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## THE USE OF SAUDI COLLOQUIAL VARIETIES OF ARABIC IN SAUDI FORMAL TWITTER ACCOUNTS

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### Abstract

The study investigates the use of colloquial varieties in Saudi formal Twitter accounts, specifically in relation to its frequency and the public response towards it. It also inspects whether the demographic factors of age, gender, and education have any effect on people's preference towards using colloquial varieties in formal settings. Over a thousand tweets collected from Saudi governmental and academic accounts were examined to inspect the frequency of the occurrence of tweets written in colloquial varieties in relation to tweets written in Standard Arabic. The results showed that 91.67% of tweets were written in Standard Arabic whereas only 8.33% of tweets were written in colloquial varieties. Moreover, interviews with participants from different demographics were conducted to elicit the public's opinion on the use of colloquial varieties in formal Twitter accounts. The results revealed that the use of Standard Arabic was favored over the use of colloquial varieties in all settings.

**Keywords:** Saudi Arabic, colloquial varieties, diglossia, language in social media, Twitter

### L'ÚS DE VARIETATS COL·LOQUIALS SAUDÍS DE L'ÀRAB EN ELS COMPTES FORMALS DE TWITTER SAUDÍS

### Resum

Aquest estudi investiga l'ús de les varietats col·loquials en els comptes formals saudís de Twitter, especialment en relació amb la seva freqüència i la resposta del públic. També analitza si els factors

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demogràfics, com ara l'edat, el gènere i l'educació, tenen algun efecte sobre la preferència de les persones per l'ús de varietats col·loquials en entorns formals. S'han examinat més de mil *tweets* recopilats de comptes governamentals i acadèmics saudís per estudiar la freqüència d'aparició de *tweets* escrits en varietats col·loquials en relació amb els *tweets* escrits en àrab estàndard. Els resultats van mostrar que el 91,67% estaven escrits en àrab estàndard, mentre que només el 8,33% estaven escrits en varietats col·loquials. A més, s'han fet entrevistes amb participants de diferents grups demogràfics per obtenir la seva opinió sobre l'ús de les varietats col·loquials en comptes formals de Twitter. Els resultats van revelar que en tots els entorns s'afavoria l'ús de l'àrab estàndard per sobre de les varietats col·loquials.

**Paraules clau:** àrab saudí, varietats col·loquials, diglòssia, llengua a les xarxes socials, Twitter

### EL USO DE VARIEDADES COLOQUIALES SAUDÍES DEL ÁRABE EN LAS CUENTAS FORMALES DE TWITTER SAUDÍES

#### Resumen

El estudio investiga el uso de las variedades coloquiales en las cuentas formales saudíes de Twitter, especialmente en relación con su frecuencia y la respuesta del público hacia ellas. También analiza si los factores demográficos como la edad, el género y la educación tienen algún efecto sobre la preferencia de las personas por el uso de variedades coloquiales en entornos formales. Se han examinado más de mil tweets recopilados de cuentas gubernamentales y académicas saudíes para estudiar la frecuencia de aparición de tweets escritos en variedades coloquiales en relación con los tweets escritos en árabe estándar. Los resultados mostraron que el 91,67% de los tweets estaban escritos en árabe estándar, mientras que sólo el 8,33% de los tweets estaban escritos en variedades coloquiales. Además, se han realizado entrevistas con participantes de diferentes grupos demográficos para obtener su opinión sobre el uso de las variedades coloquiales en cuentas formales de Twitter. Los resultados revelaron que en todos los entornos se favorecía el uso del árabe estándar sobre el de las variedades coloquiales.

**Palabras clave:** árabe saudí, variedades coloquiales, diglosia, lenguaje en las redes sociales, Twitter

## 1. Introduction

The Arabic-speaking world has been known for its diglossic situation. Diglossia as a term which has been introduced by Ferguson (1959) refers to societies where two distinct varieties of the same language coexist, one is regarded as high (H) and the other as low (L). As Ferguson (1959: 245) explains,

there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, [...] which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most

written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.

