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Cross-Cultural Semiotic Representations in Online Dating: A Comparative Analysis of Male and Female Non-Verbal Cues on *Muzz* and *Tinder* Platforms

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Dedication

TIME CAPSULE

To the bright-eyed dreamer who thought this would take three months:

Oh, sweet summer child—your optimism was contagious.

To the woman holding this finished work:

Look at you now: wiser, stronger, and (somehow) still standing. Every rewritten page brought you here.

To the hearts who carried me:

Mom – Your calls were my anchor, each one a reminder that I was never alone. Every "Did you eat today?" was a love language, every tear you shed for my struggles are reminder of your devotion. You believed in me, even when I doubted myself. You nourished both my body and soul all along this journey…

Dad – Your quiet pride was my steady rhythm; I kept going just to hear you say, "You've got this."

My sisters, Taqwa, Salsabil, and my little Oumaima! my pen supplier.

Chaima – My first call in every crisis. The human Ctrl+Z for every disaster.

Mrs. Karima – The guide who answered every panicked question with patience, turning my "I can't" into "I did."

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Tuck this between your drafts. When you find it years from now insh' Allah, may it remind you of how much you were loved—and how far that love carried you.

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Dedication

Every challenging work needs self-effort as well as guidance of elders, especially those who are very close to our hearts.

I dedicate this humble work to:

The pure soul of my father, who taught me to trust Allah, believe in hard work, and that so much could be done with little. Though his physical presence was brief in my life, his spirit remains a constant source of strength.

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All my friends with whom I shared university life with its lights and shadows.

All my teachers.

All those who believe in me and prayed for my success.

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List of Abbreviations

DS: Dating Semiosphere

GPS: Global Positioning System

HCI: Human-Computer Interaction

IAEA: Indian Association for Educational Assessment

LBRTD: Location-Based Real-Time Dating

NEP: National Education Policy

OD: Online Dating

SCPT: Semiotic Cultural Psychology Theory

TD: Traditional Dating

TSM: Tartu-Moscow School

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Abstract

Semiotics remains vital for decoding cultural representations, including digital spaces like dating platforms, where identity is constructed through visual and symbolic elements. However, comparative studies between faith-based and secular platforms using semiotics are few to none. This study bridges this gap by analyzing how users on Muzz (Islamic-focused) and *Tinder* (secular) employ non-verbal visual strategies to craft culturally appropriate identities.Using a qualitative comparative approach, we integrate Lotman'ssemiosphere theory and Barthes' denotation and connotation framework to examine twenty purposively selected profiles (balanced by platform and gender). The research investigates how cultural values manifest through visual semiotic strategies and examines denotative and connotative meanings embedded within users' self-presentation choices.The findings show that both platforms use similar visual elements like clothing and backgrounds, but these carry different cultural meanings. On Muzz, formal attire signals traditional provider roles and religious commitment, while the same clothing on *Tinder* represents lifestyle sophistication. Religious symbols appear exclusively on *Muzz* profiles, with hijabs and Mecca photographs communicating spiritual identity, whereas *Tinder* users display tattoos and body modifications as expressions of individual emancipation.Users adapt their self-presentation strategies to match each platform's cultural expectations while maintaining authentic identity expression. This research contributes to digital cultural semiotics by providing the first systematic comparative analysis of faith-based versus secular dating platforms, establishing methodological frameworks for future cross-cultural digital communication studies

Keywords**:** cross-cultural analysis, cultural identity, digital dating, online communication, semiotics

General Introduction

Background of the study

The intersection of technology and romance was culturally visible in Hal Ashby's 1971 film *Harold and Maude*, which depicted society's first encounter with automated matchmaking through the "National Computer Dating Service." This fictional representation paralleled real developments happening simultaneously, as Harvard undergraduates Jeff Tarr and Vaughan Morrill had launched Operation Match in 1965, one of America's first computer dating services (Mathew, 2019). What began as cinematic imagination has evolved into today's reality, where digital platforms fundamentally reshape how people seek romantic connections, representing a significant departure from traditional dating approaches in their emphasis on visual self-presentation (Ranzini& Lutz, 2017).

Contemporary research(Baker &Tambe, 2020; Yip &Aune, 2021) reveal significant variations in digital dating practices across cultural and religious contexts. Kim and Yoon (2018) demonstrated that digital courtship practices exhibit distinct semiotic patterns reflecting culture-specific understandings of romance and relationship formation. This observation extends particularly to faith-based platforms, where Fader (2016) argued that religious values fundamentally influence both interpersonal communication and identity construction, creating distinct semiotic environments shaped by religious beliefs.

The landscape of modern dating has shifted dramatically, as Rosenfeld et al. (2019) indicate that internet meetings through dating apps increasingly outperform traditional introductions through family and friends. Moreover, Digital platforms now facilitate connections that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, fundamentally altering relationship formation patterns. Within this digital ecosystem, two distinct approaches have emerged: secular platforms like *Tinder* and faith-based applications like Muzz.

For instance, *Tinder*, launched in 2012, revolutionized dating by emphasizing immediacy and visual appeal through its signature swiping mechanism. As Smith and Duggan (2013) noted how the platform's design encourages snap judgments based on photographs and brief biographical information, thereby, creating a fast-paced interaction model that often prioritizes casual encounters over long-term commitment. Ultimately,this approach reflects broader cultural trends toward instant gratification and surface-level connections.

In contrast to secular platforms, *Muzz* specifically serves Muslim singles seeking meaningful relationships with partners who share their religious values and culturalbackgrounds. Notably, the platform integrates Islamic principles throughout the courtship process, reflecting how relationships in Muslim communities intertwine deeply with cultural and religious traditions. As Nawaz (2021) emphasized, family involvement, community reputation, and core Islamic values like compatibility and respect significantly influence relationship formation. Similarly, Alshahrani (2022) highlighted how *Muzz* requires detailed profiles featuring religious beliefs, family values, and relationship expectations, thereby fostering connections based on shared faith rather than purely physical attraction.

Despite contrasting approaches, both platforms share foundational elements identified by Fiore and Donath (2004): personal profiles with demographics, text responses, and photographs, plus matching mechanisms. However, as Whitty and Gavin (2015) argued, apparent similarities mask fundamental cultural distinctions in how users conceptualize relationship goals, making cross-cultural semiotic analysis essential for understanding digital courtship practices.

This study employs a semiotic framework to comparatively analyze how cultural and religious values shape nonverbal self-presentation strategies on faith-based (*Muzz*) and

secular (*Tinder*) dating platforms, revealing how users negotiate identity, authenticity, and platform-specific expectations through visual cues such as clothing, symbols, and settings.

Statement of the problem

Online dating platforms serve as semiotic environments where users construct digital identities through strategic visual presentations (Finkel et al., 2012; David & Cambre, 2016). While existing research has documented self-presentation strategies and gender performance across various platforms (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Jones & Lee, 2019), these studies predominantly examine platforms within single cultural frameworks. This approach creates a critical gap in understanding how semiotic strategies vary between faith-based and secular dating environments (Chen, 2021). Specifically, there is insufficient comparative analysis of how users navigate the tension between authentic self-representation and culturally-specific platform expectations, particularly when contrasting Islamic marriage-focused platforms with secular relationship-oriented spaces.social expectations (Jones & Lee, 2019)

This knowledge gap creates significant limitations not only for understanding how traditional cultural values adapt to modern digital contexts but also for comprehending how users negotiate complex identity performances across culturally distinct digital environments. Ultimately, without this understanding, we cannot adequately comprehend how digital technologies mediate cultural identity construction in our increasingly globalized yet culturally diverse society, nor can we fully grasp the implications for platform design, cultural preservation, and cross-cultural digital communication (Al-Mansoori, 2022). Therefore, this research attempt to answer the following research questions:

a. How do male and female users on *Muzz* and *Tinder* employ nonverbal cues to construct and communicate identity across different cultural contexts?

b. What denotative and connotative meanings emerge from the nonverbal cues used by male and female users on *Muzz* and *Tinder* in different cultural contexts?

c. In what ways does cultural semiotics shape the portrayal of male and female identities differently in faith-based versus globalized secular dating profiles?

Aims of the Study

Given the significant gap in comparative semiotic analysis between faith-based and secular dating platforms, this study aims to examine how male and female users construct culturally appropriate digital identities through nonverbal visual elements across different cultural frameworks. Specifically, the research will analyze the semiotic strategies employed on *Muzz* (faith-based) and *Tinder* (secular) to understand how cultural boundaries and values shape self-presentation in digital dating environments.

Significance of the Study

This study addresses a critical need in our increasingly digitized and culturally diverse global society, where understanding how traditional values adapt to digital spaces is essential for fostering cross-cultural communication and digital inclusivity. As online dating platforms reshape relationship formation across cultural boundaries, insights into identity construction in these spaces become vital for platform designers, scholars, and policymakers working to create culturally sensitive digital environments.

At the academic level, this research contributes to digital cultural semiotics by providing the first comprehensive comparative analysis of faith-based versus secular dating platform semiotics, particularly within the understudied Algerian context. The study extends theoretical frameworks by applying Lotman's (1990) semiosphere theory and Barthes' (1977) semiotic analysis to contemporary digital phenomena, bridging classical semiotics with modern digital ethnography. Additionally, the methodological framework establishes a replicable model for future studies on culturally sensitive online environments, enriching digital ethnography methodologies.

Research Methodology

To address the research aims, this study implements a qualitative comparative approach specifically designed to examine how cultural values manifest through visual semiotic strategies across different digital dating environments. This methodological choice is particularly well-suited to the research aims as it facilitates both in-depth interpretation of cultural meanings and systematic cross-platform comparison. Building on established theoretical frameworks, the study integrates Lotman's (1990) semiosphere theory, which conceptualizes digital platforms as distinct cultural spaces with unique boundaries and codes, with Barthes' (1977) theory of denotation and connotation, thereby creating a robust analytical toolkit for examining layered visual meanings.

Regarding sample selection, the research examines twenty carefully selected dating profiles, with equal representation from *Muzz* and *Tinder* and balanced gender distribution. These profiles were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure they exhibit clear cultural markers relevant to each platform's value system. This sample size was determined to be sufficient for achieving theoretical saturation while remaining practical for the intensive semiotic analysis required. For data collection, the study employs systematic content analysis of anonymized profile screenshots, focusing specifically on profiles that represent typical self-presentation strategies within each cultural context rather than exceptional cases.

The analytical procedure unfolds through three methodical stages aligned with the theoretical framework. First, initial denotative analysis systematically catalogs literal visual elements across all profiles. Following this, subsequent connotative analysis applies cultural interpretation to uncover deeper meanings embedded in these visual

representations. Finally, comparative synthesis examines patterns and divergences between platforms, thus completing the comprehensive analytical process.

The structure of the study

This study is organized into two primary chapters that provide both theoretical foundation and practical application. The first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation through subdivided two sections that systematically examine the core concepts essential to the investigation, providing the necessary background knowledge for understanding the research domain. The second chapter presents the empirical component of the study, focusing on the practical application and analysis of the theoretical concepts established in the preceding chapter. This two-chapter structure ensures a logical progression from theoretical understanding to practical application, creating a cohesive framework for the entire investigation.

Accordingly, the first section concentrates on the nature of semiotics and cultural representation, with regard to the theoretical frameworks that connect both concepts. At this level, we provided a broad range of knowledge concerning definitions of cultural identity, the evolution of meaning-making from classical semiotics to digital environments, and the fundamental elements of semiotic analysis including signs, symbols, and cultural codes

As for the second section, the coverage was about online dating profiles and digital communication platforms. The beginning of the section focused on defining online dating, examining different platform types, and comparing online dating with traditional dating through points of parity and difference. Then, we moved to tackle the historical development of online dating, the characteristics of mobile dating applications, profile construction processes, and changing social attitudes toward digital romance.

The second chapter, which is dedicated to the practical part and the analysis of dating profiles, is divided into two main sections. The first section concentrates on the followed

methodology that appropriately enables the fulfilment of the research aim. More precisely, the section constitutes the study design, the unit of analysis, the description of selected dating platforms (*Muzz* and *Tinder*) and their profile construction mechanisms, data collection procedures including sampling strategy and ethical considerations, and analysis procedures. As for the second section, it is about data analysis and discussion of nonverbal representations within both platforms through Lotman's cultural semiotic perspective and Barthes's orders of signification, examining how cultural boundaries, center-periphery dynamics, and meaning-making processes operate within digital dating contexts; besides, the encountered limitations and some possible future studies.

Chapter One: Cultural Semiotic

Introduction

This chapter introduces the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research analysis of online dating profiles as cultural semiotic systems. Exploring how semiotics influences the meaning-making processes in digital self-presentation, and examining how identity and desire are communicated through signs and symbols in online contexts. Drawing on semiotics theories from Lotman, Barthes, Peirce, and Eco, we establish analytical approaches for understanding how dating profiles function simultaneously as cultural texts and strategic performances. This foundation allows us to examine how dating profiles both reflect and shape contemporary understandings of identity and relationship formation across different cultural contexts, addressing current gaps in research regarding the interplay between digital environments and semiotic practices.

1.1 Section one: Semiotics and Cultural Representation

1.1.1 The Semiotics of Cultural Identity and Representation

From a philosophical standpoint, the concept of representation has been debated for centuries. Plato, for instance, viewed reality as the ideal form, with representations being imperfect copies (Sofoulis, 2018). This suggests that representations are inherently flawed and can never fully capture the essence of reality. Avicenna's prophecy and veridical dreams highlights the privileged position of representation in understanding reality, particularly in the context of symbolic representation (Lizzini, 2018).

Nevertheless, from a semiotic point of view, representation actively constructs reality through systems of signs and symbols, this interpretation aligns closely with Peirce's framework, declaring that if “anything should be a sign, it must ‘represent’, as we say, something else, called its object …” (as cited in Thomas, 1973), means nothing is considered as a sign unless it significantly represents a certain object. Accordingly, in his seminal work

Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices .Hall(1997), asserted that when we study a cultural representation, we're not just looking at representation as a simple mirroring of the world. Instead, we're recognizing it as an active and constitutive process through which societies create and maintain their understanding of the world. To illustrate this concept, individuals who belong to a shared cultural space must possess a a common conceptual framework, visual representations, and ideological understandings that enable them to process and experience their environment in fundamentally similar ways (Hall, 1997)

Hall's (1997) cultural theory aligns with semiotic analysis to reveal how meaning emerges through complex interactions between signs, cultural codes, and power structures. Hall introduced three key approaches illustrating representation and semiotics intersection. First, the reflective approach: Hall describes this as the most straightforward view of representation, where language and signs function like a mirror, reflecting meanings that already exist in the world (Hall, 1997). Second, the intentional approach: This perspective focuses on the speaker or author's intended meaning. Hall explains that this approach recognizes that words and images mean what their creator intends them to mean (Hall, 1997). Ultimately, the constructionist approach: In this approach meaning is constructed through representational systems such as language, images, and other signs (Hall, 1997). The latter approach, in particular, aligns well with the semiotic theory by emphasizing how meaning is produced through systems of signs rather than existing naturally.

Drawing these threads together, Sarah Banet-Weiser's work of *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (2012) believes that in today's ‘media landscape’, ‘representation’ is more intricate as the distinction between authentic cultural expression and branded content becomes increasingly blurred. “The systems of representation that Hall identified now operate within a networked culture where meaning-making is simultaneously more democratic and more commercially controlled" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 37). This

conceptualization intersects with Lisa Nakamura's work *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet (2007*) that provides an important update to Hall's ideas in the context of digital culture:

> *"The representational systems Hall described have been fundamentally transformed by digital platforms, where cultural codes are not just shared but algorithmically amplified and modified. Identity and representation in digital spaces create new forms of cultural capital that both reinforce and challenge traditional systems of meaning-making"*. (Nakamura, 2007, p. 15).

Synthesizing these varied approaches, Hall's foundational work provides crucial insights into how cultures create meaning through representation, while scholars like Banet-Weiser and Nakamura demonstrate how digital technologies have transformed the landscape of cultural representation. Banet-Weiser (2012) and Nakamura (2007) works suggests that modern systems of representation operate through complex networks of human and algorithmic actors, creating what we might call "digital cultural codes". These developments don't invalidate Hall's framework but rather extend it into new territories of meaning-making and cultural production.

1.1.2 The Evolution of Cultural Meaning-Making: From Classical Semiotics theories to Digital Semiosphere

Drawing on the fact that semiotic theories provide a robust framework for understanding how meaning is generated and interpreted through signs and symbols; Peirce's renowned triadic model of signs (sign, object, interpretant) suggests that meaning is not inherent in signs themselves but is created through a process of interpretation. Unlike Saussure's dyadic model (which only includes the signifier & signified), Peirce emphasized that interpretation is an essential part of semiosis (the process of sign-making). Thus, a

representamen signifies something else to an individual within a specific context. It conveys meaning by generating an equivalent or even a more refined interpretation in the mind of the observer (Peirce, 1931-1958). This dynamic nature of Peirce's model highlights how communication and cultural representations evolve over time.

