it can completely.	28%
Yes, but to some extent only	24%
No, it serves different purposes	16%
Digital Majalis cannot replace traditional Majalis	29%
I don't know.	3%
Total	100%

Table 10 illustrates a spectrum of views regarding the capability of digital Majalis to fulfill the roles traditionally held by physical Majlis, emphasizing the complexities involved in blending technological advancements with longstanding cultural traditions. Notably, 28% of respondents believe that digital Majalis can entirely replace traditional Majlis, indicating a strong belief in technology's capacity to sustain cultural and social functions without geographical constraints. In contrast, 24% acknowledge that while digital Majalis can emulate some functions of traditional Majlis, they cannot fully capture the essence of in-person interactions, thus underscoring the intrinsic value of physical presence and connectivity. Additionally, 16% of participants recognize that digital and traditional

Majalis serve unique purposes, valuing the distinct advantages each provides without deeming them interchangeable. A significant 29% of respondents, holding a deep respect for tradition, contend that digital Majalis cannot supplant traditional Majlis, citing the unparalleled cultural and social values that are inherent in physical gatherings, such as ambiance, community bonding, and the subtleties of personal interaction. A further 3% remain neutral, either due to a lack of familiarity with digital Majalis or uncertainty about their capacity to replicate the traditional Majlis experience effectively.

Ali Salim al Kaabi's engagement with the Majlis during the Al Dhafra camel festival poignantly underscores the enduring relevance of these gatherings³. He highlights the critical role of the Majlis in imparting cultural knowledge and traditions to the younger generations, arguing that the absence of such interactions could jeopardize cultural continuity. His commitment to preserving this tradition amidst modern pressures illustrates the Majlis's flexibility and its crucial role in nurturing community identity and cohesion. Incorporating narratives like Al Kaabi's enriches the discussion, vividly demonstrating how traditional practices like the Majlis are not only surviving but also thriving, adapting to the demands of modernity while preserving their cultural core. These accounts offer a profound insight into the Majlis's role in cultural education and continuity, providing a nuanced understanding of its adaptation to meet contemporary societal challenges. This dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation highlights the Majlis's pivotal function in the cultural landscape of the UAE.

Table 11. Q12 What is your familiarity with the concept of the digital Majlis?

Answer Choices	Responses
I know it very well.	26.39%
I know it to some extent.	36.11%
I don't know it	19.44%
I have heard about it, but it's not very familiar.	13.89%
I have no knowledge of it at all.	4.17%

Table 11 provides a detailed look at the varying degrees of familiarity that survey respondents have with the concept of the digital Majlis. The data reveals a spectrum of awareness and understanding, which is critical for assessing the potential acceptance and effectiveness of digital Majalis in the Emirati community. Well-Acquainted (26.39%—"I know it very well."): Over a quarter of the respondents claim a comprehensive understanding of digital Majalis. This group likely represents individuals who are either actively engaged with or have a significant interest in digital platforms for community engagement. Moderately Familiar (36.11%—"I know it to some extent."): The largest segment of re-

³Source of the interviews: Henzell, J. (2010, February 2). Space and time: Why the Majlis is still important. The National News.

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/lifestyle/space-and-time-why-the-Majlis-is-still-important-1.511492>

spondents has a moderate understanding of digital Majalis. This suggests that while they are aware of the concept and possibly some of its functionalities, they might not be fully versed in all aspects or nuances of digital Majlis operations. Limited awareness (19.44%—“I don’t know it”): Nearly one-fifth of the participants admit to not knowing about digital Majalis, indicating a segment of the population that is potentially disconnected from newer forms of digital communal platforms, possibly due to a variety of factors such as lack of exposure or interest. Vaguely Aware (13.89%—“I have heard about it, but it’s not very familiar.”): A smaller proportion of the survey population has heard of digital Majalis but lacks a clear understanding, which might suggest only surface-level engagement with the concept or incidental exposure rather than direct interaction. Uninformed (4.17%—“I have no knowledge of it at all.”): A minimal percentage of respondents are completely unaware of digital Majalis. This group might face barriers to digital literacy or access, or they may reside in environments where digital adaptations of traditional practices like the Majlis are less prevalent. Overall, while a significant portion of the community shows varying levels of familiarity with digital Majalis, there is still a notable fraction that lacks detailed knowledge or any awareness at all. The data underscores the need for targeted educational and outreach efforts to enhance understanding and engagement with digital Majalis, potentially fostering broader acceptance and more active participation in these modern platforms.