In Saudi Arabia, and as a clear representation of diglossia, Standard Arabic (SA) is used as a (H) variety, whereas colloquial dialects are a representation of the (L) variety. There is a certain prestige attached to the high variety whereas colloquial varieties are stigmatized as the low variety (Holmes & Wilson 2017). Standard Arabic, which is codified in books and dictionaries, has more prestige as it is admired and respected by people because of its high status. On the other hand, colloquial varieties are learned at home and used in less formal contexts. Thus, they garner less prestige. However, with the rise of social media, the use of dialectal varieties in written forms of social media is gaining a wider acceptance among the public.

Literature shows that new modes of communication, i.e. social media, have been perceived to have an effect on sociolinguistic patterns. Blommaert (2010) asserts that globalization in its emerging vessels has a considerable effect on sociolinguistic patterns that accumulate to create profound changes in society. In relation to written texts, it is expected that Standard Arabic is to be used since vernacular varieties are normally uncodified (Holmes & Wilson 2017). However, communication through colloquial varieties in written texts has become very common, especially with the dominance of social networks facilitated by the Internet. In the last few decades, the use of informal colloquial varieties in formal settings such as TV programs started to increase gradually over time. One of the most popular social media platforms, especially in Saudi Arabia, is Twitter, with an exceptionally high number of users. An article published by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology in Saudi Arabia reported a statistic published by Business Insider which revealed that 41% of internet users in Saudi Arabia use Twitter, making it the highest percentage of usage in the world. Statistical projections predict an increase in that number in the years to come (Smith 2013).

The interaction between Standard Arabic and dialectal forms on social media is an extension of the existing interaction between the different forms of Arabic on other

media platforms such as TV. The use of colloquial varieties in written advertisements, mobile applications, and even in formal Twitter accounts is a relatively new phenomenon that is worth investigating.

## **2. Literature review**

The phenomenon of diglossia in the Arab world has been addressed in many studies over the years. Nearly sixty years ago, Ferguson (1959) discussed diglossia in the Arab world and stated that Arabic diglossia 'seems to reach as far back as our knowledge of Arabic goes' Ferguson (1959: 233). He described diglossia as a relatively stable phenomenon and discussed the functions of (H) and (L) varieties and the situations where each of them was appropriate. The following part will briefly highlight some studies that were conducted on Arabic diglossia in general, and then in the context of intelligibility level between the (H) and (L) varieties, teaching and learning, and in social media.

Alsa'afi (2016) provides a representative overview of diglossia in Arabic and its meaning, different types and its relationship to language stability and change. As he explains, Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic are in complementary distribution in terms of their context of use which is the reason why people usually tend to switch between them. Individuals use colloquial Arabic orally in informal situations such as in interactions with their friends or relatives and in conversations at home. However, in formal situations or in relation to reading or writing, people resort to Standard Arabic. Alsa'afi concludes that despite the different terms and taxonomies that were used in the literature to refer to what he described as 'intermediate varieties of Arabic', this difference is a sign of healthy intellectual activity and development in Arabic sociolinguistics (Alsa'afi 2016: 9)

Al-Sobh, Abu-Melhim & Bani-Hani (2015) investigate the nature of diglossia in Arabic. They present a survey of what scholars and linguists claimed about Arabic diglossia. They discuss the major divisions of Arabic: Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and Colloquial Arabic. They also discuss an intermediate mixed variety between

Modern Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic that is used widely in the Arab world. This variety is referred to as Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA). It is a form of Arabic spoken by educated speakers when conversing with other educated speakers which draws on the two varieties. The authors suggest possible solutions to overcome problems that are caused by diglossia. For example, it is mentioned that young Arabs normally acquire the (L) variety at a young age before the (H) variety, which is usually taught at school. This can create a problem in the mastery and fluency of Standard Arabic which explains the efforts exerted by some Arabs when they attempt to speak in the (H) variety. In order to avoid the problems that occur as a result of diglossia and the variation in Arabic today, the researchers call for a solution that is based on language planning. They suggest a plan for using the classical model of Arabic and call for political support from the government to implement the project successfully.

In relation to diglossia and the level of intelligibility between the two varieties, a study by Jabbari (2013) addresses the issue of intelligibility between Modern Standard Arabic and the Iraqi Colloquial Arabic variety. The researcher collected data from both varieties in order to illustrate the differences between them using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which highlighted the ways surface structures were altered. He concludes that there were differences between the two varieties at the level of phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax.