In parallel with this, Barthes' concept of myth as a second-order semiotic system is particularly valuable for understanding how cultural meanings are constructed, believing that representation of myth appears in a contradictory manner, it serves both as meaning and structure, being substantial in one aspect while lacking in another (Barthes, 1957). Barthes adapts Saussure's model of the sign, which consists of a signifier (the form the sign takes) and a signified (the concept it represents). In myth, however, this basic structure is complicated by a second order of signification. What was previously a complete sign (signifier + signified) in the first order becomes merely the signifier in the mythical order. This is where the ambiguity arises.

Drawing an analogy: the biosphere, the sphere of life, functions in a similar way to the semiosphere. Just as the semiosphere is a space of cultural meanings, the biosphere can be seen as a space of biological meanings (Markos, 2014) This perspective implies that life itself is inherently semiotic, involving sign processes at all levels of biological organization. This perspective extends classical semiotic theory by showing how meaning-making now operates through multiple, interconnected layers of human and technological interpretation.

1.1.3 Signs and Symbols: Basic Units of Semiotic Analysis

The concept of a sign varies depending on its contextual application where sign identification alters in accordance with specific criteria, which significantly addresses the nature of the relationship between two *relata*.

Equally important, signs as an inevitable part of the individual's daily life plays a pivotal role in meaning creation. In turn, they structure essential daily tasks such as traffic

movements, driving, eating, and even surviving in general. Furthermore, Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) draws attention to the fact that cultural contexts particularly influence the interpretation of certain phenomena as a result, meaning construction is highly dependent on communities' perceptions of surrounding signs. Arguing about the distinction between natural and conventional signs he highlighted that "The distinction between natural and conventional signs becomes particularly important when we consider how different cultures interpret the same phenomena. What appears 'natural' in one cultural context may be entirely conventional in another" (p. 45). Simply speaking, the difference depends on the way of interpterion from one social group to another.

According to Barthes (1964) the definition of a symbol, icon, index, or a signal is quite different to the definition of a sign in terms of the relationship between the object and the representamen. While commonly known about Peirce in his triadic modal, the trichotomy of index, icon and symbol are deemed to be three different forms of the sign itself. Thus, the interchangeable use of the two words symbol and sign is relatively wrong.

Symbols occupy a central position within semiotic theory, functioning as cultural repositories that encode complex meanings through conventional associations rather than resemblance or causality. In Peirce's triadic framework, symbols represent the most socially embedded sign type, operating through what he terms "habits" or established patterns of interpretation that emerge from collective usage and agreement. Danesi (2004) expands on this conception in *Messages, Signs, and Meanings* by positioning symbols as condensed cultural narratives that enable members of a community to access shared understandings through economical signification processes.

This capacity for compression appears prominently in Barthes' analysis in "Mythologies", where he demonstrates how cultural symbols function as vehicles for naturalized ideological content, simultaneously communicating denotative meaning while

activating networks of cultural associations that often remain unexamined (1972). From a complementary angle Lotman (1990) approaches symbols in *Universe of the Mind*, characterizing symbols as cultural mechanisms with remarkable temporal stability that serve as mnemonic devices preserving cultural memory across generations while simultaneously enabling creative reinterpretation within new contexts. This multifaceted understanding receives further elaboration in Sebeok's*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, which traces how symbols function across different domains from ritual to mathematics, consistently maintaining their fundamental property as conventional signs whose interpretation requires participation in cultural knowledge systems (1994).

More recently, Danesi (2017) *The Semiotics of Emoji* examines how digital environments generate new symbolic systems that nevertheless operate according to established semiotic principles, demonstrating how visual symbols in digital communication compress emotional and pragmatic content into standardized forms while remaining open to cultural reinterpretation and extension. Together, these perspectives reveal symbols as dynamic entities that serve simultaneously as stabilizing forces within cultural systems and as sites of creative meaning-making that enable cultures to maintain coherence while adapting to changing communicative needs.

1.1.4 Cultural Codes: Systems of Signification

Conventionality plays a fundamental role in meaning-making, as cultural codes establish shared interpretative frameworks within different communities. Subsequently, a code is basically the set of rules that govern a specific arrangement and sequence of given elements that eventually create a shared conception. In parallel with this line, Sebeok's (1973) argues that "Codes represent the regulatory principles behind the organization of sign systems. They are not merely rules for communication but frameworks for understanding" (p. 152), it highlights those codes, in a semiotic sense, are more than just simple guidelines for

transmitting information, but rather, fundamental structures that shape how we interpret and make sense of the world around us.

This perspective aligns with Leeds -Hurwitz (1993) assertion, that cultural codes are systemic "Cultural codes are not simply collections of signs but organized systems" (p. 76) suggesting that interpretation is always mediated by culturally specific structures rather than being inherently natural. Besides reinforcing their role in meaning making within a given cultural context where signs "can be meaningfully combined and interpreted within a specific cultural context. These codes operate at multiple levels simultaneously" (p. 76). What is more, Sebeok's (1973) added that what is often mistaken for universal meaning is, in reality, deeply embedded in culturally coded understanding, indeed, these perspectives emphasize that meaning is constructed through cultural codes that both regulate and shape perception across different societies.

Sebeok, (1973) and Leeds-Hurwitz, (1993) both recognized cultural codes as fundamental frameworks that transcend mere communication and function as interpretive systems that shape individuals understanding of reality. Their perspectives complement each other, Sebeok, (1973) emphasizes that codes are regulatory principles behind the organization of sign systems that structure our interpretation of the world. While Leeds-Hurwitz, (1993) reinforces this by characterizing cultural codes as "organized systems" rather than random collections of signs.

Together, their work point at the fact that codes function as invisible yet powerful forces that both constrain and enable meaning-making within cultural contexts.

1.1.5 The Interplay of Signs, Symbols, and Codes in cultural communication:

The interplay of signs, symbols, and codes in cultural communication is a dynamic process, as illustrated in Maletic's (1987) work on movement and dance, which highlights how semiotic elements interact to convey meaning, that "The body itself becomes a complex

sign system, where movement, space, and expression create layered meanings through their interaction with cultural codes" (p. 45). This perspective basically highlights how nonverbal communication is not superficial, but rather central to how humans construct and interpret meaning. Additionally, considering these perspective, Leeds-Hurwitz, (1993) synthesizes this perspective, arguing that meaningful communication does not arise from isolated signs but rather from complex networks were multiple sign systems function within culturally defined frameworks.

This dynamic process creates what we “might call 'meaning networks' where signs reinforce, modify, or contradict each other” (Leeds-Hurwitz,1993,p. 124).his concept of “meaning networks” significantly captures how communication functions as an ecosystem rather than a linear exchange.

This point of view in return shifts our understanding from seeing communication as simple transmission of discrete symbols to recognize it as a complex interplay where multiple sign systems (verbal, visual, gestural, spatial) converge and interact. For example, when a professor makes a critical comment with a warm smile, we witness a meaning network in operation. The verbal criticism "Your argument needs revision" might suggest dissatisfaction, while the simultaneous smile communicates encouragement and belief in the student's ability. The professor's relaxed posture might further modify this interpretation. This interaction of multiple sign systems (verbal critique, facial expression, & body language) eventually creates a complex yet unified meaning.

Danesi, (2004) expands this notion further by introducing the concept of "semiotic competence," suggesting that effective cultural communication requires not just understanding isolated signs but developing "the ability to navigate complex sign systems and understand their contextual variations across different cultural settings" (p. 37). The "face

with steam from nose" emoji beautifully demonstrates how meaning networks operate differently across cultural contexts.

When a Brazilian student sends a message to her study group saying “I just finished the 50-page reading assignment’’ attaching the ‘face with steam from nose’ emoji, her American classmates might misinterpret this as expressing anger or frustration about the workload. This misreading occurs because in many Western contexts, the steam-from-nose emoji has been commonly associated with anger, or being "steamed" about something. However, the Brazilian student intended the emoji to represent a proud exhale of accomplishment.

When it comes to the Arabic context however, the ‘Thumbs up’ emoji for example is considered rude if it is used during a conversation while it is frequently used for positive affirmation in western culture. Similarly, to the use of different emojis to say good morning in both cultures, in the case of Arab people they tend to attach the good morning greetings with ‘flowers’ emoji whereas the westerners use a ‘cup of coffee’ emoji with a ‘smiling face’ in their daily communication.

Danesi, (2017) workon emoji provides a contemporary application, demonstrating how digital communication integrates multiple semiotic resources that "form a dynamic system where meaning emerges from the interrelationship between visual symbols, textual elements, and cultural references" (2017, p. 85). This perspective aligns with Peirce's notion that signs exist within interpretative chains rather than as isolated entities. Whereas, Lotman'ssemiospheric model complements these views by positioning cultural communication within a broader spatial metaphor where "boundaries between different sign systems are not fixed barriers but zones of accelerated semiotic processes" (1990, p. 142). This concept helps explain how intercultural communication operates not as simple transmission across boundaries but as complex translation processes that transform meaning.

Within this framework, cultural codes function as organizing principles that connect disparate signs into coherent systems, operating as what Brandt (2020) describes as "cognitive scaffolding that guides interpretation across varied communicative contexts" (p. 63). To illustrate, in Japanese business meetings, pauses of thoughtful silence are often respected as signs of careful consideration and wisdom. Meanwhile, in many Western contexts, the same pauses and silences might generate discomfort, being interpreted as awkwardness or communication breakdown. Neither interpretation is inherently correct, because both emerge from cultural frameworks that unconsciously guide our perception.

1.1.6 Theoretical Models for Cultural Semiotics

The theoretical foundations of cultural semiotics draw from diverse intellectual traditions, each offering distinct yet complementary frameworks for analysing how cultures create, indicate, and transform meaning. Four models have proven particularly influential in this field, providing analytical tools that illuminate different aspects of cultural signification processes

1.1.6.1Yuri Lotman'sSemiospheric Model. Lotman (1990) semiospheric model represents a significant theoretical innovation in cultural semiotics, conceptualizing culture itself as a complex semiotic space with internal organization and external boundaries. Lotman coined the concept of the semiosphere that refers to the whole semiotic space of a culture, analogous to the biosphere in biology. It positions all semiotic activity within a culturally defined space that makes meaning possible. One of the key aspects of Lotman's model is its recognition that signs are not isolated entities but exist within complex networks of relationships (Merrell, 2008). Where elements are interconnected and influence each other (Buskell, et, al. 2019). Culture, in this view, is a dynamic system where meaning is constantly negotiated and redefined (Hodel, et, al. 2024). This perspective is crucial for understanding cultural dynamics and how cultures evolve over time.

As Sebeok (1994) observes that Lotman'ssemiosphere offers a spatial metaphor for cultural meaning systems that accounts for both internal structure and external relations. This integration makes the semiospheric model particularly useful for analyzing phenomena of cultural hybridity, translation, and intercultural communication. According to Lotman's*Universe of the Mind* (1990) foundational work where thoroughly explores these ideas:

1.1.6.1.1 Boundaries. Lotman (1990) stated "The border of semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position, giving substance to its semiotic mechanism. The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa" (p. 136) it suggests that boundaries function as bilingual translational mechanisms that filter and transform external messages into the internal language of the semiosphere. Gramigna and Madisson (2022) emphasized that these boundaries should not be understood as simple dividing lines but as zones of increased semiotic activity where cultural translation processes intensify.

1.1.6.1.2 Asymmetry. According to Yuri Lotman'ssemiosphere theory, asymmetry plays a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of cultural spaces and semiotic activity. In alignment with the notion of semiosphere however, it is conceptualized as the semiotic space for the existence and development of culture while it is not a homogeneous entity (Leo, 1994 &Kotov, 2002). Instead, it exhibits asymmetry in several key aspects, influencing how meaning is generated, communicated, and transformed within it.

- **Center-Periphery Dynamics**

In Lotman'ssemiospheric model, asymmetry represents the uneven distribution of cultural power and meaning. The center contains dominant languages and ideologies while peripheries host emerging systems. As Lotman suggests, this asymmetrical relationship creates dynamic tension; the established center maintains cultural norms while peripheral zones introduce innovation through their marginalized position, driving cultural evolution through their interactions.

Moreover, Lotman emphasizes the importance of the center-periphery relationship in the semiosphere. The center typically represents the dominant cultural norms and values, while the periphery is the space where new ideas and alternative perspectives emerge. The

interaction between the center and periphery is a key driver of semiotic change (Decker, et al. 2020). Asymmetry arises from the power imbalances and the constant negotiation between these two poles. Texts from the center meet peripheral structures to generate new meaning (Decker, et al. 2020).

- **Translation and Interpretation**:

Asymmetry also manifests in the processes of translation and interpretation within the semiosphere. Different subsystems may interpret the same signs in different ways, leading to multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings. This interpretive asymmetry is a source of both creativity and misunderstanding in cultural communication (Vilar, 2024).

1.1.6.1.3 Heterogeneity. Different parts of a culture's meaning system work in different ways, creating borders where new ideas can grow. For example, think about what happens when teenagers create their own slang words. They might take a normal word like "sick" and give it an opposite meaning to mean "really good" or "awesome." When this happens, a new meaning is created because two different ways of using language came together. (Lotman, 1990), thus, heterogeneity describes the coexistence of multiple, often incompatible, semiotic systems and languages within a single semiosphere.

1.1.6.1.4 Binary Opposition. Binary opposition in the semiosphere refers to the fundamental mechanism through which cultural meanings emerge by establishing contrasting pairs that organize experience and create hierarchical relationships within cultural systems. As it is mentioned in Lotman (1990) milestone work "Any culture begins by dividing the world into 'its own' internal space and 'their' external space. How this binary division is interpreted depends on the typology of the culture. But the actual division is one of the human cultural universals" (p. 131). He also added the fact that a culture's self-awareness can be examined through two opposing perspectives: 'inside vs. outside' and 'correct vs. incorrect.' In the first case, a culture appears to contrast itself with other cultures or with non-culture. In the second, it sets its own norms against what it perceives as violations of those norms.

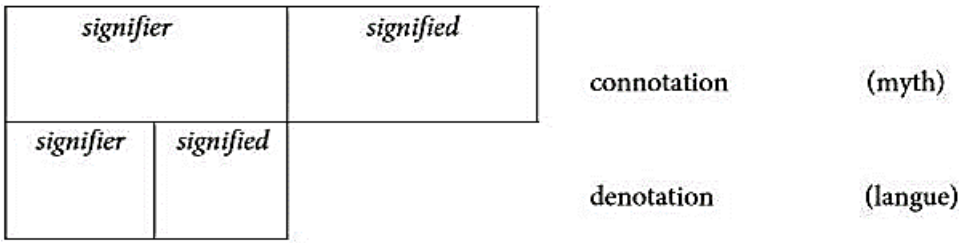
1.1.6.2 Roland Barthes' Mythologies. Barthes' semiotic (1972) model expands upon Saussure's foundational work by introducing a hierarchical structure of signification that operates across multiple levels. In this model, a primary signification system (denotation) serves as the foundation upon which a secondary system (connotation) builds, effectively transforming the entire denotative sign into merely the signifier component of this second-order system (Barthes, 1972)**.**

Barthes refers to this layered structure as the "mythical system" highlighting how this mechanism allows cultural meanings to transcend their historical origins. As Barthes argues, "Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (1972, p. 142). Through this process, culturally and historically specific meanings are naturalized, disguising their constructed nature and presenting themselves as inevitable, universal truths.

This framework remains remarkably relevant in digital culture, where Milner (2016) observes that today's internet memes work just like the myths Barthes wrote about. They make political or social ideas seem normal by hiding them in funny or innocent-looking content. But because memes spread online, they travel faster and change more quickly than traditional myths could. Milner's insight highlights how digital technologies have not fundamentally altered the semiotic mechanisms Barthes identified but have instead intensified their operational speed and expanded their reach, creating new challenges for critical analysis in networked communication environments.

Figure 1

Language and Myth / Denotation and Connotation



Note. From “Critique of ideology or/and analysis of culture? Barthes and Lotman on secondary semiotic systems”, by D. Monticelli, 2016, *Sign Systems Studies*

This model provides powerful tools for analysing how cultural texts and practices carry ideological meanings that appear natural rather than constructed, through distinguishing between three orders of signification:

- ***Denotation***

Denotation represents the first order of signification in Barthes' semiotic model. It refers to the literal, explicit, or dictionary meaning of a sign what Barthes calls “face-value.” At this level, there exists a relatively straightforward relationship between the signifier (the material form) and the signified (the concept it represents). For example, a photograph of a rose denotes simply the flower itself. Barthes explains in *Elements of Semiology* (1964) that denotation presents itself as the primary, natural meaning that appears to require no cultural code to interpret.

- ***Connotation***

Connotation constitutes the second order of signification where cultural, contextual, and subjective associations enter the meaning-making process. As Barthes details in "*Elements of Semiology*," connotation occurs when the entire denotative sign (signifier + signified) becomes merely a signifier. Using our rose example, the connotation might include associations with romance, passion, or beauty. Crucially, connotations are not arbitrary but systematically organized through cultural codes that reflect historical and social contexts. For example, in many Western cultures, the colour white connotes purity, innocence, cleanliness, and peace (Kholova, 2024). This connotation is historically rooted in religious traditions such as white robes symbolizing spiritual purity, and social customs like white wedding dresses signifying virginity.