Table 12. Q13 Have you ever participated in a digital Majlis?

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes (If the answer is yes, please answer question 14)	39.13%
No (If the answer is no, skip to question 16)	60.87%
Total	100.00%

Table 12 provides crucial insights into the actual engagement levels of respondents with digital Majalis, reflecting their direct experiences with these modern platforms. The data splits the respondents into two clear groups based on their participation history. Participants (39.13%—“Yes”): This group represents a significant minority of the respondents who have actively participated in a digital Majlis. Their experiences and feedback in subsequent questions (like question 14, which explores the reasons for their attendance) will be invaluable in understanding what draws individuals to these digital forums and how they perceive their effectiveness and utility. Non-Participants (60.87%—“No”): Most respondents have not participated in a digital Majlis. This higher percentage indicates potential barriers or lack of opportunity, interest, or awareness preventing a larger population from engaging with digital Majalis. This group’s non-participation could stem from various reasons, including a preference for traditional councils, lack of information about how to participate in digital councils, or general disinterest in digital adaptations of traditional formats. Overall, the data

from **Table 13** highlights a critical gap between the availability or awareness of digital Majalis and actual engagement levels. Understanding why over half of the respondents have not participated in digital Majalis could help strategize more effective ways to promote these platforms, making them more inclusive, accessible, and appealing to a broader audience. This analysis also sets the stage for exploring deeper questions about the specific elements that might attract more participants to digital Majalis, ensuring their growth and sustainability as a modern extension of traditional cultural practices.

Table 13 delves into the primary reasons why participants choose to engage with digital Majalis, providing insight into the factors that drive their participation. This understanding is crucial for tailoring these platforms to better meet the needs and preferences of potential users. Ease of Attendance from Anywhere (65.45%): The most significant draw for participants is the convenience digital Majalis offers. A substantial 65.45% of respondents appreciate the ability to join discussions from any location, highlighting the importance of accessibility in the digital age. This ease of access eliminates geographical and physical barriers, making it a primary attraction for those who seek flexible engagement opportunities. Recommended by Friends or Family (29.09%): Social influence plays a notable role, with nearly a third of the participants attending digital Majalis based on recommendations from friends or family. This suggests that personal networks are effective channels for increasing participation, as trusted recommendations often carry weight in decision-making processes. Topic of Discussion was of Interest (27.27%): The relevance of the discussion topic is another significant factor, with over a quarter of respondents citing it as a reason for their attendance. This indicates that the content of the Majalis must be engaging and pertinent to the interests of the potential audience to attract and retain their attention. Curiosity About Digital Coordination (25.45%): A smaller yet meaningful percentage of participants are driven by curiosity about how digital Majalis are organized and facilitated. This interest in the digital format suggests that a segment of the audience is open to exploring new communication and community engagement methods.

Table 13. Q14 What is the main reason for your attendance at the digital Majlis? (Select all that apply.)

Answer Choices	Responses
Ease of attendance from anywhere	65.45%
Curiosity about digital coordination	25.45%
Topic of discussion was of interest	27.27%
Recommended by friends or family	29.09%

The data from **Table 14** underscores the varied motivations behind attending digital Majalis, with convenience emerging as the most compelling reason. Understanding these drivers can assist organizers and facilitators of digital Majalis

in optimizing their platforms to enhance participation rates. By focusing on ease of access, leveraging personal networks, ensuring relevance of content, and maintaining an intriguing digital format, digital Majalis can potentially increase their appeal and effectiveness within the community.

Table 14. Q15 How satisfied are you with your experience at the digital Majlis?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very satisfied	18.0%
Satisfied	30%
Neutral	49%
Dissatisfied	2%
Very dissatisfied	2%

Table 14 explores the satisfaction levels among participants who have engaged in digital Majalis, providing a snapshot of how effectively these platforms meet user expectations and needs.