Studies related to diglossia also shed light on its effects on teaching and learning. A master thesis by Al-Huri (2012) investigates the impact of diglossia on teaching/learning Arabic courses in Sana'a secondary schools. The findings show that the teachers in the study sometimes used MSA in teaching Arabic, but the students rarely used it to interact with their teachers. The researcher states that students' linguistic deficiency was due to their lack of communication capacity rather than comprehension. In addition, teachers' expertise and level of qualification play an important role in their attitude towards the use of MSA.

Another study by Benmamoun & Albirini (2016) investigates whether learning a standard variety is similar to learning a new language. The study compares patterns of Standard Arabic acquisition by heritage speakers to patterns of those learning

Standard Arabic as a second language. Moreover, the researchers examine the influence of colloquial varieties on the acquisition of Standard Arabic. The findings show that both groups performed in a relatively similar way in which they encountered similar difficulties and produced similar error patterns. However, heritage speakers showed positive and negative influence of colloquial Arabic whereas L2 learners did not display any clear transfer effects from English.

In the realm of diglossia in social media, Qudah (2017) conducted a study on Jordanian Arabic diglossia in social media in order to identify the circumstances under which diglossic behavior appears in different social media tools, specifically Twitter and Facebook, and its effects on Standard Arabic. The study concludes that Standard Arabic is used for political issues, news and religion, whereas the (L) variety is used for personal topics as well as topics that relate to fashion, sports, and music. As for Arabic diglossia in the media, a study by Alshamrani (2008) investigates Arabic diglossia in some Arabic TV stations and the circumstances under which each of the two varieties were used. The findings confirm the use of both varieties and indicate that their use depends on the context of TV stations, the type of programs in which they occurred as well as the audience background.

Chelghoum (2017) examines the effects of social network sites on language use as well as diglossia in Arabic. In order to investigate the use of languages in Facebook, seventy-eight Arab Facebook users participated in an online survey. The findings indicate that the participants chose English as the most dominant language in social communication and chose Arabic dialects in online Facebook chats. The results also show that many participants favored the use of Modern Standard Arabic in the majority of their posts.

Abandah et al. (2015) investigates the status of the Arabic language in social networking and mobile phone communications. The study aims at classifying the quality of languages and codes used in online platforms. These include Facebook, Twitter, news sites, blogging sites, and mobile phone short messages. Large portions of text were collected and analyzed in terms of code, channel, context sender, and message. The study concludes that colloquial Arabic was the common medium for casual conversations, especially in exchanging messages on Facebook, whereas blog

and news platforms recorded the highest percentage of Standard Arabic. However, there was a high percentage of mixed language in news sites. According to the authors, users often use colloquial words alongside Standard Arabic in order to supplement their messages and facilitate the conveyance of their feelings and ideas.

Although a number of studies were conducted on diglossia in the Arab-speaking world, there is a scarcity of literature dedicated to investigating the use of (L) varieties in formal settings on Twitter. Furthermore, as the majority of official governmental and academic Twitter accounts serve to inform and assist the general public, it is necessary to explore the issue of public responses to shed light on their perspectives and reactions. The significance of the current study stems from the need to bridge the gap in the literature due to the lack of research on using (L) varieties in the realm of social media, specifically within the context of Twitter. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the use of Saudi colloquial varieties of Arabic in Saudi formal Twitter accounts, specifically in relation to its frequency and the public response towards it. In addition, the study inspects whether the demographic factors of age, gender, and the level of education have any effect on people's preference towards the use of Arabic colloquial varieties in formal settings.

### **3. Research questions**

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are the Saudi colloquial varieties of Arabic used among Saudi formal Twitter accounts compared to the Standard Arabic variety?
2. What are the public responses to the instances of the colloquial varieties in these accounts?
3. Do the demographic factors of age, gender, and education have any effect on people's preference towards the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings?

#### **4. Data collection**

Twelve formal Twitter accounts composed equally of governmental and academic accounts were investigated in this study. A total of one thousand and two hundred tweets, the last one hundred tweets from each account, were examined to inspect the frequency of the occurrence of tweets written in colloquial varieties in relation to tweets written in Standard Arabic. The sample excluded retweets from other accounts, pinned tweets, and tweets in English to restrict the sample to Arabic tweets and, therefore, provide valid and reliable results. In addition, replies to tweets written in colloquial varieties were inspected to examine public response to these tweets.