- **Mythology**

Mythology represents Barthes' most distinctive contribution to semiotics a specific form of connotative system with explicitly ideological functions. In *Mythologie*s, Barthes (1972) describes myth as a sign system built on top of another sign system, through taking an existing sign (with its meaning) and turns it into a new signifier with a different meaning. Myth transforms history into nature by emptying signs of their historical contingency. It takes

already-constituted signs and appropriates them for ideological purposes, making culturally specific meanings appear universal and inevitable.

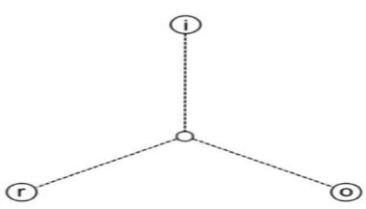
1.1.6.3 Charles Sanders Peirce's Triadic Model. Charles Sanders Peirce (as cited in Kilstrup, 2015).) triadic model of semiotics presents a comprehensive framework for analyzing sign processes, contrasting significantly with the dyadic approach of Saussurean semiotics. This model emphasizes that semiosis, or sign process, inherently involves a triadic relationship among three indispensable components, jointly contributing to the generation of meaning (Kilstrup, 2015). At its core, the model posits that a sign's meaning arises from a relationship between three components: the representamen, the object, and the interpretant (Rohr, 2014) (Kilstrup, 2015). This is distinct from a simple dyadic relationship, as it emphasizes the crucial role of interpretation in creating meaning. Within this framework, icons, indices, and symbols represent different types of signs, categorized by the nature of the relationship between the representamen and the object.

- ***Representamen***

The Representamen functions as one piece of the three-part structure that creates meaning in which something stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity (Jappy, 2016). This formulation allows for a broader understanding of what can function as a sign, including qualities, events, and laws not just physical objects or sounds. The Representamen main role is initiating the semiotic process by connecting a meaning with its object mediated through interpretation.

Figure 2

C.S. Peirce's Model



Note. From “Semiotics: The Basics”, by D. Chandler, 2022, Routledge.

- ***Object***

The Object in Peirce's triadic model refers to what the sign represents or stands for. However, Peirce distinguishes between the Immediate Object (the object as the sign itself represents it) and the Dynamical Object (the reality that somehow determines the sign). Jappy (2017) explains that this distinction is crucial for understanding how signs can represent with varying degrees of adequacy and from different perspectives. Consider a map of New York City as an example for Jappy(2017) point of view. This map is a sign that represents the actual city, a tourist map however, highlights major landmarks that represents the city differently than a detailed topographical map or a subway map. The tourist map might be perfectly adequate for a visitor wanting to see famous sites, but completely inadequate for an urban planner needing to understand the infrastructure.

- ***Interpretant***

The Interpretant constitutes the third element in Peirce's (1955) triadic model,representing the sense made of the sign or the effect produced in the mind of the interpreter. Crucially, the Interpretant is itself a sign, which demonstrates the recursive nature of semiosis. As Jappy (2017) elaborates, Peirce eventually developed a complex classification of Interpretants, including Immediate (the interpretant as represented in the sign), Dynamic (the actual effect produced), and Final (the ultimate effect the sign would produce under ideal conditions).

Peirce further categorized signs into three types based on their relationship to their objects:

- ***Icons***

Icons establish relationships with their objects through qualities they share, functioning through resemblance or similarity. Peirce's conception of iconicity extends beyond simple visual similarity to include structural, diagrammatic, and metaphorical forms of resemblance (Jappy, 2017). Icons represent their objects by partaking in their qualities,

allowing for direct insight into those qualities. Photographs, portraits, and onomatopoeic words serve as common examples of icons.

- ***Indices***

Indices create meaning through existential connections to their objects, establishing what Jappy (2017) calls "dyadic, reactive relations." Unlike icons, which relate to their objects through shared qualities, indices point to their objects through physical or causal relationships. Smoke indicates fire, a weathervane shows wind direction, and a thermometer registers temperature through actual connections rather than resemblance or convention. The indexical aspect of signs proves particularly important in Peirce's pragmatic philosophy, as it grounds meaning in the actual effects and consequences of objects in the world.

- ***Symbols***

Symbols derive their meaning entirely through convention, habit, and general laws of interpretation. Words, flags, and mathematical symbols exemplify this category, as their relationships to their objects depend on agreed-upon rules rather than resemblance or physical connection. emphasizes that symbols represent the most sophisticated form of signification in Peirce's model, as they operate through what Peirce terms "Thirdness" the realm of law, habit, and generality (Jappy, 2017). Symbols gain their power through their capacity to transcend particular contexts and generate meaning across various situations.

1.1.6.4 Umberto Eco's Model of Codes. Umberto Eco's (1976) contributions to semiotics provide a robust framework for understanding how meaning is constructed and communicated within a culture. Eco's Model of Codes posits that communication relies on shared codes, which are systems of rules and conventions that allow senders and receivers to encode and decode messages effectively.

These codes are not static but are constantly negotiated within a cultural context (Kholova, 2024) The effectiveness of communication, therefore, depends on the degree to

which individuals share these codes (Savitsky, 2019). Taking the example of two friends speaking in slang. If one says, "That's fire!" to describe something amazing, their communication depends entirely on sharing a cultural code. Another example of older person or someone from a different cultural background might misinterpret "fire" literally. This demonstrates how codes are not universal but culturally specific.

1.1.6.4.1 Cultural Encyclopaedia. Complementing the Model of Codes, Eco's concept of the Cultural Encyclopaedia represents the totality of knowledge, beliefs, and experiences shared by a community, in which are primarily developed in his work "A Theory of Semiotics" (1976), offering a sophisticated framework for analysing the complex processes (Harris, 2011; Torkild, 2015).

This encyclopaedia is not a mere organized dictionary but rather a vast, interconnected network of information. Individuals draw upon this encyclopaedia to interpret signs and make sense of the world around them (Smirnova, 2019). Think about how a gaming community might use specific language that only other gamers understand, or how scientists share complex research through specialized forums. These are examples of how digital spaces create micro-universes of knowledge.

1.1.6.4.2 Cultural Codes. Unlike earlier structuralist approaches that viewed codes as rigid and universal, Eco emphasizes their conventional, cultural, and social negotiated nature, as Danesi (2007) explains, Eco's cultural codes operate hierarchically, ranging from basic denotative codes (direct associations) to complex connotative codes (cultural associations).

This hierarchical structure allows members of a culture to interpret complex messages. For example, a photograph of a rose might activate a simple recognition code (identifying the object as a flower) while simultaneously triggering more elaborate cultural codes associated with romance, passion, or beauty.

1.1.7.Historical Roots and Development of Cultural Semiotics

The foundations of semiotics in a broad sense can be primarily traced back to the milestones of de Saussure, (1916) and Peirce, (1955), whose theories on signs and symbols laid the groundwork for understanding how meaning is constructed (Sless, 1986), Saussure's focus on the arbitrary nature of the sign and the importance of language as a system of differences, and Peirce's(1955) focus on the trichotomy of sign, object, and interpretant, provided fundamental concepts for analysing cultural phenomena.

Later, the Tartu-Moscow School (TSM) of Semiotics, with key figures like Lotman and Uspenskij,(1971)significantly advanced the field by focusing on culture as a complex system of signs (Halas, 2017; Tamm, 2017). By the year of 1990, Lotman introduced the so-called Semiospherical model. Lotman alongside Uspenskij viewed culture as a mechanism for generating, storing, and transmitting information, emphasizing the role of cultural texts and memory in shaping collective identity (1971).

Lorusso's work (2015) provides an initiated review of key representatives of 20th-century structuralism in semiotics and its entries into poststructuralism, offering case studies in semiotic analysis of cultural texts (Lenninger, 2018). Her analysis details how semiotics, social sense, and social communication can function together to analyse how culture works in the contemporary era (Lorusso, 2015). Torop (2017) further contributes to the understanding of cultural semiotics by emphasizing the interpretation of cultural history in the context of cultural semiotics, highlighting the importance of history and different aspects of temporality for the semiotics of culture.

From a Contemporarily point of view, the advent of digital media has brought new dimensions to cultural semiotics. Digital platforms have become fertile ground for the creation and interpretation of non-verbal signs in specific, impacting various aspects of social life, including how we form relationships. Scolari (2009) reviews semiotic contributions to

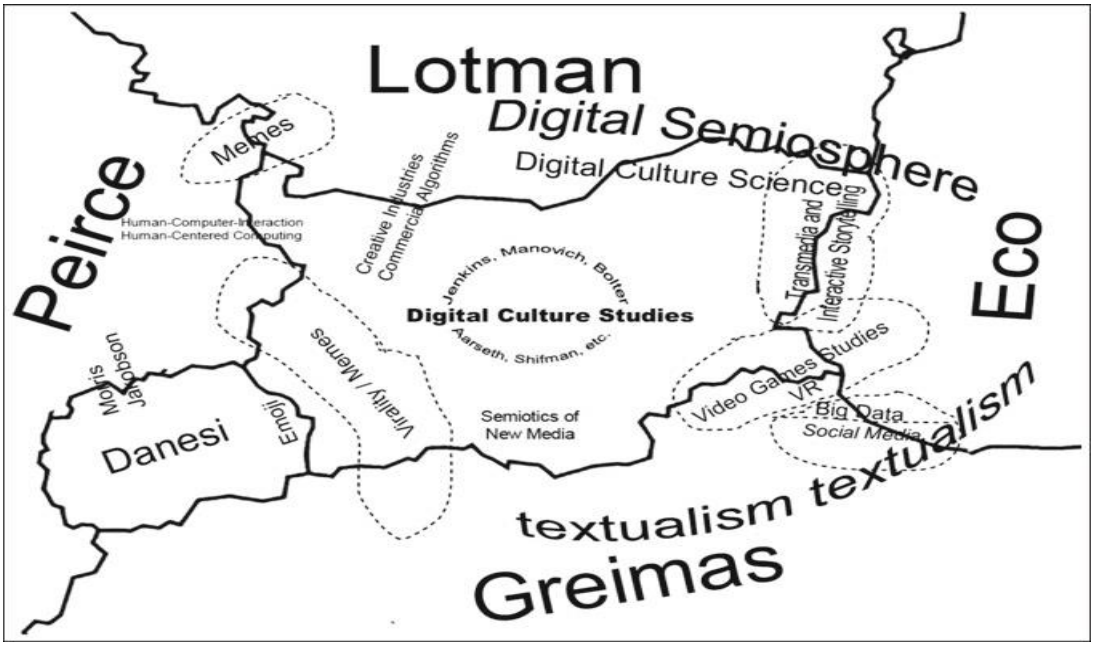
new media, computer-mediated communication, and human-computer interaction, centring on the works of Eco,(1976) a pioneer in the debate on hypertext and the future of the book.

1.1.8 Cultural Semiotics in Relation to Digital Semiotics

In 1999, Castells described a technology-driven society where the electronic system has become the material basis for our lives, our ways of communicating, and our work, transforming virtual reality into our reality (Castells, 1999). Thus, we can better understand the impact of technological innovation on semiotics. Scolari also stated that semiotics matures and grows as a result of new processes of producing and interpreting meaning, such as those proposed by new technologies (Scolari, 2015, p. 1049). With the emergence of digital media, our culture has become predominantly visual, which has generated an explosion in semiotics.

Figure 3

Map of the semiotic approaches to digital culture



Note. from *The Digital Mind*: Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture" by KristianBankov, 2022, *Springer*

Digital semiotics, born from a new approach to semiotics, overlaps with many other media, the most prominent of which is the cultural field. However, it is not easy to reach a common template, especially given the multiplicity and distinctiveness of general semiotics (Cosenza, 2014). (Berlanga et al., 2018)pointed out that digital semiotics is understood as the application of traditional semiotic concepts to digital texts, whether oral, written, visual, or audio-visual(Berlanga et al., 2018). However, the term “digital semiotics” is rarely used as a definition of a discipline or branch of study, although some, such as Nanteke (2017), do use it in this way.

Another well-established area of research in this field is the semiotics of Human-Computer Interaction(HCI) (de Souza, 2005, 2013). Clarisse de Souza and her team explore this field from an engineering perspective. In their recent publication, “On the Digital Semiotic Field: Culture, Media, and Science in the Anthropocene”, Hartley, Ebros, and Ojamaa(2020) reformulate and update Lotman’s (2000) evolutionary and dynamic approach to cultural semiotics.

In addition, Wiggins, in his study "The Rhetorical Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality" (Wiggins, 2019), discusses this new form of online communication, explaining how memes represent a new form of meaning construction from the perspectives of ideology, semiotics, and ideology-related intertextuality that enables movement within culture. The intersection of digital semiotics with cultural semiotics is seen as a powerful force that contributes to reshaping cultural practices and identities. Furthermore, digital semiotics can enhance our understanding of cultural semiotics by providing new frameworks for analyzing how signs operate in digital contexts and yielding valuable insights into meaning and its communication in both traditional and digital contexts. As O'Halloran (2015) claims, digital semiotics makes the insights of signifiers more accessible and fosters a far greater capacity to understand phenomena that are initially

incomprehensible. It also argues that analysis in the digital environment poses a challenge for semioticians to transform theoretical and descriptive perspectives into workable analytical frameworks that bridge the semantic gap between the various levels of semiotics.

Digital semiotics analyses how meaning is created and transmitted through digital communication, including emojis, hashtags, memes, and other visual and textual elements. Cultural semiotics is concerned with the processes by which cultural and social factors shape the production and interpretation of signs. Digital methods use different digital tools and techniques to analyse and interpret semiotic data.

Cultural semiotics focuses on the dynamics of power and ideological forces in society. Different social groups use symbols, images, and language to distinguish their identities and assert their authority. As digital technologies have changed the concept of sending and receiving messages also the meaning they carry, different ways of applying cultural and social semiotics have applied to study the construction of meaning through digital platforms. This has led to different ways of applying cultural and social semiotics to study the construction of meaning through digital platforms.

Individuals, intuit and construct meaning by using specific symbols for specific purposes, and their widespread dissemination throughout culture (Indian Association for Educational Assessment, n.d). It is not just about studying signs and symbols, but also understanding how they are formed and used in specific cultural and social contexts through the experiences and interactions surrounding us in the complex and captivating digital age. This enables us to understand the hidden agenda of the communication process, by providing methods.

New approaches to data processing and interpretation facilitate deeper and easier interaction with cultural heritage. As Storey (2009) points out, semiotics has become an essential tool for understanding the world of culture embodied in the electronic approach.

From memes to hashtags, electronic culture is teeming with a wide range of signs and symbols that are constantly evolving and changing. This provides frameworks for analyzing them, understanding their meaning and significance within their cultural context. Therefore, the interaction between cultural and digital semiotics is essential for a comprehensive understanding of how digital culture works, and the process of interpreting and engaging with it. Furthermore, the flexibility and adaptability of symbols in digital communication are highlighted.

1.1.9 Empirical case studies in cultural semiotic analysis

Cultural semiotic analysis, a field pioneered by scholars like Yuri Lotman, is the study of signs and symbols within a culture and how these signs contribute to the construction of meaning (Brdar-Szabo&Brdar, 2023). Empirical case studies bring this theoretical framework to life by examining real-world examples, providing concrete evidence of these semiotic processes in action. However, Research on this topic in Algeria remains extremely limited.

One significant area where empirical case studies in cultural semiotic analysis are invaluable is in understanding media localization and cross-cultural communication (Pandey& Singh, 2024). For example, the semiotic structures in media and their impact on translation equivalence, particularly between India and the West, within the framework of India's National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 (Pandey& Singh, 2024). This highlights how signs and codes in an Indian film like "PK" can carry different meanings based on cultural context, necessitating careful semiotic analysis for effective translation and localization. Similarly, Yang (2023) examined online video consumption shaped by viewers' comments, illustrating how translational practices influence meaning-making in a digital environment. Equally important, the study of "authenticity" in Danish TV dramas by Turkish audiences, as investigated in Kaptan (2021), it demonstrated how cultural backgrounds shape the reception and interpretation of foreign media.

Advertising offers another rich field for empirical case studies in cultural semiotic analysis. Mahmood and Malika, (2025) explored the semiotic pragmatics of billboard advertisements in Islamabad, decoding the linguistic, visual, and mythical elements used to manipulate consumer behaviour. This study emphasizes how advertisers use signs like celebrity endorsements and cultural symbols to resonate with consumers. Gokgul's work, (2022) supported this notion by focusing on the use of cultural codes in corporate advertisements to establish emotional bonds with consumers, showing how shared cultural understanding influences the effectiveness of advertising.

The application of semiotic analysis extends to cultural heritage and tourism. The study of Madandola and Boussaa, (2023) discussed cultural heritage tourism as a pillar for sustainable development, using the case of Old Oyo town in Nigeria. Besides the work of Raemy and Sanderson, (2023) discussing the usability of automatically enriched cultural heritage data and highlighting the importance of interoperability and standardized data publication for cultural heritage resources. Furthermore, semiotic analysis is crucial in understanding cultural values and social issues. To end with the study of Rutherford, (2022) that offered a semiotic-cultural psychology theory analysis of the signs 'We', 'Us', 'I' and 'Me', using COVID-19 related cases to illustrate the signifier-referent model. This research is relevant to the emerging field of semiotic cultural psychology theory (SCPT).