A small portion of the respondents, 18%, express a high degree of satisfaction with their digital Majlis experiences, indicating that for these individuals, digital Majalis effectively deliver on their promise of engaging and meaningful interaction. (30%): Another 30% of participants report being satisfied, suggesting that while their experiences were positive, there may be room for improvement in certain areas. Combined with those who are very satisfied, nearly half of the respondents have had favorable experiences overall. (49%): The largest group, nearly half of the respondents, remains neutral about their experiences. This significant proportion may indicate a variety of factors: perhaps the digital Majalis met some but not all expectations, or the participants are still undecided about the value of these forums compared to traditional in-person meetings. A minimal percentage of participants, 4% combined, express dissatisfaction to varying degrees. This low level of dissatisfaction suggests that while most find digital Majalis acceptable or better, there are still aspects that could be enhanced to reduce negative experiences. The predominance of neutral responses highlights a potential uncertainty or ambivalence about digital Majalis. It suggests that while these platforms do not generally provoke strong dissatisfaction, there is a significant opportunity to elevate user experiences from merely acceptable to actively positive. Enhancing features such as interaction quality, technical reliability, and relevance of discussion topics could convert neutral participants into satisfied ones, thereby broadening the appeal and effectiveness of digital Majalis. This feedback is crucial for organizers aiming to refine and adapt digital platforms to better serve the community's needs and preferences.

Table 15 reveals participants' preferences for specific features that contribute to the effectiveness of digital Majalis. The insights from this table help identify which technological and interactive elements are crucial for optimizing the user experience in digital formats. Live Broadcast with High-Quality Video and Audio (46%): Nearly half of the respondents emphasize the importance of high-

Table 15. Q16 What features do you think are important for the digital Majlis to be effective? Select all that apply.

Answer Choices	Responses
Live broadcast with high-quality video and audio	46%
Interactive question and answer sessions	29%
Accessibility on different devices (smartphone, tablet, computer)	41%
Opportunities to communicate with other participants	46%

quality video and audio in live broadcasts. This indicates a strong preference for clear and uninterrupted streaming, which is essential for maintaining participant engagement and ensuring that discussions are easily audible and visible, mimicking the clarity and immediacy of in-person interactions. Opportunities to Communicate with Other Participants (46%): Also at 46%, the need for opportunities to communicate with other participants highlights the social aspect of the Majlis. Participants value the ability to interact, not just passively receive information, suggesting that features supporting participant interaction can significantly enhance the experience. Accessibility on Different Devices (Smartphone, Tablet, Computer) (41%): Flexibility in access across various devices is identified by 41% of respondents as crucial. This feature supports inclusivity and convenience, allowing participants to join from any location and device, thereby broadening the reach and participation in digital Majalis. Interactive Question and Answer Sessions (29%): Interactive Q&A sessions are valued by 29% of the participants, underlining the importance of dialogue and direct engagement between speakers and the audience. This interaction mimics the traditional Majlis's discursive nature, allowing for a dynamic exchange of ideas and enhancing the overall participatory experience. The data suggests that successful digital Majalis should integrate technological excellence with interactive capabilities to create an engaging, accessible, and communicative environment. By focusing on these key features, organizers can significantly improve the effectiveness of digital Majalis, making them more appealing and functional for a wider audience.

Table 16. Q17 How likely are you to participate in the digital Majlis in the future?

Answer Choices	Responses
Very likely	32%
Likely	36%
Not sure	22%
Unlikely	7%
Very unlikely	3%
Total	100%

Table 16 provides insights into the willingness of participants to engage with digital Majalis in the future, offering a gauge of potential growth and sustainabil-

ity for these modern platforms. Very Likely (32%): A substantial portion, nearly one-third of respondents, express a strong intention to participate in future digital Majalis. This group's eagerness indicates a significant level of satisfaction or a strong belief in the benefits offered by digital Majalis, such as convenience and accessibility. Likely (36%): The largest segment, comprising over a third of the respondents, feels somewhat positive about future participation. Combined with those who are very likely to participate, a clear majority (68%) of the participants are inclined towards continued engagement with digital Majalis, suggesting a positive reception and a potential for increasing regular attendance. Not Sure (22%): Many respondents are uncertain about their future participation. This ambivalence could be due to various factors, including mixed experiences in past sessions, the need to improve digital Majlis features or fluctuating personal interest. Unlikely (7%) and Very Unlikely (3%): A small minority, totaling 10%, express reluctance or resistance towards future participation. This reluctance could stem from dissatisfaction with past experiences, preference for traditional, in-person Majalis, or perceived deficiencies in the digital format's ability to replicate the social and cultural depth of traditional Majalis. Overall, the data from **Table 16** points to a generally optimistic outlook for the future of digital Majalis, with a strong majority indicating a likelihood of continued participation. However, the significant proportion of uncertain participants suggests the need for improvements and enhancements to digital Majlis formats to convert this uncertainty into positive anticipation. Addressing factors contributing to reluctance and enhancing the overall user experience could help solidify and expand the user base for digital Majalis.