In order to confirm the results of the qualitative analysis of the public perspectives, a semi-structured interview guide was designed to elicit the public's opinions and points of view on the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings on Twitter. A total of thirty male and female participants, fifteen of each, were interviewed and recorded. The interviews were all conducted in the participants' mother tongue, which is Arabic, and then were translated into English. Participants included informants from both genders, different age groups, and different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. A consent form was handed to all participants who read, signed, and returned it to the researcher.

#### **5. Results and discussion**

The analysis of all the tweets in the formal Twitter accounts investigated in the study showed that 91.67% of tweets were written in Standard Arabic whereas only 8.33% of tweets were written in colloquial varieties. This provides an answer to the first research question that seeks to compare the use of colloquial varieties to Standard Arabic in formal Twitter accounts. Table (1) below shows the frequencies and percentages of tweets written in the colloquial varieties and Standard Arabic in both governmental and academic accounts.



<b>Governmental accounts</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Colloquial varieties</b>	<b>Standard Arabic</b>
	Frequency	43	557
	Percentage	7.17%	92.83%
<b>Academic accounts</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Colloquial varieties</b>	<b>Standard Arabic</b>
	Frequency	57	543
	Percentage	9.5%	90.5%
<b>All formal accounts</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Colloquial varieties</b>	<b>Standard Arabic</b>
	Frequency	100	1100
	Percentage	8.33%	91.67%

Table 1. Frequency of Colloquial and Standard Arabic Tweets in Formal Twitter Accounts

In relation to governmental Twitter accounts, the researcher observed that the majority of official governmental accounts restricted their tweets to Standard Arabic for formality. The accounts that included colloquial tweets, such as the ones investigated in this study, were governmental accounts which were closely related to services provided to the public such as housing and the healthcare context. Nonetheless, even in such accounts, the use of Standard Arabic highly exceeded the use of colloquial varieties. The frequency of colloquial varieties among all governmental accounts was within the same range, which was from 5 to 10% of their tweets.

Academic Twitter accounts showed a noticeable tendency to remain very formal in their accounts and avoid the use of colloquial varieties in their tweets. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no public universities in Saudi Arabia used any colloquial varieties in their accounts. All the universities that tweeted in colloquial varieties were private. Therefore, the academic accounts investigated in the current study included official accounts of two private universities along with two public and two private colleges, all based in Saudi Arabia. Although all the academic accounts investigated in the study used colloquial varieties in their tweets, the occurrences of colloquial tweets in the accounts of public colleges were much lower than those found in the accounts of private universities and colleges. This could be attributed to a trend that has spread

lately in which colloquial varieties are used as a marketing strategy to attract customers and create a sense of solidarity with them.

The second research question aimed to inspect the public responses to the instances of colloquial varieties in the accounts included in the present study. The analysis of replies to tweets written in colloquial varieties in governmental accounts showed a variety of responses, sometimes irrelevant to the content of the tweet. These responses varied from general comments on the topic, irrelevant questions and irrelevant comments to even some sarcastic comments. Other replies included criticism on the content of the tweet as well as the services provided by the governmental institution. In some accounts, users totally ignored the contents of the tweets and directed some inquiries to the governmental institution. The majority of replies to tweets written in colloquial varieties in formal governmental Twitter accounts were very positive as they included high praise on the content of tweets and were very well received by the public. However, there were some comments criticizing the use of colloquial Arabic in writing tweets. The following excerpt from a governmental account shows a controversy of opinion in an exchange of conversation between two Twitter users over the use of colloquial varieties in formal accounts.

*User 1: ara an yatemala Ea'adat annadhar fi alqa'imeen a'ala hesab alwezarah wa estebdalohom bimotakhassiseen fi alloghah. Famaqam kamaqam wezarat assehha yajeb a'alaiha estikhdam alloghah ala'arabiya alfos'ha wa laisa allahja ala'amiiyya wa thalika le edh'har athaqafa ala'arabiya. Wa in aradtom estibdalaha bil'a'amiiyyah falyakon honaka a'adlon fi estikhdam jameea' allahjat wa laisat annajdiyyah faqat.*

User 1: I call for a reconsideration of who is to be in charge of managing the ministry's Twitter account and a replacement of the current individuals with ones who are specialized in the Arabic language. A prestigious official account such as the account of the Ministry of Health should only use Standard Arabic and not colloquial Arabic in order to show the Arabic culture to readers. If you wish to use colloquial Arabic, at least be fair and use different colloquial varieties and not just the Najdi colloquial variety'.