2. Section two: Online dating and self-presentation

2.1 Self-Presentation in the digital Dating context

The proverb "love is blind" expresses the idea that choosing a partner is not based on outward characteristics. Many fairy tales and cartoons have been inspired by this hypothesis, featuring princesses attracted to street children or monsters, princes choosing mermaids, and even blue cars being drawn to red ones. However, beyond these fairy tales, research has repeatedly shown that partner choice is strongly influenced by similarity between people. In

fact, princes tend to marry princesses, and mermaids marry mermaids. This indicates a tendency to partner with individuals of similar socioeconomic, educational, and religious backgrounds (Kalmijn& Flap, 2001). Recent research has suggested that online dating platforms have contributed to increased racial, ethnic, and religious disparities (Lampard, 2020; Thomas, 2018).

In this modern era, the number of online resources helping people find a romantic partner has almost doubled over the past ten years. In 2015, over 500 dating-related applications could be found on iTunes (Johnson, Vilceanu, & Pontes, 2017). Examples of these applications include *Tinder*, Grindr, Happn, and Hinge. As a result, online dating has become the most popular method for people seeking a date or life partner, ahead of work, school, friends, and nightclubs (Su & Hu, 2019). Consequently, these online dating sites are crucial for users to present themselves to potential romantic partners. The first impression of potential future partners is often based on their dating profiles.

2.2 Online dating

Today, more and more people rely on the internet to meet new individuals for casual dating or to start romantic relationships. As a result, the number of online dating platforms designed to help people search for romantic partners has almost doubled over the past ten years. Online dating platforms serve as appropriate resources for finding a partner, especially when meeting others in person can be challenging (Couch &Liamputtong, 2008). Additionally, 66% of people who have dated online indicated that they met a romantic partner through these platforms (Smith & Duggan, 2013). This trend may also explain why individuals today have a more positive attitude toward online dating compared to the end of the 20th century (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

On these platforms, individuals form impressions of others based on their online dating profiles. It is essential to develop impressions of the profile owner using cues found in

these profiles, which are often conveyed through pictures and text (Farrer& Gavin, 2009). The profile picture is typically the first cue visible on online dating profiles, and this initial impression can significantly influence perceptions of attractiveness (Birnbaum, Iluz, & Reis, 2020). This first impression is crucial in determining whether someone may be considered relationship material (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Therefore, it is important for individuals to present themselves attractively and interestingly.

Ritchie et al. (2016) stated that pictures are essential for forming impressions of a profile owner's attractiveness. A study by Aronson, Abrahamsen, and Rottman (1966) found that physical attraction is the primary determinant in whether people decide they like someone. In online dating, liking typically consists of three separate dimensions: physical attraction, social attraction, and romantic attraction (van der Zanden, Schouten, Mos, &Krahmer, 2020). First, physical attraction relates to someone's visible features and how handsome or pretty users perceive the profile owner to be. The second dimension, social attraction, measures whether users like someone and would like to talk and socialize with them without romantic intentions (McCroskey& McCain, 1974). Finally, the third dimension is romantic attraction, which covers the extent to which users would like to date someone (Campbell, 1999).

Moreover, Hardy (2004) suggested that online dating could serve as a preventive measure, helping to protect against potential risks. The courtship and dating period that precedes an in-person meeting allows individuals to clarify preferences and avoid the sudden problems or disappointments that can arise during offline meetings (Whitty, 2004; Danback, 2006). Thus, online dating can be seen as a form of excessive sorting of one's interactive life (Davis et al., 2006a, p. 465), fitting into the concept of filtering that contributes to self-construction through the collection of information about profiles, allowing users to control their self-presentation according to their desires (Davis et al., 2006a, p. 465). As Ellison et al.

(2006, p. 430) pointed out, individuals engaging in online dating employ strategies designed to adapt to the online environment while maximizing its advantages, as the self-presentation of profiles is enhanced by the graduated control that online dating provides.

Over the years, humanity has recognized the need to form romantic relationships. This recognition also highlights the difficulty of finding a suitable partner. Thus, intervention has often been necessary to seek assistance. From the ancient customs of some tribes to arranged marriages in certain societies, there exists a tradition dating back thousands of years: romantic relationships are not solely created through random, unplanned encounters, but also through the deliberate intervention of third parties (Kontz, 2005). In the modern era, the desire to establish relationships and find a lasting partner remains a challenge, but the resources available to meet these challenges have evolved.

2.3 .Definition of Online Dating

Dating is considered one of the initial stages that precede traditional engagement and marriage, as it allows individuals to get to know each other emotionally. However, online dating refers to mixed relationships that begin with communication via the Internet, with the expectation of an offline romantic encounter. Online dating has been defined as romantic relationships based in online environments, whether through forums, dating sites, or mobile applications, leading to emotional experiences through the features provided by these mediums, which have the potential to facilitate offline interactions (Degim, Johnson, & Fu, 2015). The term "dating sites" or "online dating" refers to websites and applications whose primary focus is to create opportunities for users to form new romantic relationships. These relationships can evolve into dating relationships and, potentially, long-term commitments that end in marriage (Finkel et al., 2012).

According to Rosen et al.(2013), online dating sites all have a similar structure, with participants submitting a profile and answering a series of questions that serve as a

questionnaire about the person, including geographic location, age, weight, religion, education level, income, and other relevant demographic data. Because sites are technology- and social-context-dependent, user experiences vary from one form to another, with different meanings for different cultures and contexts, and thus the degree to which a consistent experience is achieved is almost non- existent. For example, online dating in more traditional societies such as Turkey, India, and other countries takes the concept of finding a marriage partner with compatible parameters between the two, while in other cultures it may become a more secular approach to seeking short-term relationships for listening or spending time, where local and global definitions overlap in virtual environments.

In addition, online dating sites and applications have alleviated the spatial constraints that some have faced in traditional face-to-face courtship. However, technology studies have also highlighted how this distance can reinforce established beliefs and behaviors that maintain normative hierarchies. Identity in online dating environments is influenced by offline social norms and, in turn, influences those norms. Strategies of self-presentation and self-disclosure are adapted to attract the attention of potential partners via an online dating site (Hancock &Toma, 2009). In online dating interfaces, individuals present themselves using predetermined traits, creating their online identity with the markers provided by the site or application. Dating practices vary from one cultural context to another, with different cultures around the world viewing the concept of dating and romance through diverse religious, political, and sexual lenses. As love online has become increasingly modern, it allows the user to be selective about the qualities he is looking for in a partner, as online dating allows a large group to be examined in a short period of time compared to sifting through the same number in real life outside the Internet.

2.4 Online dating sites

Online dating sites are a specialized type of social media designed to help users find romantic partners and friends, and they are very popular (Golbeck&Klavans, 2015). Users create profiles that include numerous personality traits and a wide range of questions tailored to personal descriptions. These include basic information such as age, gender, race, height, and preferences (books, movies, music, etc.), as well as additional personal details like smoking and drinking habits, interest in having children, dietary preferences and restrictions, and religion.

2.5 Dating apps

Dating apps are software applications that can be accessed on any Internet-connected device, including smartphones, and allow users to create new personal connections in the context of establishing personal, romantic, or sexual relationships (Castro &Barrada, 2020). They have witnessed continuous growth, with approximately 80 million users of online dating services in Europe and an expected increase in the coming years (Statista, 2023b). For example, *Tinder* and Badoo are the most popular applications in Italy.

Online dating applications facilitate the search for individuals based on preferred personality traits that vary from person to person, such as age, sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. Many of these applications also leverage GPS technology to enhance communication between individuals (Anzani et al., 2018). This technology is effective and has the potential to facilitate the formation of both short- and long-term relationships (Danielsbacka, Tanskanen, &Billari, 2022).

Online dating has been a common practice since its inception in 1995 with the creation of the first online dating site, Match.com (Orchard, 2019). The trend continued with the launch of mobile dating applications in 2007 (Bonilla-Zorita et al., 2021). While dating applications and online dating sites also serve a similar purpose, they differ in important

ways. Because of these differences, dating apps have significantly increased in popularity, particularly due to their easy accessibility for smartphone users (Orchard, 2019). Unlike websites, mobile dating apps rely on geographic location, which means that profiles are close to the user (MacLeod & McArthur, 2019). The limited written content found on dating app profiles suggests that physical appearance is likely to be a major factor in initial reactions and profile evaluations (Miller, 2020).

2.6 Traditional dating 'offline dating':

The term 'traditional dating' encompasses the various ways in which people meet potential partners in their daily lives outside the Internet. This includes dating that occurs through social or family ties, where individuals are introduced to one another, as well as connections made through new work relationships or encounters with strangers (Finkel et al., 2012).

Although traditional dating includes various forms of heterogeneous and sometimes predictable meeting contexts, it is distinctly different from electronic networks. This difference spans all aspects, from the initial meeting to matching, communication methods, and ultimately the outcomes. In contrast, the term 'online dating' refers to potential partners met via the Internet. This typically involves members of the opposite sex who perceive themselves as available and are seeking a partner of the opposite sex. All of this occurs within the constraints of a cultural algorithm that aims to demonstrate compatibility and equivalence between individuals.

2.7 How different is Online Dating (OD) form Traditional Dating (TD):

2.7.1 Points of Parity

In online dating, people choose the environment in which they want to interact and select a partner, much like in traditional dating, where some may prefer to meet someone through a religious organization rather than a dance club, or vice versa. This choice allows

individuals to align their dating experiences with what truly matters to them. People looking for a partner online may also care more about the culture, religion, or branding of certain sites compared to others (Finkel et al., 2012). The user experiences this through their profile, which serves as a front window to their personality. It provides potential matches a glimpse into their identity and showcases their interests and values.

2.7.2 Points of difference

In online dating, once a user has created a profile, a significant gap can be identified between the online dating space and real-life dating. The difference lies in the fact that, in real-life dating, people cannot present as detailed a view of themselves as they can in the online dating environment, where potential matches can be viewed at any moment of the day or night (Finkel et. al, 2012) . likewise, once a profile is created, it is exposed to thousands of people, whereas real life operates within a range of controls. Furthermore, a key point of contrast is that online dating mirrors the information-gathering process, where the user first obtains voluntary information about the other person, and only then may a face-to-face meeting occur. In contrast to offline dating, information about the other party is gathered after the face-to-face meetings have taken place.

2.8 The historical overview and development of online dating

Online dating, as the latest of a long effort over the years, has led to its rapid spread and wide acceptance through various applications that have touched all segments of society and different cultures in their search for potential partners. Looking back to past eras, we find that matchmaking and mediation services were one of the components of engagement and marriage before the advent of online dating. This service was provided by some people for a fee or in exchange (Finkel et al., 2012). It was often a side role for some priests and clergymen in certain communities, and sometimes elderly women in the community would search for and match partners. This practice continues to this day, though with a narrower

focus, as matchmaking experts today work with a smaller base of society. Matching decisions between people are usually based on intuition, experience, and the cultural structure of both parties, rather than on mathematical algorithms (Adelman &Ahuvia, 1991; Gottlieb, 2006; Wall and Cosby, 1987).

Furthermore, personal ads for dating and marriage have been around for a long time, as it was not until the advent of the modern newspaper that they became a way for people to search for a partner (Cox, 2009). The first printed personal ads date back to the early 18th century (Orr, 2004). The media was relied upon to obtain information in general and mating information in particular. Step by step, personal ads were followed by newspapers, then video dating, and then computers, which facilitated the process. By the late 20th century, Internet communication became possible, allowing people to communicate and fall in love in online chat rooms without ever meeting face to face (Ben-Zeev, 2004; Witty & Carr, 2006; Witty and Gavin, 2001).

From here, a generation emerged that was strongly dominated by the Internet, classified across generations, starting with the launch of Match in 1995, followed by many sites that provided a wide range of browsing and searching options, allowing users to publish profiles and browse the profiles of potential partners according to their framework. On the other hand, there are other specialized sites designed for specific subcategories, such as the needs of subscribers of a specific age (for example, SeniorPeopleMeet) or religious orientation (for example, JDate).

Progress has paved the way for the introduction of computers in the late 1980s and the widespread use of the Internet, leading to the rise of many commercially owned dating sites. Since the advent of online dating in the 1990s, new categories have developed to differentiate between types of use and application: online personals sites, algorithm-based matching sites, and smartphone-based dating apps (Finkel et al., 2012).

The first generation appeared in 1995 with the launch of Match.com, which introduced an online personals site. It allowed users to post a dating profile and browse other profiles to choose their desired partner. Today, Match.com states that one in five relationships begins online (Fisher, 2011).

Five years later, the second generation emerged in the early 2000s when eHarmony introduced the concept of online matchmaking, or algorithm-based matchmaking. This format requires personal information such as interests, values, and desired principles. For a fee, social and behavioral scientists process the data to determine matches based on the algorithms used by the site (Finkel et al., 2012).

In 2008, the third generation was launched, which is the category that includes dating applications with all their features, the most famous of which is *Tinder*. Also known as the mobile application that relies on self-selection. These sites allow people to browse profiles of potential partners from the general public using a geolocation-based program (Finkel, et al., 2012). This category of applications was introduced after the emergence of Apple Inc., which is the App Store for mobile iPhones. Moreover, it was launched in conjunction with broader social networking sites, such as Facebook, where it gained great popularity (Finkel et al., 2012).

2.9 The Characteristics of Online Mobile Dating

What used to be represented by dresses, suits, perfumes, cars, shoes, language, body language, knowledge, and first impressions is now embodied in our era by taking a single photo when dating over the phone. Today, the reality of online dating is embodied for millions of people in the form of mobile applications characterized by portability, availability, location, and cultural frameworks (Schrock, 2015). These applications provide options for specific partners as well as a framework for self-presentation, especially through profile pictures. These stages are part of a long history of changes in the practice of dating

and establishing relationships. Once, the circle was limited to family and friends in choosing and suggesting partners. Later, it became a matter of chance encounters in everyday life, where these previous patterns were mostly socially and locally connected (Weigel, 2016). Meeting a partner, in this context, indicates a crucial feature of the earlier analog dating services.

Online dating agencies, with their secular and faith-based advantages, have overcome the local connection feature they share in matching people based on stated principles and dynamics. They still seek to match individuals through personal relationships, separating the so-called scope of partner suggestions through friends and family from a shared foundation between the two individuals. Here lies the appeal of online dating: its convenience and accessibility. Change is not just a matter of location but also involves the style of the relationship and the impact of technology and changing social norms, varying from one individual to another and from one society to another.

One can find a partner on a national or even international basis, which expands the scope. However, it is increasingly practiced via mobile devices through applications, returning to locally linked principles that are fed by global positioning systems. These applications work with limited intensive information—such as age, gender, religious orientation, and sexual orientation—where decisions are made mainly based on one or a few pictures. Profile texts mostly act as an appendix and are often overlooked (Degen&Kleeberg-Niepage, 2020). This is largely due to the fast and dynamic scrolling of the application. However, despite the importance of profile texts, images play a crucial role.

2.10. Profile Construction

Historically, courtship may have been in the hands of parents and matchmakers, but today it is in the hands of online dating app users. Online dating apps rely on self-actualized users to find matches for themselves through photos rather than compatibility formulas. An

online dating profile is a fundamental element of a person's identity, serving as a gateway to deeper engagement and ultimately to establishing a desired relationship goal (Ellison et al., 2012).

Online dating profiles combine visual and textual elements to facilitate partner matching. Photos serve as the primary visual component, while demographic information and personal descriptions allow users to communicate their interests, intentions, and desired partner characteristics.

Many users specify their relationship objectives, ranging from casual encounters to long-term commitments that may develop into lifelong partnerships (Sternberg, 1986; Eastwick et al., 2018). Success metrics vary accordingly, with some users prioritizing dating experience while others seek meaningful connections (Gibbs et al., 2006; Sharabi& Dykstra-Devitt, 2019). Profile browsing enables users to identify others with compatible relationship goals.

In fact, a person's online dating goals may be reflected in other aspects of their profile. For example, people who are seeking a long-term relationship vary in both the presence and content of photos on their profiles. A person seeking a long-term relationship is more likely to display a profile photo, whereas a person seeking a causal relationship is more likely to wear less clothing in the photos they post (Gallant et al., 2011). Each person's intentions are reflected in the characteristics of the photos displayed on their dating profiles.

2.11. Changing attitudes toward online dating

In 1992, less than 1% of the population was estimated to have met their partner through print personal ads and other media (Laumann et al., 1994). Back then, the Internet revolution had not yet taken hold, and print dating was still considered a culturally unpopular medium; using newspapers and print magazines to search for romance was viewed as highly stigmatizing (Finkel et al., 2012). Negative views persisted even after the advent of online

dating. Many online daters were labeled as desperate or socially inept (Whitty& Carr, 2006), but thanks to the influence of popular culture and media - especially movies like You've Got Mail - online dating has begun to shed its negative reputation (Finkel et al., 2012).

The year 1997 was a turning point, as it saw a surge in online dating. This was no coincidence; web technologies allowed for increased user-generated content and sharing capabilities (Hogan et al., 2011). However, there was still skepticism among the younger generation, who remained wary of online dating. In the early 2000s, a study was conducted to examine college students' attitudes toward online dating. The study found that many young people still had more negative than positive feelings about it (Donn& Sherman, 2002). The main concerns were that people online might lie, that getting to know someone took longer, and that the process was unsafe (Donn& Sherman, 2002).