The survey results reveal a complex but insightful landscape of cultural engagement among participants with respect to traditional and digital Majalis in the UAE. The traditional Majlis continues to hold significant value, demonstrating a strong capacity to foster community ties and preserve cultural heritage. Most participants express high satisfaction with their experiences at traditional Majalis and view them as essential platforms for maintaining social bonds and discussing community-relevant topics. Despite this strong preference for traditional settings, there is also a noteworthy openness to embracing digital Majalis. The survey indicates that a significant number of respondents appreciate the convenience and accessibility offered by digital formats. With 68% of participants likely or very likely to engage in future digital Majalis, there is clear potential for these platforms to become more integrated into the cultural fabric of the community. However, the effectiveness of digital Majalis in fully substituting traditional Majalis remains debatable. While some respondents see digital platforms as adequate alternatives for fostering social interactions, a substantial proportion insists that digital Majalis serve different purposes and cannot entirely replace traditional settings. This highlights an ongoing balance between innovation and tradition.

The factors deterring younger demographics from attending traditional Majalis, such as time constraints and the allure of digital communications, point to areas

where traditional Majalis may need to adapt to maintain their relevance among the younger population. Meanwhile, the high quality of interactions, the importance of live discussions, and the ability to connect with others in a culturally rich atmosphere are pinpointed as crucial for enhancing the appeal and functionality of digital Majalis. Moving forward, it is evident that both traditional and digital Majalis will continue to play significant roles within the UAE. For optimal cultural cohesion and continuity, efforts should be made to bridge the best aspects of both platforms. Enhancing the technological features of digital Majalis while preserving the intimate and interactive nature of traditional Majalis could provide a hybrid model that satisfies a broader range of preferences and needs within the community. This balance will be key to fostering a dynamic cultural dialogue that honors tradition while embracing the future.

5. Conclusion

As I conclude this comprehensive research on the adaptation and acceptance of traditional and digital Majalis in the UAE, several key insights emerge. The study clearly illustrates that while traditional Majlis continue to play a pivotal role in Emirati culture, there is a growing acceptance of digital Majalis, particularly among younger demographics. This blend of traditional and digital formats suggests a dynamic cultural landscape where heritage and modernity coexist and complement each other. The research has highlighted that traditional Majalis are still highly valued for their role in fostering community bonds and maintaining cultural heritage. The physical setting of the Majlis, the face-to-face interactions, and the rich cultural ambiance are irreplaceable elements that digital formats struggle to replicate fully. However, the convenience, accessibility, and innovative potential of digital Majalis are appealing, especially as they align with the technological inclinations of the younger population. Moreover, the barriers to participation in traditional Majalis, such as time constraints and a preference for digital communication, suggest areas where traditional formats could evolve to increase engagement. Simultaneously, the digital Majalis' lack of deeper cultural immersion indicates the need to enhance how these platforms deliver a culturally enriching experience. Future research should focus on developing a hybrid model that integrates the accessibility and innovative aspects of digital Majalis with the intimate and culturally rich experience of traditional Majlis. Such a model could potentially address the varying needs and preferences across different age groups, ensuring that the Majlis remains a central, unifying platform for dialogue and cultural exchange in the UAE.

In conclusion, as the UAE continues to preserve its rich cultural traditions and embrace digital innovation, the evolution of the Majlis reflects broader themes of change and continuity within the society. By fostering an inclusive approach that respects tradition while leveraging technology, the UAE can ensure that the traditional or digital Majlis remains a cornerstone of its cultural and social fabric.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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