*User 2: Bela'aks ana ashoof allahjah al'a'miiyyah "albaidha" tawsal akthar men eshtikhdam alfos'ha, Lea'n hathi alvidyouwat attaw'awiyah mowajjahah*

*lelmojtama' bkel ekhtilafatah kebar sin, atfal, mota'allimeen, ghair mota'allimeen.  
Fala'amiyaah momken tshed kebar assin mathalan akthar men alfos'ha.*

User 2: 'On the contrary, I think using the 'white' colloquial dialect delivers the meaning to a wider range of people than the range Standard Arabic can reach. Such educational videos in which colloquial Arabic is used are directed to all the different strata of society: old and young, literate and illiterate etc. Therefore, colloquial Arabic can, for example, attract the elderly more than Standard Arabic'.

As evident in the conversation from the excerpt, the two users have different perspectives in relation to the use of colloquial varieties in formal Twitter accounts. The first user believes that it is inappropriate to use colloquial varieties in official and formal settings. He also adds that if they must use colloquial varieties, it is unfair to only use the Najdi variety of the colloquial varieties. The other user objects to the criticism of using colloquial varieties in formal accounts and explains that the use of colloquial varieties in videos to spread awareness among people can deliver the meaning to a wider range of people than the range Standard Arabic could reach.

As for replies to colloquial tweets in academic accounts, they were considerably less than those found in governmental accounts. Types of engagement included general comments, irrelevant comments, inquiries, student complaints, as well as some positive and funny comments from students. Similar to the overall nature of response towards colloquial tweets in governmental accounts, the majority of replies to colloquial tweets in academic accounts were positive as the tweets were mostly well-received. There were no recorded objections to the use of colloquial Arabic in the investigated academic accounts.

The third research question sought to examine whether age, gender, or the level of education have any effect on people's preference towards the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings. Thirty participants from different genders, age groups, and educational levels were interviewed and were asked about their perspectives regarding the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings in general, and in governmental and academic accounts specifically. The results showed that the use of Standard Arabic was favored over the use of colloquial varieties in all settings. Table (2)

provides an overview of the attitudes of participants towards the use of Standard Arabic and colloquial varieties in formal Twitter accounts.

Gender	Participant Number	Age	Education	Formal settings in general			Governmental settings			Academic settings		
				SA	CV	N	SA	CV	N	SA	CV	N
Male	1	51 & above	Ph.D.	✓			✓			✓		
	2	51 & above	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	3	36-40	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	4	46-50	Secondary school	✓			✓			✓		
	5	21-25	BA			✓	✓			✓		
	6	15-20	Secondary school	✓			✓			✓		
	7	41-45	BA		✓				✓	✓		
	8	31-35	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	9	51 & above	Secondary school	✓			✓			✓		
	10	31-35	BA			✓	✓			✓		
	11	36-40	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	12	15-20	Intermediate school			✓	✓				✓	
	13	36-40	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	14	15-20	Secondary school		✓			✓		✓		
	15	31-35	MA			✓			✓	✓		
Female	16	51 & above	Ph.D.	✓			✓			✓		
	17	31-35	MA	✓			✓			✓		
	18	26-30	MA	✓			✓			✓		
	19	51 & above	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	20	51 & above	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	21	41-45	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	22	41-45	BA			✓	✓			✓		
	23	15-20	Intermediate school	✓			✓			✓		
	24	15-20	Secondary school	✓			✓				✓	
	25	26-30	BA	✓			✓			✓		
	26	26-30	BA	✓					✓	✓		
	27	21-25	Secondary school	✓			✓					✓
	28	21-25	Secondary school	✓			✓			✓		
	29	21-25	BA		✓				✓		✓	
	30	15-20	Secondary school	✓			✓			✓		
Results of all participants			Frequency	22	3	5	25	1	4	26	3	1
			Percentage	73.33 %	10%	16.67 %	83.33 %	3.33 %	13.33 %	86.67 %	10%	3.33 %