Three years later, public attitudes have been examined toward online dating and found that 44% of Americans agreed that the Internet was a good way to meet people, while 44% disagreed (Madden &Lenhart, 2006). Additionally, only 29% agreed that online daters were desperate, and 66% of the population thought that online dating could be dangerous. Over the years, Pew has revisited the survey to track the results. In 2013, 21% agreed that online daters were desperate, while 59% agreed that online dating was a good way to meet people (Smith, 2013).

2.12. Factors that led to online dating

Kang and Hoffman (2011) stated that the totality of tasks a user performs online is an important predictor of online dating. Couch and Liamputtong (2008) explored the differences in demographic circumstances that led to online dating and found that searching for a soulmate, partner, sex, fun, relaxation, and easier ways to meet people were among the main motivations. Speaking of circumstances that vary from person to person, these can also be

considered factors that motivate online dating, especially busy work schedules, inability to go out often, separation from a partner, and moving to a new city (Couch &Liamputtong, 2008).

Some scholars (Whitty& Gavin, 2001). have claimed that relationships that begin online can extend their success beyond the web. Through the sample of 30 men and 30 women, Whitty, (2001) investigated the amount of time people spent chatting online before meeting face-to-face. Sixty-five percent of participants reported meeting their partner within a week of chatting online, while 11% reported meeting their partner within a month of initial contact (Whitty& Carr, 2006). Additionally, goals have changed, with the majority (91%) of participants hoping to find a long-term relationship through online dating, and 35% of participants appreciating the convenience of online dating, as it allows them to access and browse dating sites from the comfort of their own homes.

2.13. The Importance: Why is the study of online dating specifically important:

Kim and McKenry (2002) stated that marital stability and success have a strong positive effect on self-esteem, and that productive and successful relationships with others are strong indicators of happiness (Baumeister& Leary, 1995). However, happiness significantly affects the lifespan of individuals when they have good subjective well-being. Today, dating apps are the most common way to meet partners. This technological change in the course of romance is affecting the social practice of who ends up marrying and who has children with whom, thereby influencing the course of generations and society in general.

In general, dating apps have become a distinct category of study because they are predominantly visual, relying heavily on images. Dating apps have become an important lens through which to explore new visual literacies in communication. A case in point is *Tinder*, which relies primarily on profile pictures as a matchmaking tool. These apps can be used as a focal point for exploring issues of gender, identity, and interpersonal relationships, and are influenced by the visual representations of others. These apps also aim to embody how young

people reconfigure concepts of love, sex, and romance according to their own cultural norms and backgrounds. It is useful to consider these platforms, and marriage in general, as markets (Roth, 2015).

As economist Alvin Roth (2015) points out in his book *Who Gets What and Why*, there can be rich matching markets with many buyers and sellers, in this case singles, but little differentiation, and weak matching markets with fewer buyers and sellers and a high degree of differentiation. With the rise of the internet, the search for love has become more intense, increasing its advantages and offering greater upside. It may begin with dating and possibly culminate in long-term marriage (Finkel et al., 2012; Golbeck, 2015). A study by Couch and Liamputtong (2008) on the use of the internet to meet partners revealed several potential benefits, including reduced deception; the ability to maintain anonymity unless both parties wish to meet; the ability to filter identity and filter out the user's cultural norms; and access not only to like-minded individuals but also to better geographical connectivity.

Online dating also provides valuable insights into the cultural and normative approaches that shape relationships, as they influence user behavior. Prominent examples include *Tinder* and Muzz. Furthermore, it can stimulate emotional and romantic connection. Furthermore, it can also infuse technology through matchmaking algorithms and user privacy. With the popularity of these apps, studying them allows tracking changes in societal attitudes and understanding people and their ability to adapt to digital communication.

Conclusion

In short, this chapter has reviewed the literature of the research work by introducing the theory of cultural semiotics. Furthermore, it has introduced a set of key concepts related to this field such as signs, symbols, and codes beside their role in constructing meaning. Then, it introduced the historical background of cultural semiotics highlighting the two analytical frameworks that will be employed for the analysis of this study, Roland Barthes'

Semiotic of Orders of Signification (Denotation & Connotation), alongside the most important analytical tool for the analysis of dating profiles which is Lotman's 1990 Semiospheric Model. Both were chosen to examine the cultural artifacts of the 'Dating Semiosphere' (DS). Shedding light on the sign systems and meanings manifested in the profiles of both genders. This chapter ends up with introducing the online dating and a brief background on the development from traditional dating to online mobile dating, emphasizing on the characteristics of online mobile dating, profile construction and the significance of studying online dating. The coming chapter entitled "Research Design" deals with the research methodology of this study.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter represents the research methodology, data analysis, discussion of the findings, followed by a discussion of methodological limitation.The chapter is primarily divided into two main sections. The first section outlines the research methodology employed in the study, specifically detailing the qualitative comparative approach that examines cultural semiotic representations across the*Muzz* and *Tinder* platforms. The second section presents the analysis of data through Lotman'ssemiosphere model and Barthes' orders of signification. Following this analysis, a comprehensive discussion of findings reveals how religious and secular values manifest through visual self-presentation on these platforms. Finally, the chapter concludes by addressing methodological limitations encountered during the research process and offering recommendations for future studies in the emerging field of digital cultural semiotics.

1. Section One: Research Methodology

1.1. The Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research method focused on a cross-cultural analysis of nonverbal representations in faith-based dating profiles versus secular dating profiles.This study examines how cultural semiotics are applied differently to represent distinct sign systems and cultural codes in both *Muzz* and *Tinder* platforms. Furthermore, the study investigates how these platforms function as spaces of meaning-making within their cultural contexts. Given the comparative nature of the study ,a qualitative research design is selected as it appropriately fulfils the primary aim of analysing the selected sample through a dual theoretical lens. The research is guided by two theoretical frameworks: Lotman's cultural semiotic model of the semiosphere,which examines cultural boundaries and meaning-making processes and Barthes' cultural semiotic theory of orders of signification, including

denotation and connotation.Lotman's model emphasizes cultural boundaries and meaning-making, while Barthes' model allows for layered analysis (denotation/connotation) . These frameworks will offer a systematic interpretation of how visual and nonverbal elements in dating profiles are culturally encoded and decoded across platforms that serve distinct communities.

1.2. Unit of Analysis

This research sample holds significant cultural value, as it represents one of the rich digital spaces where cultural symbols and meanings are prominently expressed. The selected sample consists of twenty dating profiles taken from two different dating applications, *Muzz* and *Tinder*ten from each, with equal representation from both genders. Notably,each profile is characterized by unique self-presentation features that reflect their cultural context. Therefore, this study focuses specifically on nonverbal features such as profile picture choices and visual cultural references.

1.3. Selection of Dating Platforms

1.3.1. The Construction of *Muzz* Dating Profiles

Muzz (previously known as Muzmatch) represents a faith-centric approach to dating applications, specifically designed for Muslims seeking marriage partners within their faith tradition. Unlike mainstream dating apps, it differentiates itself, it differentiates itself by incorporating features that align with Islamic values and traditions (Abubakar et al., 2020). The platform's construction reflects Islamic cultural values and practices in several key ways. Profile construction on *Muzz* includes distinctive features reflecting Islamic cultural sensibilities, such as:

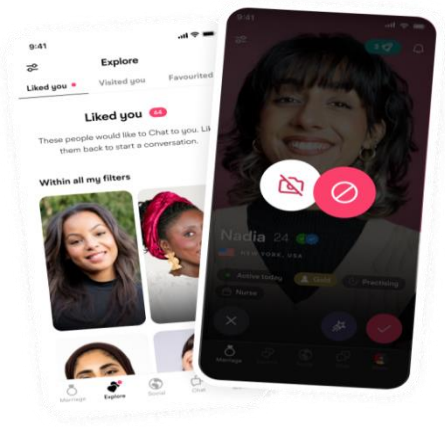
- Religious identity markers indicating (e.g.,sect affiliation such as Shia or Sunni),
- Level of religiosity (prayer frequency)

- The platform offers filtering options for displaying photographs with or without hijab for women
- Incorporates a "Wali" (guardian) feature that facilitates family involvement in the process, honouring traditional Islamic courtship rituals.

It also enhances trust and safety through incorporating profile verification features such as phone number and photo verification (Zhu et al., 2024), and Screenshot Restriction Feature (see Figure 4),which help prevent fake profiles and **identity deception**. Moreover, profile sections emphasize religious practices and adherence levels alongside cultural background sign systems. The platform prioritizes **Halal intention indicators** such as marriage, over casual dating signals, and offers enhanced privacy controls that aligned with Islamic concepts of modesty. These elements create a semiotic environment where religious identity is foregrounded through both explicit declarations and implicit design features, making it a rich site for analysing faith-based cultural codes.While *Muzz* demonstrates how faith-based platforms embed religious values and marriage-oriented intentions into their design architecture, secular dating applications like *Tinder* operate within fundamentally different cultural frameworks that prioritize individual choice, visual appeal, and diverse relationship goals.

Figure 4

Screenshot Restriction Feature on Muzz Preventing Unauthorized Capture of Profile Content



Note. From Muzz, 2025 (https://muzz.com/en-US/)

1.3.2. The Construction of Tinder Dating Profiles

Tinder stands asone of the most widely used Location-Based Real-Time Dating (LBRTD) apps. Functioning as a unique secular space where the self is presented, both societally and app-specifically. *Tinder* is sometimes viewed as an easy way to have a casual sexual encounter without romantic commitment and motivation.

Since it launched in 2012, *Tinder*has grown as one of the world's most popular dating apps. It is a global online dating platform available in more than 190 countries and over 40 languages (*Tinder*, 2024). It was developed by Sean Rad and Justin Mateen. The app offers a unique and vast opportunity to display one's sexual performance as a means of finding romantic gratification (Sumter, Vandenbosch, &Ligtenberg, 2017). Although,marriage-oriented intention is not common among most users. However, there are those who strive for this outcome. The *Tinder* app platform prioritizes forming social connections or engaging in casual sex. Motives may vary, such as

- Establishing a romantic relationship,
- Stimulating emotional or sexual fantasy,
- Or simply seeking entertainment and satisfying curiosity.

- It uses the language of play, where the app's screen—once a match is made—encourages the user to send a message or continue swiping through other matches.

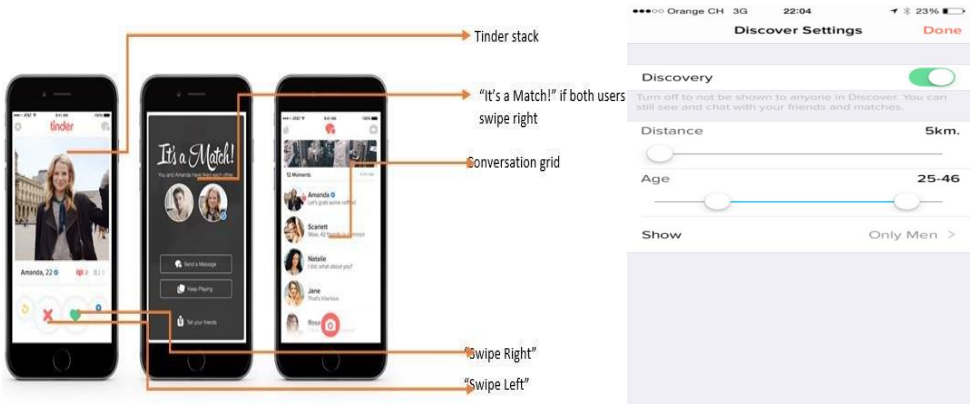
Tinder is a platform contributing to the rise of a new visual culture through its matching system.Using *Tinder* is relatively simple. It displays personal information from Facebook (name, age, gender, occupation, and education level, if available). Additionally, *Tinder* profiles include photos and text descriptions. Users can see mutual Facebook friends and the distance between themselves and others based on the phone’s GPS. They can also link their profiles to sites such as Facebook and Instagram.

On *Tinder*, users view profiles in a queue section called "Discover."where right swipes indicate interest and left swipes reject potential matches Users are limited to a specific number of swipes per day. When a match occurs, users can exchange messages and view each other’s profiles. Filtering allows users to select gender, age range, and other criteria to appear in the queue. Creating a profile involves uploading photos (mandatory) and choosing from predefined descriptions, followed by an optional self-description known as a "*Tinder* bio." Users then specify their gender, age, sexual orientation, desired relationship type, preferred age range, and geographic radius. The app then displays matching profiles based on these preferences. The app’s appeal lies in the immediacy of visual impressions and decisions. Visuals are used to create a contextual framework and engage embodiment strategies in social interaction. These strategies are also influenced by cultural and social norms, often aligning with implicit expectations within each user's cultural or ethnic group.

In contrast to Muzz's faith centered semiotic environment, *Tinder*'s design architecture creates a secular cultural space where visual representationand individualized self-presentation become the primary signifying systems through which users navigate contemporary dating culture.

Figure 5

a) The Tinder app topography *b)Discovery settings*



Note. a) Fromhttp://bit.ly/2uNELbU

Note. b) FromPlišo, A.-M., &Morikawa,T. (n.d.). *Tinder me tender: Breaking the myth of a mobile dating application in a cross-cultural comparison*.University of Basel.

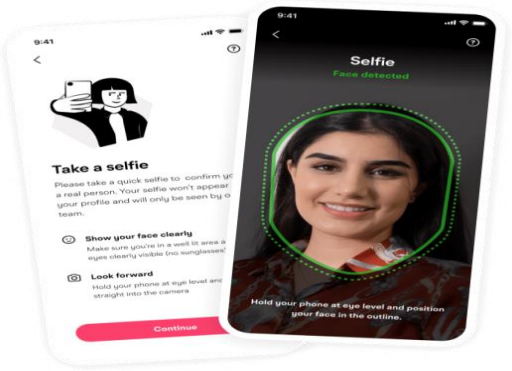
1.4. Procedures of Data Collection

The investigation aimed to identify patterns in the visual elements of user profiles. Despite dating applications' theoretical availability in Algeria, we faced consistent access difficulties to *Tinder*. Consequently, this necessitated seeking assistance from contacts outside Algeria to gather profile data and take screenshots for profiles using their accounts, leading to potential limitations, since relying on third parties reduced control over profile selection.

As a result, the research necessarily focused on nonverbal elements (primarily images and Emojis) as the mainly consistent data points across all collected profiles. The data collection process involved capturing profile screenshots, which were then anonymized using coded identifiers (e.g., **T-FP1** for *Tinder* Female Profile 1) to respect ethical standards and protect subject privacy. **Screenshot** security feature **on *Muzz***however, prevented direct screenshots, requiring us to document profiles using secondary device to photograph screens.

Figure 5

Muzz App's Selfie Verification Process with Instructions and Face Detection Feature



Note. From Muzz, 2025 https://muzz.com/en-US/

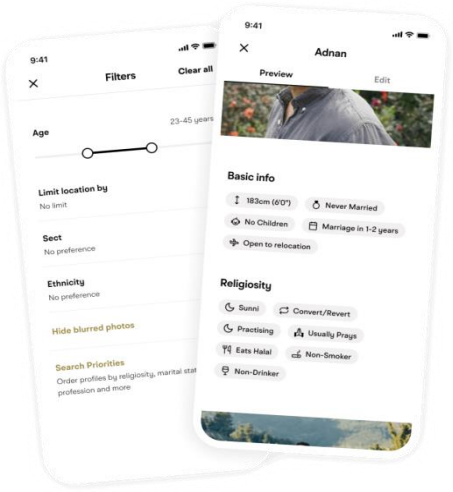
Each profile was analysed using a systematicinter-coding, adhering to this research ethical considerations. The findings were analysed upon a content analysis matrix categorizing observations into three primary dimensions: profile identification,photographic elements, and profile section components. This structured approach ensures systematic comparison while ensuring analytical consistency.

1.4.1. Sampling Strategy

The sampling approach employed a purposive sampling strategy to select profiles through specific criteria to gain detailed cultural insights into the chosen sample (McCombes, 2019). The filtering mechanisms inherent on both platforms makes random selection on the platform unfeasible.Profiles were selected from adults aged 25–35 this demographic cohort provides three characteristics to this sample such as: to control generational differences in digital self-presentation, as this age group typically demonstrates familiarity with digital platforms.

Figure 6

Filtering *Options and Profile Information Display on Muzz Including Age Preferences and Religiosity Indicators*



Note. From Muzz, 2025 (https://muzz.com/en-US/)

Gender balance was ensured with equal representation: five profiles per gender from each platform(N = 20 total), allowing robust cross-gender and cross-cultural comparisons. Due to inability to directly access *Tinder* profiles restricted the number of profiles available for analysis and the research necessarily focus on nonverbal elements (primarily images) as the only consistently reliable data across all collected profiles. To control for temporal variables all profiles were collected within one week to minimize the influence of platform updates or socio-cultural events. English was the primary language used in describing the profiles; however, non-English cultural expressions present in profiles were also included in the analysis. The final sample of 20 profiles offers sufficient diversity for identification of recurring semiotic patterns while remaining manageable for in-depth comparative analysis This allows exploration of how religious and secular identities are expressed through nonverbal self-presentation. Another point to bring to the table, the sampling strategy was designed to capture the core semiotic patterns of faith-based versus secular dating cultures rather than to compare different nationalities.

For *Muzz* profiles, the research focused exclusively on Algerian users to maintain cultural consistency within the Islamic faith-based framework. This homogeneous approach allows for clear identification of Islamic semiotic patterns without the interference of varied

cultural interpretations of religious practice. Including Muslims from diverse backgrounds such as Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey would have introduced additional layers of cultural variation that could obscure the core Islamic semiotic patterns this study aims to identify. By concentrating on one cultural group, the research can isolate how Islamic values translate into digital self-representation without the complexity of different regional Islamic traditions.

For *Tinder* profiles, the study deliberately included users from multiple nationalities to reflect the platform's secular, globalized nature. *Tinder* markets itself as transcending traditional cultural boundaries and creating a universal language of attraction based on individual expression rather than cultural or religious identity. The multinational sampling captures this platform's fundamental character as a globalizing force that promotes similar patterns of self-presentation across different cultural backgrounds.

1.5. Procedures of Data Analysis

This research's analytical approach integrates cultural semiotics with comparative content analysis. Two complementary semiotic frameworks were applied to provide a dual lens on cultural meaning-making in dating profiles. The first is Lotman's (1990) semiosphere model, offering tools for understanding cultural boundaries, center-periphery dynamics, translation and interpretation across borders, and internal cultural heterogeneity. The second is Barthes' theory of signification orders (denotation and connotation), which helps to extract shared cultural meanings from profiles content. Consequently, the analysis unfolded in several stages:

- *Stage one: development of coding procedures*

A coding framework was constructed based on the two semiotics theories
and related research on internet self-presentation. This initial coding captured denotative content; literal elements such as setting (photo location), costume (clothing), and

accompanying objects, laying the foundation for deeper analysis.

The categorieswereorganizedintothree dimensions :

a. Profile Identification (gender, age, religious/cultural affiliation)

b. Photographic Elements (symbols, body language, clothing, location, objects, poses,)

c. Profile Section Components (Emojies, icons, verification badges, visual motifs)

- *Stage Two: independentcoding*

Lotman'ssemiosphere model was applied to examine how profiles operate within cultural boundaries, in order to maintain inter-rater reliability and minimize subjectivity. thus, we were in charge of the analysing process. For instance, *Muzz* profiles demonstrated a distinctly Islamic semiosphere through specific visual codes distinguishing Islamic from non-Islamic spaces. Central elements, such as prayer or modest dress, were contrasted with more flexible peripheral elements. Cultural translation was analysed by observing how Islamic traditions aligned with modern dating conventions. Lotman's emphasis on heterogeneity which revealed the internal diversity of both platforms rather than treating faith-based or secular profiles as homogenous.Stage two concentrate on coding denotative elements, for meaning interpretation of cultural elements.

Settings (e.g., mosque, beach, café**)**

Attire (e.g., hijab, formal attire, casual wear)

Objects or icons (e.g., prayer beads, pets, books)

- *Third stage: the implementation of the theoretical framework*

Barthes' connotative analysis moved beyond the literal meaning to explore cultural associations. Starting from the denotative elements, second-order signifiers (cultural values and meanings) were identified. For example, a headscarf may literally denote a piece of fabric but connotatively suggest religious devotion, cultural heritage, or modesty depending

on context. This demonstrates how profile elements portrayed complex cultural messages implicitly understood by users from similar cultural backgrounds.

- *Stage four: cross cultural comparative analysis*

Finally, findings were compared across platforms, mapping distinctions between the Islamic semiosphere of *Muzz* and the secular one of *Tinder*. This included examining gender presentation and how masculinity and femininity were visually coded in relation to religious versus secular values.

The entire data collection and analysis process was conducted within seven weeks. Week one was dedicated to sampling and profiling data collection. Week two was used in the initial coding process using a framework developed from the literature on digital self-presentation. Three weeks were dedicated for more in-depth semiotic analysis guided by Lotman's and Barthes' frameworks. Then couple of weeks were left for cross-platform comparison and findings synthesis. This chronology guide ensured methodological consistency and clarity in all research phases.

1.6. Ethical Consideration

This research strictly adheres to ethical guidelines for digital ethnography and social media research. All personal information was removed from collected profiles and replaced with coded identifiers to protect user privacy (e.g., **T-FP1** for *Tinder* Female Profile 1). Additionally, Profile images were described rather than published, while cultural and religious symbols were examined with academic objectivity and cultural sensitivity, thereby ensuring respect for participants' identities and communities.

Throughout the study, the analysis focused on cultural patterns, not individual self-presentation choices, maintaining an academic rather than evaluative stance. Collected data and screenshots were stored securely on password-protected devices and will be deleted upon the study's completion to prevent unauthorized access or misuse. These ethical protocols

ensure respect for personal privacy and cultural sensitivity while allowing for meaningful academic analysis of nonverbal self-representation across culturally distinct digital platforms

2. Section Two: Data Analysis and Discussion

2.1. Data Analysis

2.1.1 *Muzz* Profile Findings

2.1.1.1 Lotman's Cultural Semiotic perspective. The *Muzz* application profiles establish clear cultural significations that align with Islamic values through consistent visual elements. This creates what Lotman described as a 'semiosphere' with distinctive rules of signification that are immediately recognizable to in-group members. The following analysis examines how these cultural boundaries manifest across religious identity markers, professional presentations, and heritage expressions.

2.1.2.1.1 Cultural Boundaries. Cultural boundaries in Lotman's semiosphere refer to the zones where different cultural systems meet, interact, and sometimes create new meanings. These boundaries can be both restrictive and generative, limiting certain expressions while enabling creative innovations.

M-FP3's profile clearly demonstrates how religious boundaries influence self-presentation. Her niqab represents a distinct cultural boundary, defining appropriate female visibility within certain Islamic traditions**.** Yet**,** the profile itself embodies a crossing of boundaries by leveraging modern technology (dating apps) while adhering to traditional religious practices. Here, the verification badge serves as a boundary-crossing mechanism, enabling her traditional identity to function within a modern technological context without compromising its integrity.

Similarly**, M-FP1** negotiates cultural boundaries between ethnic tradition and contemporary dating practices. Her Amazigh attire maintains cultural distinctions that preserve ethnic identity, while her participation in digital dating signifies boundary crossing.

The "warm and neutral expression" suggests a comfort with this negotiation—neither fully abandoning tradition nor rejecting modern platforms. In this case**,** the verification badge legitimizes such boundary crossing, making it socially acceptable to express traditional identity in non-traditional contexts.

In contrast, male profiles exhibit a different approach to cultural boundaries, often emphasizing professional and lifestyle identities alongside religious-cultural markers. For instance, **M-MP2's** gym selfie negotiates boundaries between private bodily development and public self-presentation. By photographing himself "flexing his arm" in a semi-private space (a gym changing area with "lockers in the back"), he crosses boundaries between intimate bodily practice and public dating presentation. The verification badge legitimizes this boundary crossing, rendering his physical display socially acceptable within dating contexts rather than inappropriate.

Similarly, **M-MP4's** choice to look "away from the camera" while wearing traditional Islamic attire demonstrates the maintenance of cultural boundaries. In some Islamic traditions, direct engagement with the viewer through photography may be considered immodest; thus, he preserves cultural norms around appropriate male presentation while still participating in the modern practice of online dating.

Format of a mirror selfie represents an intriguing boundary violation regarding personal space affordances. Medical environments typically enforce strict boundaries around professional behavior and self-presentation, yet **M-MP1** integrates this professional space into a personal dating context.

2.1.2.1.2 Center-Periphery Dynamics. In cultural semiotics, the center represents established norms and dominant values, while the periphery indicates alternative or emerging expressions. The dating profiles reveal interesting center-periphery dynamics in how individuals present themselves.

Profile **M-FP3** perfectly illustrates center-periphery tensions in religious expression. Wearing a niqab in an outdoor setting positions this woman at what might be considered the cultural center of traditional Islamic values. The verification badge adds institutional legitimacy to her profile, reinforcing her placement within the core of a faith-based cultural system. Her contemplative pose—with her hand near her niqab—suggests comfort with this central positioning rather than resistance to it.

Similarly, **M-FP4's** photograph at Mecca represents perhaps the ultimate center in Islamic cultural geography. By choosing this highly sacred location for her profile photo, she positions herself at both the physical and symbolic heart of religious identity. The white hijab and the presence of the Kaaba in the background unmistakably signal adherence to central religious practices. Here, the verification badge does more than validate identity; it implicitly endorses her alignment with these core cultural values.

In contrast, **M-FP5** introduces an intriguing periphery dynamic through her use of emojis. While other profiles maintain formal verification without personal embellishment, her inclusion of **"a ringed planet emoji, accompanied by a white heart and sparkling stars"** injects elements of youth and digital culture into the dating platform. This subtle innovation creates a peripheral departure from the established system while still upholding verification standards.

Male profiles **similarly** exhibit fascinating center-periphery dynamics that reveal cultural value systems. Consider **M-MP3's** pilot uniform, which unmistakably represents a centralized professional identity. The **"formal blue pilot uniform with gold**

accents" positions him firmly within institutional authority structures. Aviation, as a profession with strict hierarchies and standardized appearances, places this profile at the center of professional prestige systems. His verification badge reinforces this centrality, creating a dual validation—from both the dating platform and the implied professional institution that granted him pilot status.

Conversely**, M-MP2** occupies an intriguing position between center and periphery in masculine self-presentation. His mirror selfie in a gym while **"flexing his arm"** engages with contemporary fitness culture's emphasis on physical development. This represents a relatively peripheral form of masculine expression compared to **M-MP3's** institutional authority, yet one that has gained centrality in dating culture where physical appearance is prioritized. The gym setting, with its **"lockers in the back,"** frames this as a legitimate space for masculine performance.

Notably, **M-MP4's** traditional Islamic appearance demonstrates religion's role as a cultural anchor. His **"traditional Islamic white thobe with a head covering (turban)"** and **"serious and calm expression"** situate him within religious tradition rather than secular modernity. By averting his gaze from the camera, he subtly upholds traditional values of modesty. Here, the verification badge serves to legitimize this religious presentation within the dating platform's framework, illustrating how traditional identities are accommodated in modern technological spaces.

2.1.2.1.3 Translation and Interpretation. Lotman's concept of translation involves how meanings move between systems or how symbols from one context are interpreted in another. The profiles demonstrate various translation processes among them the translation of conservative cultures from real life to digital spheres.

M-FP1 exemplifies cultural translation through clothing. Her "Amazigh (Chaoui) attire with intricate needlework" represents traditional ethnic identity, now reinterpreted

within the modern context of a dating profile. Here, the verification badge functions as a translation mechanism, assuring viewers that this ethnic expression is authentic rather than performative effectively converting cultural trust into digital verification. Her "warm and neutral expression" further facilitates this translation by rendering traditional attire approachable within contemporary dating norms.

Similarly, **M-FP2** offers a more pronounced example of cultural translation. Her "traditional Kabyle attire, complete with a headpiece and necklace" transplants specific cultural heritage from ceremonial contexts into the digital dating sphere. These elements serve as cultural signifiers that demand interpretation for unfamiliar audiences while signaling belonging to potential matches. Her "subtle smile with straightforward gaze" aids this translation by personalizing what might otherwise appear as opaque cultural markers.

Male profiles reveal distinct translation processes between cultural spheres. **M-MP1** demonstrates professional-to-personal translation through his "green medical scrub top" in an apparent "medical facility." This visually communicates occupational prestige without verbal declaration, while the clinical setting authenticates and the mirror selfie format adapts it to casual dating conventions.

Meanwhile, **M-MP2's** gym selfie translates physical culture into dating capital. His "black t-shirt with sports pants" and the act of "flexing his arm" convert fitness pursuits into tangible desirability attributes like strength and discipline. Contextual details the "water bottle" and "black bag"—ground this translation in authenticity, while his "slightly serious" expression bridges athletic dedication and romantic intentionality.

2.1.2.1.4 Heterogeneity. Lotman's concept of heterogeneity refers to the coexistence of different sign systems within a cultural space, creating richness and dynamism within faith based digital semiosphere.

M-FP3 and M-MP4 exemplify religious heterogeneity within the dating platform's ecosystem**. M-FP3's** pink niqab against a natural backdrop creates a striking juxtaposition between strict religious observance and personal aesthetic expression. This chromatic choice within religious parameters reveals how even ostensibly rigid symbolic systems accommodate internal diversity. Conversely, **M-MP4's** "traditional Islamic white thobe with a head covering (turban)"—paired with his averted gaze establishes a distinct religious aesthetic within the same digital space. Together, these profiles illustrate the spectrum of variation possible within shared faith traditions.

Furthermore, **M-FP2 and M-FP5** show case heterogeneity in negotiating tradition and modernity**. M-FP2's** formal posture in traditional Kabyle attire embodies cultural preservation, while **M-FP5's** relaxed stance in contemporary attire (black headband, yellow t-shirt) within a modern setting signals cultural adaptation. The latter's innovative emoji usage ("✨") further accentuates this modern orientation. Though both profiles are verification-authenticated, they represent divergent strategies for maintaining cultural identity within the platform's framework.

The male profiles show a significant heterogeneity in how masculinity and status are presented where professional heterogeneity is evident when comparing **M-MP1 and M-MP3. M-MP1's** "green medical scrub top" in a clinical setting establishes professional identity through the medical field, while **M-MP3's** pilot uniform represents a completely different professional sphere. Both use occupation as a primary identity marker, but through distinct visual languages. The verification badges legitimize these different professional presentations, allowing diverse work identities to coexist within the same dating ecosystem.

Moreover, **M-MP2 and M-MP5** demonstrate heterogeneity in bodily versus institutional status. **M-MP2's** gym setting and flexing pose emphasize physical capital and the body as a project, while **M-MP5's** formal suit emphasizes institutional capital and professional accomplishment. Both men are seeking to display value, but through completely different cultural systems 'physical culture versus business culture'. Their contrasting approaches show how masculinity can be performed through either bodily or institutional achievements.

Finally, Religious and secular heterogeneity is evident between **M-MP4** and **M-MP5**. **M-MP4's** traditional Islamic attire positions religious identity as fundamental to his self-presentation, while **M-MP5's** Western business suit places him within secular professional culture. Both men adopt formal attire, but from entirely different cultural traditions, demonstrating how the dating platform accommodates both religious and secular expressions of masculine identity.

2.1.2.2 Barthes's Semiotics of Orders of Signification.

2.1.2.2.1 Denotation.

- **Cultural and Religious Dress**

At the denotative level, *Muzz's* profiles are characterized by a coherent set of denotative elements that constitute a visual language. Photographic content reveals the cultural context within which the self is constructed. Women's profiles demonstrate a marked prevalence of cultural and religious dress, with some profiles featuring traditional clothing in various forms. These include the black Chaoui-style Amazigh outfit with gold Amazigh embroidery, as shown in **(M-FP1)**, complete with a headband, and the traditional Kabyle outfit **(M-FP2),** complete with head accessories (forehead). They also featured various forms of Islamic dress, including the niqab **(M-FP3),** which covers the face, and the hijab **(M-FP4).**

Even in more relaxed and simple settings, such as in **(M-FP5)**, a simple yellow shirt with a black headband, modesty and cultural identity remained clear through the head covering.

Men's profiles on the *Muzz* app platform display distinct clothing choices ranging from professional attire to traditional religious attire. The traditional Islamic thobe with head covering appears in **(M-MP4)**. Professional attire frequently appears, such as a green medical uniform **(M-MP1)**, a formal pilot's uniform **(M-MP3)**, and a business suit **(M-MP5)**. Casual clothing such as fitness wear **(M-MP2)** also appears, indicating distinct professional contexts and activities.

- **Environmental Settings and Backgrounds**

The building settings of these profiles range from indoor home environments to outdoor spaces. Women's profiles feature indoor home environments **(M-FP1, M-FP2)** that typically feature plain backgrounds of walls or plain space. Outdoor environments **(M-FP3)** feature natural elements of trees and sky. Culturally significant religious sites such as Mecca **(M-FP4)** feature the Kaaba and crowds of pilgrims, evidence of the Hajj or Umrah season. Only one profile **(M-FP5)** depicts a peaceful night scene on a beach.

Men's profiles primarily depict indoor environments with functional contexts, such as a medical facility **(M-MP1)**, a gym **(M-MP2)**, a hotel room **(M-MP3)**, and an indoor domestic space **(M-MP5)**, with the exception of an outdoor setting **(M-MP4)**, which features trees in the background. Male environments often include environmental elements that express professional or lifestyle contexts.

- **Facial Expressions and Communication Patterns**

Facial expressions across profiles tend to maintain consistent patterns. In female's profiles, expressions are calm, neutral, or subtly warm without exaggerating emotion. In M-FP3, the niqab covers most of the facial features, excluding the eyes. The expression remains

calm through the eyes. The gaze is directed directly at the camera, indicating direct and thoughtful communication.

Men's profiles show facial expressions that tend toward seriousness or neutrality, with very limited smiles. Only **M-MP3** exhibits a "friendly gaze," suggesting a reserved male self-presentation. Poses generally face the camera directly, with the exception of **M-MP4**, where the gaze is turned away, creating a sense of contemplation. Most are mirror selfies **(M-MP1, M-MP2)** or self-portraits **(M-MP3, M-MP5)**, suggesting direct interaction in self-presentation.