Table 2. Participants' attitudes towards the use of colloquial and Standard Arabic tweets in formal Twitter accounts

To examine whether gender affects participants' attitudes towards the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings, a comparison was drawn between male and female participants' attitudes. The analysis of participants' attitudes in formal settings in general showed that both genders favored the use of Standard Arabic over colloquial varieties, but female participants exhibited a higher preference towards the use of Standard Arabic with a percentage of 86.67% whereas the percentage of male participants was 60%. This is in alignment with many previous studies suggesting that women use more standard forms whereas men use more vernacular forms (See Labov 1990, Holmes & Wilson 2017, Holmes & Meyerhoff 2003). It is worth mentioning that this lower percentage does not mean that the rest of male participants favored colloquial varieties because 26.67% of male participants expressed that they were neutral, and only 13.33% favored colloquial varieties. In governmental and academic settings, there were no significant differences between the results obtained from male and female participants. Table (3) shows the distribution of the preferences of male and female participants regarding the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings in general, governmental settings, and academic settings.

Gender	Occurrences	Formal settings in general			Governmental settings			Academic settings		
		SA	CV	Neutral	SA	CV	Neutral	SA	CV	Neutral
Male	Frequency	9	2	4	12	1	2	14	1	0
	Percentage	60%	13.33%	26.67%	80%	6.67%	13.33%	93.33%	6.67%	0%
Female	Frequency	13	1	1	13	0	2	12	2	1
	Percentage	86.67%	6.67%	6.67%	86.67%	0%	13.33%	80%	13.33%	6.67%

Table 3. The preferences of male and female participants

As for the age variable, there was a consensus among all the participants aged 46 and above that the proper form to be used in all formal settings is Standard Arabic. Their objection to the use of colloquial varieties was observed in the negative adjectives they used to describe their use in formal settings. For example, a participant said that such use makes formal accounts lack professionalism, formality and

seriousness. Another participant even described this use as 'totally unacceptable and also disastrous'. Another age group which includes participants aged from 36-40 also showed a 100% consensus towards the use of Standard Arabic. Other age groups included different preferences, but the use of Standard Arabic was favored more than colloquial varieties among all age groups. The overall tendency regarding the age factor is that the younger the participant, the more likely he or she is to accept the use of colloquial varieties. Table (4) provides the statistics in relation to the age groups of the participants in the study and the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings.

Age	Occurrences	Formal settings in general			Governmental settings			Academic settings		
		SA	CV	Neutral	SA	CV	Neutral	SA	CV	Neutral
51 & above	Frequency	6	0	0	6	0	0	6	0	0
	Percentage	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
46-50	Frequency	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
	Percentage	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
41-45	Frequency	1	1	1	2	0	1	3	0	0
	Percentage	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	66.67%	0%	33.33%	100%	0%	0%
36-40	Frequency	3	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0
	Percentage	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
31-35	Frequency	2	0	2	3	0	1	4	0	0
	Percentage	50%	0%	50%	75%	0%	25%	100%	0%	0%
26-30	Frequency	3	0	0	2	0	1	3	0	0
	Percentage	100%	0%	0%	66.67%	0%	33.33%	100%	0%	0%
21-25	Frequency	2	1	1	3	0	1	2	1	1
	Percentage	50%	25%	25%	75%	0%	25%	50%	25%	25%
15-20	Frequency	4	1	1	5	1	0	4	2	0
	Percentage	66.67%	16.67%	16.67%	83.33%	16.67%	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%

Table 4. The preferences of participants according to their age groups

The third demographic variable investigated in this study is the level of education. Almost all participants from different educational levels have a tendency to prefer Standard Arabic over colloquial varieties. Table (5) illustrates the frequencies and percentages of the preferences of participants according to their level of education.