- **Profile Structure and Material Objects**

The profile structure maintains consistency across both male and female users, displaying basic biographical information (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity) without significant variations in order or focus, suggesting a standardization approach implemented by the platform. Additionally, verification is consistently applied to all profiles, appearing as blue institutional badges next to usernames.

Emoji use is limited across profiles, with only one female profile **(M-FP5)** including emojis (a ringed planet, a white heart, and twinkling stars) next to the username. However, the objects shown in photographs vary by gender. Women's profiles show minimal objects, creating a focus on the subject rather than possessions. When present, they carry cultural significance, as shown in **(M-FP2)**, with the head ornaments and studded necklace symbolizing traditional Algerian heritage, while the presence of the Kaaba and pilgrims in white performing Umrah or Hajj in the background **(M-FP4)** adds to the religious and Islamic faith.

Men's profiles frequently feature items that emphasize technology, with iPhones appearing in many images. Other items appear in professional contexts (e.g, medical equipment **(M-MP1)**), or lifestyle activities (e.g, sports equipment, a travel bag) **(M-MP3,**

M-MP2), or masculine accessories such as glasses and a silver ring **(M-MP5)**. These items suggest the prominence of technology in lifestyle and professional identity. Additionally, physical modifications such as tattoos or some additions are noticeably absent in all male profiles. Body posture includes various poses, including arm bends **(M-MP2)**, indicating physical ability and fitness awareness.

2.1.2.2.2 Connotation.

- **Cultural Heritage and Religious Identity**

The connotative level reveals aspects and standards of cultural and religious identity that operate within superficial presentation through profiles. The traditional Chaoui and Kabyle dress shown in women's profiles **(M-FP1, M-FP2)** not only suggests adherence to cultural and aesthetic standards, but also symbolizes the active adoption and pride of Algerian cultural heritage, weaving it as an integral part of national identity and a symbol of its cultural symbols.

This indicates cultural harmony and its preservation through its embodiment across generations and eras within its aesthetic folds. The Amazigh embroidery, as shown in **(M-FP1)**, indicates a history with a touch of cultural pride and continuity embodied and woven between threads, carrying within it historical significance that goes beyond mere aesthetic choice, placing the user within an ethnic and cultural tradition that tells a long history.

Meanwhile, manifestations of Islamic modesty, from the full niqab to the hijab, symbolize varying degrees of religious commitment and modesty within the realm of Islamic traditions. The niqab in the profile **(M-FP3)** indicates a religious practice, which may indicate a degree of commitment. The user expects similar values in a partner. Wearing the hijab while performing Umrah or Hajj in Mecca, as illustrated in **M-FP4**, signifies commitment to the teachings of Islam and the fulfilment of one of the pillars of Islam with its strict regulations and legal obligations.

It also indicates religious participation that goes beyond the restrictions of speech and declaration to practice, becoming a lived experience for the user on the ground, forming the essence of their religious identity and potentially serving as a sign of compatibility between potential partners. The traditional Islamic thobe **(M-MP4)** in men's profiles signifies religious authenticity and cultural tradition adherence, presenting an alternative pathway rooted in religious devotion and cultural continuity, yet equally valid within frameworks of masculine identity.

- **Professional Achievement and Status Markers**

Professional clothing, settings, and work environments in men's profiles signal achievement, professional status, and financial security. The medical uniform **(M-MP1)**, pilot uniform **(M-MP3)**, and business suit **(M-MP5)** do not merely indicate employment but suggest prestigious positions in the labor market, carrying significant cultural capital in Islamic societies where professional stability is highly valued. These traits are particularly desirable in the marriage market within male-dominated social structures.

The hotel room setting visible in **M-MP3**'s profile suggests global mobility and professional flexibility, qualities potentially attractive to partners. Combined with the pilot's uniform, this environmental detail constructs a cohesive narrative of transnational career success. The frequent presence of technology, such as Apple products rather than generic smartphones, suggests brand awareness and modernity despite traditional religious values, demonstrating the balance males strike between religiosity and a contemporary lifestyle.

- **Physical Fitness and Masculine Identity**

Sportswear, as depicted in **M-MP2**, communicates physical fitness awareness and self-discipline. The athletic environment and flexed posture of **M-MP2** underscore health consciousness and physical strength—traditional masculine traits reinterpreted through contemporary fitness culture. This display of bodily discipline promotes an active, vibrant

lifestyle, contrasting sharply with sedentary alternatives, thereby enhancing social value in masculine-centric communities. Body posture includes various poses, including arm bends **(M-MP2)**, indicating physical ability and fitness awareness.

- **Environmental Comfort and Trust Elements**

The internal structure of backgrounds in women's profiles reflects comfort and privacy at home, as illustrated in **(M-FP1, M-FP2)**, while **(M-FP5, M-FP3)** reflects harmony with nature, creating a sense of comfort and psychological reassurance. As for Mecca, **M-FP4,** it indicates spiritual and religious commitment, which is a fundamental pillar of Islamic identity.

The unified profile structure across all profiles reflects a hierarchical system in personal profiling, prioritizing demographic and background information over personal expression, suggesting seriousness about building relationships and comfort.Also , profile verification badges signal trust and authenticity within the app's ecosystem, enhancing trust in a religious dating context where family reputation and personal integrity are paramount in building relationships.

- **Emotional Expression and Self-Presentation**

Facial expressions across profiles indicate emotional awareness and sense of self-control, as opposed to the more common display of emotion. The prevalence of neutral and serious expressions indicates attractiveness and a charismatic structure that restrains and inhibits emotion—traditionally masculine traits that denote maturity and stability also connote gravity and responsibility, aligning with traditional concepts of male roles in the Muslim community as providers and protectors. With the exception of the "friendly gaze" in the **M-MP3** file, this suggests a spectrum of emotion framed within masculine identity on the platform.

In women's profiles, calm, neutral expressions indirectly symbolize humility and self-control, conveying valuable personality traits. Even on the subtle side of facial features, as in **M-FP3**, a calm gaze reflects inner peace. The presence of minimal items in female profiles indicates a person's value of their essence over their material possessions. In the case of **M-FP2**, traditional jewelry represents a cultural symbol associated with Algerian heritage, such as aesthetics and social status. The absence of emojis, which are almost non-existent in just one profile, indicates formality and seriousness in embarking on a relationship.

The professionally crafted, high-resolution images across male profiles convey a sense of male vanity, yet convey authenticity and spontaneity, while also displaying care. Similar to the effective selfie-taking, the images demonstrate self-sufficiency and contemporary visual knowledge.

2.1.3 Tinder Profile Findings

2.1.3.1. Lotman's Cultural Semiotic perspective. Lotman conceptualized culture as a semiosphere which is basically a space of semiotic processes where meaning-making occurs. *Tinder* represents a secular semiosphere where boundaries, interpretations and diversity function differently compared to faith based semiospheres.

2.1.3.1.1. Cultural Boundaries. While *Tinder* appears boundary-free, it actually enforces specific cultural codes, for example, brief and witty bios are valued over lengthy explanations besides the display of social status through travel photos, activities, and possessions rather than explicit value statements.

Also, to add that *Tinder* profiles prioritize visual representation where photos are the primary communication vehicle. This creates an implicit secular boundary where physical appearance becomes a key filtering mechanism.

Female profiles on *Tinder* demonstrate fascinating boundary negotiations between traditional and modern forms of self-presentation. Drawing on **T-FP4's** Saudi Arabian profile, it exemplifies a significant cultural boundary through her partial face visibility, showing only lips and chin while wearing an open veil in a car interior.

This represents what Lotman would identify as a boundary, simultaneously adhering to certain cultural modesty norms while not strictly adhering to full covered hair or neck, parts of her body still appear, being influenced by the western dating semiosphere and participating in a Western dating platform. The pearl necklace and slight smile function as subtle feminine signifiers.

Furthermore, the **T-FP3** profile establishes different cultural boundaries through her neck tattoo (firearm design) and red polished nails. Since these bodily modifications serve as boundary-crossing elements for the dating concept in general but it matches well with the secular free of faith boundary, signaling participation in alternative subcultures while still engaging with mainstream dating practices. Her bathroom mirror selfie with side angle face and hand in hair creates an intimate boundary zone between private and public self-presentation.

Moreover, the**T-FP1's** profile negotiates cultural boundaries through contrasting elements. Considering Her warm smile and minimalistic necklace represent conventional femininity, while her prominent arm tattoo with architectural design crosses into alternative cultural territory. This boundary position allows her to signal both approachability and individuality, creating what Lotman might call a "boundary personality" that can function effectively across different cultural spaces within the dating ecosystem.

Male profiles on *Tinder* negotiate cultural boundaries in ways that differ from female profiles, often emphasizing different aspects of identity. **T-MP3** most clearly demonstrates cultural boundaries through his profile photograph in a historical Italian city (likely

Florence). This profile visually establishes boundaries between home culture and foreign culture through tourism. The setting of a historical landmark creates a boundary between everyday life and special cultural experiences.

The profile suggests cultural boundary crossing through travel and engagement with another culture's historical sites. This boundary-crossing behaviour is significant as it demonstrates willingness to engage with cultural "otherness" while still maintaining his own identity markers (style of dress, posture).

Similarly, **T-MP4's** profile displays cultural boundaries through the setting of what appears to be a bar with colourful lanterns and a "Travellers' Choice 2023" award. This setting establishes a boundary between everyday environments and special cultural spaces designed for social interaction. His presence in this well-rated establishment signals cultural capital and the crossing of social boundaries.

In contrast, **T-MP5's** gym setting creates a different type of cultural boundary - one between physical fitness culture and other aspects of life. The industrial, modern fitness facility with bright orange/red neon signage establishes a specialized cultural space with its own rules and behaviours.

2.1.3.1.2. Centre-Periphery Dynamics

The verified profile **T-FP5** occupies a central position within the *Tinder* semiosphere. Her blue verification checkmark represents institutional legitimacy within the platform's cultural hierarchy. The Italian nationality, neutral expression, and conventional car setting align with platform norms of "proper" self-presentation despite the fact that it is not quite common to see verification check marks in *Tinder* profiles , also her "proper" self-presentation contradicts other female profiles through her less body parts exposure and casual pose that is considered as peripheral for secular semiosphere. Her simple profile structure

with minimal information demonstrates how centrality often manifests through adherence to established conventions rather than expressive individuality.

In contrast, **T-FP2** operates from a more centric position (aligns with what secular indicates) with extensive tattoos (arms and leg text tattoo) and bathroom mirror selfies that partially obscure her face. The absence of verification denotes her further from the cultural center. However, from a dating semiospheric perspective, her multiple selfie styles (seated on floor, standing mirror pose) represent peripheral experimentation with self-presentation formats that diverge from central dating profile conventions. Yet this peripherality allows creative expression that might appeal to subcultural niches within the dating ecosystem.

Nevertheless, **T-FP3's** profile occupies an interesting middle position between center and periphery. While her small neck tattoo (firearm) represents a central secular participation, her clear mirror selfie adheres to conventional presentation formats (where convention is far from secular). From a dating semiosphere perspective, her "uncertainty rock and roll hand sign" in her bio represents a peripheral innovation in communication style, while her structured profile sections maintain central platform conventions. This strategic positioning allows her to signal alternative identity markers while remaining legible within mainstream dating culture.

T-MP3 actually represents center values most prominently through his visible tattoos (text tattoos on the knees) and ripped jeans, which signal secular, liberated self-expression. These elements position him firmly within the center of the secular dating culture, where body modifications and non-conventional clothing are valued expressions of individuality. His casual posture in a tourist location further reinforces his central position in secular dating norms that value experiences and aesthetic self-presentation over traditional values.

Similarly, **T-MP4's** presence in what appears to be a bar or restaurant setting with colourful lanterns represents central values in secular dating culture. This environment

celebrates social interaction in leisure spaces designed for pleasure and connection rather than traditional courtship settings. His relaxed poster and casual blue button-up shirt further establish his position within secular dating norms that value approachability and social ease.

In contrast, **T-MP1** displays more peripheral elements through his formal business attire (dark suit, light blue dress shirt, and dark tie). This traditional professional presentation, while respected in mainstream society, moves toward the periphery in secular dating contexts where authenticity and casual self-expression are often more valued than conventional markers of success. His more formal approach represents a peripheral element that bridges traditional values with the secular dating platform.

Also, for **T-MP5's** profile gym setting places him at the centre of secular dating culture that values physical appearance and self-improvement. The modern fitness facility with bright neon lighting represents the celebration of body cultivation and physical attractiveness that stands at the centre of many secular dating interactions. However, his relatively modest beige/light brown t-shirt and neutral expression might suggest some peripheral elements of restraint that could connect to more traditional values.

Ultimately, **T-MP2** firmly occupies the center through his casual gym shirt, car selfie, and use of weight lifting emojis. These elements celebrate physical culture, mobility, and direct communication about personal interests that define central values in secular dating. His verified profile status further legitimizes his position within the platform's central value system.

2.1.3.1.3. Translation and Interpretation

Through her combination of casual pose and detailed profile structure, **T-FP1** engages in meaning translation. Her visible tattoos translate alternative cultural participation into dating appeal, while her warm smile translates approachability across potential cultural differences. The "heart-eyes emoji used with relationship statement" in her profile serves as a

translation device between serious relationship intentions and casual platform communications, making her desires legible within dating app communication conventions. Her profile serves as the fittest secular model in this research analysis, having a look on her exposing black straps, her arm and shoulder tattoos, her spontaneous pose and direct eye contact with the camera creates.

The **T-FP3's** profile bathroom mirror selfie with side angle face translates personal aesthetic into dating platform code through the familiar format of the mirror selfie. Her phone case and polished nails translate personal style choices into visible personality markers. The "thinking face emoji with rock and roll hand sign" translates complex emotional states (ambivalence, edginess) into the simplified visual language of dating apps, making interior psychological states outwardly visible to potential matches.

T-MP5 best exemplifies translation and interpretation processes through his Saudi Arabian identity in a modern gym setting. This profile demonstrates cultural translation between traditional Saudi cultural context and globalized fitness culture. The beige/light brown t-shirt and neutral expression represent a visual translation between cultural codes - adopting universal gym culture while maintaining cultural modesty in attire choice.

Similarly, **T-MP4** engages in cultural translation through his presentation in what appears to be a multicultural setting with international recognition (Travelers' Choice award). His blue button-up shirt represents a "cultural translation" that works across boundaries - neither too formal nor too casual, allowing for flexible interpretation across cultural contexts. In contrast, **T-MP2** shows translation between physical fitness culture and dating culture through his use of weight lifting emojis in his profile text. These symbols translate his physical activities or interests into digital communication codes that signal specific values to potential matches.

2.1.3.1.4. Heterogeneity

The female profiles demonstrate significant heterogeneity in self-presentation styles, creating a rich semiosphere of feminine expression. The T-FP1 profile combines conventional femininity (warm smile, minimalistic necklace) with alternative markers (prominent architectural tattoo). This heterogeneity allows her profile to function across different cultural contexts within the dating platform, potentially attracting diverse audiences with different value systems.

Similarly, the **T-FP2's** profile exhibits heterogeneity through contrasting photographic styles. Her seated full-body photo in black outfit versus standing mirror selfie in white top with light jacket demonstrates how multiple feminine presentations can coexist within a single profile. The extensive tattoos alongside conventional profile structure (relationship statement first, followed by basic info) shows heterogeneity between visual self-presentation and textual self-organization. This creates a rich, multi-layered semiotic text that communicates across different registers.

T-MP3 most strongly demonstrates cultural heterogeneity through his visual juxtaposition of elements: a historical Italian setting combined with contemporary fashion (ripped jeans, black jacket), and traditional architecture alongside his visible tattoos. This profile embodies the coexistence of different time periods and cultural codes within the same semiotic space. Similarly, **T-MP4's** profile exhibits heterogeneity through the diverse cultural signals in his setting with multicultural decorative elements (colourful light bulbs). His warm smile and blue button-up shirt create a presentation that could be interpreted across multiple cultural contexts, allowing for heterogeneous readings.

Moreover, **T-MP1** displays heterogeneity through the contrast between his formal business attire and the natural garden setting. This juxtaposition of professional identity and

leisure space creates a semiotically rich presentation that combines different life spheres and value systems.

2.1.3.2. Barthes's Semiotics of Orders of Signification.

2.1.3.2.1. Denotation.

- ***Clothing and Self-Presentation Styles***

At the denotative level, *Tinder* profiles display key connotations within the dating platform's communication system. Female profiles show remarkable diversity in clothing choices, ranging from casual to formal or tailored attire. These range from casual or everyday attire, as seen in **(T-FP3)** a dark winter graphic sweatshirt and a grey undershirt with a black and white jacket **(T-FP5)**, to more fashion-forward sleeveless shirts and dresses, as seen in **(T-FP2)** and **(T-FP1)**. While **(T-FP4)** indicates a more formal black and white striped ensemble with an open black shawl, allowing the hair to be seen. Many profiles reveal only part of the clothing, focusing more on facial features than the full clothing.