Education	Occurrences	Formal settings in general			Governmental settings			Academic settings		
		SA	CV	Neutral	SA	CV	Neutral	SA	CV	Neutral
Ph.D.	Frequency	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
	Percentage	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
MA	Frequency	2	0	1	2	0	1	3	0	0
	Percentage	66.67%	0%	33.33%	66.67%	0%	33.33%	100%	0%	0%
BA	Frequency	10	2	3	12	0	3	14	1	0
	Percentage	66.67%	13.33%	20%	80%	0%	20%	93.33%	6.67%	0%
Secondary school	Frequency	7	1	0	7	1	0	6	1	1
	Percentage	87.5%	12.5%	0%	87.5%	12.5%	0%	75%	12.5%	12.5%
Intermediate school	Frequency	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	0
	Percentage	50%	0%	50%	100%	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%

Table 5. The preferences of participants according to their level of education

As seen in table (5), the overall tendency is to prefer Standard Arabic to colloquial varieties. However, percentages varied according to the level of education from one group to another. For example, Ph.D. holders all preferred the use of Standard Arabic in all settings followed by secondary school students with a percentage of 87.5%. It should be noted, though, that the most influential variable that seems to affect the preference of Standard Arabic over colloquial varieties is age rather than the level of education. This could be attributed to the fact that some of the high school graduate participants consulted in the study were aged 46 and above. Their presence in this educational level category increased the percentage of preference. Therefore, there appears to be a correlation between Standard Arabic preference and age; the older the participant, the more likely they are to prefer Standard Arabic.

Overall, the population consulted in the study indicated that there was an observable tendency to use colloquial varieties and especially for advertising purposes. Some even believe that Standard Arabic is rarely used in this day and age, which is somewhat an extreme statement. Some participants did not seem to mind the use of what was described as 'simplified Arabic', which is an intermediate mixed variety known as Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA). According to Mitchell (1986), ESA has risen from the interaction of Standard Arabic and vernacular Arabic creating a variety where local features are reduced by way of koineization or borrowing from Standard Arabic. In the analysis of the tweets in the investigated formal accounts, it was observed that the colloquial tweets were not always entirely vernacular but sometimes were rather a mix of Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic. In this study, they were counted as colloquial tweets to avoid confusion with tweets that were written entirely in Standard Arabic.

There were some observations made by the interviewees in relation to their preference of the use of Standard Arabic in formal settings. They described it as more expressive, eloquent, and many referred to it as a way to reflect seriousness and professionalism. Three participants attributed their favoritism of Standard Arabic to its link to their religion and heritage. 'It is the language of the Quran, and we take pride in it', two participants explained. The third stated that its position as the language of the Quran necessitated that we preserve it.

Other reasons why Standard Arabic is the 'correct' way to tweet, as described by an interviewee, is that it has a unified meaning that is easier to understand. Many participants explained that because there were differences within the Saudi colloquial varieties, it might be difficult to understand the intended meaning. This comment is in alignment with the response described earlier by a Twitter user who said in a reply to a colloquial tweet written that Standard Arabic should be used, and that if they must use colloquial varieties, it is unfair to only use the Najdi variety of the colloquial varieties. This clearly reflects the difficulty he faces reading tweets in a particular colloquial variety that differs from the one he speaks. In addition, Standard Arabic addresses all Arabs, a participant stated, and therefore is comprehensible to expatriate workers in



Saudi Arabia who encounter a difficulty when colloquial varieties are used in formal Twitter accounts of the country they reside in.

An interesting observation made by some participants was related to credibility. Many indicated that only tweets written in Standard Arabic were credible. They explained that tweets in Standard Arabic are taken seriously, and that tweets written in colloquial varieties might be used for sarcasm. A participant even said that if you read a tweet in colloquial varieties in formal Twitter accounts, 'you might think that the account is hacked'.

The majority of participants insisted on the importance of using Standard Arabic, especially in academic accounts and even more than governmental accounts. Academic accounts are the representatives of education, they believe, and are supposed to set an example to the public. A participant described the use of colloquial tweets in academic accounts as a 'disaster' and explained that whoever does that is 'trying to market himself on the expense of his culture'. A participant who is currently a student was completely against the use of colloquial varieties in academia. She specifically commented on the role of academic accounts as an example to students and stated that their abandonment of Standard Arabic will surely affect students' use of Standard Arabic and cause them to neglect it. 'Why should I use [Standard Arabic] if they themselves don't use it?', she exclaimed, emphasising the need to reject this phenomenon and change this attitude and encourage the use of Standard Arabic especially in academic accounts.

Finally, the participants were asked whether they would retweet or like a tweet from a formal Twitter account written in colloquial Arabic. Their responses varied between total rejection and acceptance. Three participants were neutral. Twelve participants stated that they will never retweet such tweets. Half the participants did not have a problem and said they would retweet colloquial tweets in formal accounts but some of them restricted doing so to certain conditions. The main reason why those would accept to retweet colloquial tweets was the importance of the tweet and the need to use it to spread awareness. Another reason was related to the topic of the tweet and whether it is interesting to the user. A participant provided a point of view

that differed from all other participants in which she stated that 'it depends on the topic and to which degree it is colloquial. If it is in simplified Arabic that is fine but not totally in a colloquial variety'. As for tweet likes, many participants provided the same opinion regarding tweets and likes altogether. However, two participants had different opinions. The first stated that it is possible to retweet a tweet written in colloquial if it is important or by a certain influential person, but he would not like it. On the other hand, the second user stated that he would like tweets to keep them for future reference but would not retweet them as long as they are in colloquial varieties.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study investigated the use of colloquial varieties in formal governmental and academic Twitter accounts. The frequency of colloquial tweets in relation to tweets in Standard Arabic as well as the public responses to them were surveyed. The findings showed a significant preference towards the use of Standard Arabic compared to the use of colloquial varieties in all formal settings. The results also showed an overall positive attitude in the replies towards colloquial tweets in formal Twitter accounts. In addition, the study inspected whether the demographic variables of age, gender, and the level of education have any effect on people's preference towards the use of colloquial varieties in formal settings. The results showed that Standard Arabic was mostly preferred by the general public regardless of the differences in demographic factors. Overall, there is an alignment between the preference of the interviewed participants of Standard Arabic and the governmental and academic accounts' tendency to use Standard Arabic more than colloquial varieties.

Based on the researcher's observations, Saudis used the standard and the colloquial varieties interchangeably on Twitter. Albeit used in both forms, it is apparent in users' reactions and responses that the stigma attached to the dialectal forms is still somewhat existent, and the Standard variety is still preferred and perceived as the prestigious one. The rise of social media consequently affected the status of the

colloquial varieties as they seem to be permissible in modern modes of communication.

Studies on other forms of media have concluded that the more frequent use of colloquial varieties, which goes against the stream of solely using Standard Arabic as a medium of communication, is pushing boundaries and changing perspectives regarding what is permissible in Arab public discourse. As globalization continues, it is no longer a strict matter of black or white, i.e. supporters and opponents in the Arab-speaking world, as there are those who try to steer a middle course towards a less controversial description of the diglossic situation in Arabic.

An increase of written vernacular forms following the Arab Spring in 2011 was observed (Faris 2012). This was facilitated by social media outlets (Caubet & Miller as cited in de Ruiter & Ziamari 2018). Other studies have suggested that through social media, vernacular forms are making their ways into written languages. New social media is paving the way for vernacular written forms into the mainstream.

While investigations of the prevalence of diglossic situations in social media are abundant, further research should be dedicated to the phenomenon of written vernacular forms surfacing as a medium of communication in formal settings. Could this be an opportunity to standardize vernacular forms?

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**Appendix**  
**Analysis of tweets in formal Twitter accounts**

**Governmental accounts**

Account number	Occurrences	Colloquial varieties	Standard Arabic
1	Frequency	6	94
	Percentage	6%	94%
2	Frequency	5	95
	Percentage	5%	95%
3	Frequency	9	91
	Percentage	9%	91%
4	Frequency	6	94
	Percentage	6%	94%
5	Frequency	10	90
	Percentage	10%	90%
6	Frequency	7	93
	Percentage	7%	93%

**Overall occurrences in governmental accounts**

Occurrences	Colloquial varieties	Standard Arabic
Frequency	43	557
Percentage	7.17%	92.83%

**Academic accounts:**

Account number	Occurrences	Colloquial varieties	Standard Arabic
1	Frequency	10	90
	Percentage	10%	90%
2	Frequency	21	79
	Percentage	21%	79%
3	Frequency	4	96
	Percentage	4%	96%
4	Frequency	15	85
	Percentage	15%	85%
5	Frequency	6	94
	Percentage	6%	94%
6	Frequency	1	99
	Percentage	1%	99%

**Overall occurrences in academic accounts**

Occurrences	Colloquial varieties	Standard Arabic
Frequency	57	543
Percentage	9.5%	90.5%