Male *Tinder* profiles display a variety of visual elements. Clothing styles range from formal, such as black business suits with a shirt and tie **(T-MP1)**, to trendy ensembles such as black blazers with light T-shirts and ripped jeans **(T-MP3, TMP4)**, to casual sportswear such as light gym T-shirts **(T-MP2, T-MP5)**, indicating a diversity of self-presentation in different social contexts.

- ***Environmental Settings and Backgrounds***

The background settings for portraits include prominent contrasts across profiles. Female profiles appear in domestic environments **(T-FP1)**, with many profile selfies presented in front of a bathroom mirror or at home **(T-FP2, T-FP3)** or within a car interior **(T-FP4, T-FP5)**. These backgrounds provide a friendly, personal backdrop for self-presentation.

Male profiles display wide environmental diversity, showing outdoor locations such as green parks with an architectural hedge **(T-MP1)**, tourist locations such as an Italian city with views of a bridge or canal **(T-MP3)**. Indoor locations include a car interior with visible sunroofs **(T-MP2)** or the interior of a fitness center featuring multiple mirrors in a sporty design **(T-MP5)** as well as a cheerful restaurant or bar background **(T-MP4)**. These backgrounds suggest the context of movement and social interaction.

- ***Poses, Expressions, and Physical Presentation***

Selfie angles in female profiles tend toward more informal self-portraits, with people posing in mirrors **(T-FP3)**, sitting on the floor **(T-FP2)**, or in car seats **(T-FP4, T-FP5)**. The posing orientation is characterized by direct eye contact with the camera or slight profile angles, which enhance engagement with potential partners. Also, facial expressions primarily suggest a friendly, subtle smile **(T-FP1, T-FP4)**, a subdued, neutral expression **(T-FP3, T-FP2)**, or pouty lips **(T-FP5)**, depicting a range of expressions from warm to friendly seriousness.

Male profile poses tend to be formal and straightforward, with people typically standing upright **(T-MP1)**, sitting with a regular posture **(T-MP3)**, looking directly at the camera **(T-MP1, T-MP2, T-MP4, T-MP3)**, or posing for a selfie in a fitness center mirror **(T-MP5)**. Facial expressions also feature friendly smiles **(T-MP1, T-MP2, T-MP4)** or neutral expressions **(T-MP5, T-MP3)**.

- ***Body Modifications and Personal Accessories***

Body modifications are prominent in female profiles, where tattoos of varying sizes and designs are displayed. These include architectural designs on the shoulders and arms **(T-FP1)** and at the collarbone; large graphic and text tattoos on the arms, legs, and neck **(T-FP2)**; and small, symbolic tattoos such as a firearm design on the neck below the ear (**T-**

FP3). However, some profiles **(T-FP4, T-FP5)** do not display any visible tattoos, demonstrating a variety of body modification options.

Body modifications in male profiles are minimal, with only one person sporting a tattoo, a text tattoo on their knees **(T-MP3)**. While objects frequently shown in female images include iPhones for taking selfies in front of the mirror as shown in **(T-FP2, T-FP3)**, polished fingernails in various colors of black and red **(T-FP2, T-FP3, T-FP5),** jewelry in the form of simple necklaces and earrings **(T-FP1, T-FP3, T-FP4),** and sunglasses in **(T-FP5)**, which are personal cosmetic accessories that complement a person's appearance.

Men's profiles display accessories such as glasses and a watch **(T-MP5, T-MP1, T-MP2, T-MP3),** a portable entertainment item such as a drink or cup **(T-MP1)**, and a fashion accessory such as a beanie **(T-MP3).**

- ***Profile Structure and Digital Communication Elements***

Female *Tinder* profiles exhibit a denotative-level pattern. Relationship preferences and emojis are typically prioritized first, with some profiles displaying this information prominently **(T-FP1, T-FP2, T-FP3)**. This is followed by varying arrangements of personal information, interests, and communication preferences. **(T-FP5)** stands out from this pattern, featuring a simpler structure containing only basic information.

The structure of male *Tinder* profiles suggests a balanced and organized pattern of information presentation. It begins with relationship goals **(T-MP1)** or basic information **(T-MP2, T-MP3)**, followed by personal details **(T-MP5, T-MP4)**, lifestyle factors, and communication preferences.

Additionally , emoji usage appears consistently across female profiles, with distinct patterns emerging. Heart-shaped eyes often accompany relationship statements **(T-FP1, T-FP2)**, while a thinking face appears alongside statements of uncertainty in **(T-FP3, T-FP5)**. Profile **(T-FP4)** displays more emoji diversity, with the heart emoji used to represent a long-term partner and icons representing preferred activities and personality traits.

Male emoji use appears selective, with emojis corresponding to specific user activities or preferences. Examples include a heart emoji with a relationship statement **(T-MP1)**, a weightlifting emoji with fitness information **(T-MP2)**, and champagne glasses representing casual dating preferences **(T-MP2)**. **T-MP3** and **T-MP4** profiles show no emoji use at all. Similarly, **T-MP5** displays a thinking face emoji.

Profile verification indicators appear inconsistently across both genders. Female profiles lack visible verification badges, with the exception of profile **(T-FP5)**, which displays a blue verification badge. Additionally, verification indicators appear inconsistently in male profiles, with **T-MP2** and **T-MP5** displaying a blue checkmark next to their names, while **T-MP1**, **T-MP3**, and **T-MP4** lack verification badges.

2.1.3.2.2. Connotation.

- ***Fashion, Informality, and Social Integration***

Connotatively, *Tinder* profiles reveal hidden meanings that transcend the literal visual realm. Fashion and the informality of clothing in female profiles **(T-FP2)** and **(T-FP1)** symbolize attention, suggesting authenticity, freedom, and ease of communication, while formal attire suggests social integration. These are qualities valued in contemporary dating markets, conveying cosmopolitanism and cultural sophistication.

Male clothing styles possess a rich connotative level. The diversity between clothing in the formal **(T-MP1)** and informal **(T-MP5)** contexts suggests competence in adapting to different social contexts, practical function, and awareness of appropriate self-presentation in various settings. In masculine styles, the objects on display serve as indicators of social status and lifestyle markers. The inclusion of professional accessories (watches, glasses) as seen in **(T-MP5, T-MP1, T-MP2, T-MP3)** suggests success, professional achievement, and attention to detail, while additional recreational items such as a drink or cup suggest material prosperity.

- ***Environmental Intimacy and Social Mobility***

The ubiquity of home environments in female profiles, particularly bathroom mirrors **(T-FP2, T-FP3)** and car interiors **(T-FP4, T-FP5)**, creates a sense of intimacy and spontaneity, inviting one into one's personal space, creating a sense of privileged accessibility to potential partners. The absence of religious markers in clothing or settings connotes a secular approach to relationship formation where religious identity is not positioned as a central compatibility factor.

Environmental choices in male profiles reveal preference patterns. Outdoor public spaces **(T-MP1)** suggest belonging to the world, activity, and social engagement. In the case of tourist locations, such as an Italian city **(T-MP3)**, cultural sophistication and a culture of travel are valued traits. A car interior with a visible sunroof **(T-MP2)** and the interior of a restaurant or bar indicate ease of movement and social and financial success through car ownership and multiple activities. On the other hand, the context of a fitness center indicates an interest in physical fitness and a culture of healthy living.

- ***Physical Attractiveness and Emotional Availability***

The constant display of striking angles and expressions in female profiles not only suggests physical attractiveness but also a developed self-awareness of one's appearance, indicating social intelligence. Gazing directly at the camera and smiling at it conveys openness and emotional availability **(T-FP1)**, essential features of contemporary dating, which lacks commitment and constraint. The poses create eye contact, simulating personal interaction and signalling ease of communication.

Male facial expressions reveal a variety of masculine features, from friendly smiles to calm neutrality, indicating reliability, emotional stability, and self-confidence. Additionally, the different postures of males, characterized by stability, presence, and environmental engagement, suggest confidence and physical ability. This directness creates a virtual eye contact that mimics in-person interaction, suggesting comfort in social interaction and ease of emotional connection.

- ***Body Modifications and Individual Autonomy***

The prominence of tattoos in female profiles indicates a connotative sign, as body modifications suggest the user's personal and individual autonomy **(T-FP1, T-FP2, T-FP3)**, which can be seen as a rebellion against conventional beauty standards and a departure from the norm. The selected designs—architectural tattoos and textual elements—act as personal narratives inscribed on the body, inviting interpretation while maintaining the ambiguity of their meanings. With the exception of the tattoo-free profiles **(T-FP4, T-FP5)**, they suggest a commitment to conventional beauty standards that discourage body modification.

The presence of tattoos in male profiles, generally minimal and visible in a single profile, symbolizes adherence to traditional masculinity norms or simply conforms to a

personal aesthetic preference based on physical preservation, which typically discourages permanent body modification. This absence may indicate professionalism, while its presence may reveal the user's individuality and personal narrative.

- ***Profile Structure and Digital Communication Strategies***

The structural organization and prioritization of female profiles on *Tinder*, particularly with the prominence of relationship phrases, symbolizes the availability of emotion and romance. The use of emojis indicates the fluidity of emotional expression, and as a shorthand for this, the heart-eyes emoji specifically signifies desire and romantic attraction as a key element of identity display, while the thinking face emoji signifies reflection and contemplation, creating a visual shorthand for personality traits.

The structure of male profiles suggests a systematic approach to thinking and prioritizing communication. Beginning with relationship intentions directly addresses the platform's purpose, suggesting the pursuit of romance rather than casual browsing. The progression from relationship goals to personal details, and finally to interests, suggests a hierarchy that prioritizes compatibility in relationship expectations over shared hobbies or interests.

Selective use of emojis in male profiles, particularly the heart emoji with a relationship statement, suggests a romantic emotional expression, this approach demonstrates emotional intelligence and an awareness of the platform's digital communication norms. Excessive use of emojis can signal immaturity and lack of seriousness, while their complete absence can signal emotional stasis.

- ***Trust and Platform Authentication***

The variance in the consistency of verification indicators for female profiles indicates a differentiation in the platform's eligibility, unverified profiles may suggest fleeting interaction between partners or may be resistant to the app's verification processes, unlike a profile bearing the verification badge **(T-FP5)**, which indicates credibility and transparency within the platform.

The absence of verification indicators across male profiles generally suggests recent contact with the app, fleeting interaction with its features, or resistance to completing verification processes that require additional personal information. This authentication functions within the app's institutional trust system as authenticity determinations.

Finally, the analysis of profiles on *Muzz* and *Tinder* reveals two cultural domains operating within digital dating environments. The *Muzz* platform creates a religious environment characterized by cultural boundaries that preserve Islamic and traditional values while integrating digital technology. profiles display cultural signals that express cultural heritage and religious commitment as an important point, consistent with Islamic cultural values without transgressing.

Tinder, on the other hand, is a more flexible, secular environment than *Muzz*, not bound by a uniform value system. *Muzz* works to bridge Islamic identity, traditional cultural values, and modern dating practices without compromising on values. In contrast *Tinder*, showcases the connection between lifestyle diversity and dating, incorporating personal aesthetics—travel, suits, and body language—into secular dating.

At the denotative level, both platforms exposure visual elements. *Muzz* profiles highlight religious dress, traditional clothing, professional uniforms, and culturally significant environments, which form cohesive religious values. Meanwhile, *Tinder* profiles emphasize

clothing diversity, body modifications, and lifestyle, which indicate flexibility and aesthetic preferences.

At the connotative level, *Muzz* profiles express the cultural heritage, religious commitment, professional achievement, and adherence to traditional gender roles within religious settings, reflecting the platform's emphasis on serious relationship intentions, and cultural values. Connotatively, *Tinder* profiles reference individuallity , aesthetic self-expression, and the emotional appeal of secular dating. Body modifications, diversity in the clothes, and the use of emojis represent digital emotional openness. This comparative analysis demonstrates how digital dating platforms function as cultural dimension that reflect meaning-making, revealing the relationship between traditional cultural values and technology in the construction of romantic relationships.

2.2 Discussion of the findings

2.2.1. Key Differences & Similarities across faith-based and secular dating platforms

Dating profiles function as rich semiotic texts that communicate identity through carefully selected visual elements. *Muzz* and *Tinder* represent distinct semiospheres with their own centers, peripheries, and boundary mechanisms. While *Muzz* centers religious and cultural tradition, creating a semiosphere where modesty and heritage are valued, *Tinder* centers physical appearance and lifestyle experiences, creating a semiosphere where self-expression and aesthetic appeal dominate.

a. Discussion of Identity Construction Through Non-Verbal Cues

- **Similarities**

Users on both platforms employed strategic visual elements to construct desirable identities and signal belonging through settings and body language. Both contexts exhibited individualism through solitary profile pictures. For example, *Muzz'*s**M-MP1** profile featured a professional selfie in medical scrubs to convey professional status, while *Tinder*'s **T-MP3**

utilized a historical Italian city backdrop to demonstrate cultural capital through travel. Both platforms selected backgrounds that communicated their core values, irrespective of cultural context.

The cross-cultural study by Rui and Stefanone (2013) provides additional insight by revealing how strategic self-presentation functions across diverse cultural settings, particularly in digital environments. Their finding that both Singaporean and American users practice strategic image management, despite cultural differences, parallels our observation that *Muzz* and *Tinder* users adopt similar visual strategies across distinct cultural and religious frameworks. This research indicates that while specific cultural expressions may differ, the fundamental strategic approach to self-presentation remains consistent. For instance, **T-FP2's** serious expression communicating relationship intentions and **M-MP4's** averted gaze reflecting cultural modesty both represent deliberate self-presentation choices aligned with platform expectations while serving the same core purpose of attracting compatible partners.

In this regard, it becomes evident that both genders relied on body language to convey personality traits and culturally sanctioned norms. Both contexts shared common approaches for communicating dating intentions despite differing personal belief systems.

- **Differences**

Religious Signifiers:*Muzz* profiles prominently feature religious markers such as**M-FP3's**niqab, **M-FP4's** photo at Mecca, and **M-MP4's** traditional Islamic Thobe. These are entirely absent from *Tinder* profiles, which emphasize secular status symbols. *Tinder* females opted for liberated self-expression through explicit tattoos. As it appears in the **T-FP1** profile extensive tattoos,and through body modifications like **T-FP3's** neck tattoo and **T-FP1's** exposed shoulders.Contrasting with Muslim females' hijab and modest posing as key cultural signs of faith belonging.

Body Exposure:*Tinder* profiles show significantly more body exposure and modification, as it is illustrated int the **T-FP2's** profile short dress and the bold pose. Whereas *Muzz* profiles emphasized modesty with covered bodies and conservative positions. Van Kampen et al. (2024) highlighted how young women navigate "a complex interplay between traditional gender roles and elevated risks in online dating," evident when comparing female users across platforms. According to his study, *Tinder* females employed the so called "selling your best 'self'" through intimate self-presentation taking the example of the Saudi Arabian female profile on *Tinder* (**T-FP4**) she was not fully constrained with the hijab standards, when it comes to her *Clothing*, she was putting an open veil showing part of the brown dyed hair her body exposure aligns well with Van Kampen et al point of view. In contrast, *Muzz* females-maintainedmodesty even in beach settings and the **M-FP5** female profile serves as a good example through her conservative pose and less body exposure, demonstrating faith-based boundaries, where everything within is centric and everything outside is peripheral.

Cultural Heritage:*Muzz* profiles emphasize cultural heritage through traditional dress looking at **M-FP1's**Amazigh attire and **M-FP2's** traditional Kabyle attire, signaling national heritage, while *Tinder* profiles emphasize individualistic expression through tattoos and personal style choices taking the example of the Bar guy (**T-MP4**) he appears alone with a friendly smile resembling the secular culture perfectly since these setting are secularly accepted and sometimes attractive among western females rather than cultural heritage indicators, and with no ethnic group signifiers.

Gaze Direction:*Muzz* profiles demonstrate avoidance of direct stare as modesty like M-MP4's averted gaze, while *Tinder* profiles frequently use direct eye contact to establish connection as it is shown in **T-FP1** and typically most of the *Tinder* studied profiles they look directly to the camera. This reflects center-periphery dynamics where direct eye contact in

Islamic culture is considered disrespectful (peripheral), while in secular semiospheres, avoiding eye contact becomes the peripheral act.

b. Discussion of Denotative and Connotative Meanings

A semiotic analysis of dating app profiles reveals diverse ways of presenting oneself across different digital dating spaces and the fundamental influence of cultural context on nonverbal communication strategies, which in turn carry different cultural connotations among users. By examining the denotative and connotative meanings in *Muzz* and *Tinder* profiles among male and female users, distinct patterns emerge.

Clothing choices represent the most prominent semiotic system between the two platforms. Women's profiles on *Muzz* show a prevalence of traditional cultural clothes and religious head coverings. The perfect examples from these findings are **M-FP2** and **M-FP3**. **M-FP2** shows a woman in traditional Kabyle attire, with a traditional Algerian headpiece and necklace, while **M-FP3** displays Islamic attire consisting of a light pink niqab (a face-covering veil that leaves only the eyes visible) and a hijab. These examples powerfully demonstrate how clothing transcends mere aesthetics to communicate deep cultural and religious identity. They convey powerful connotations that go beyond aesthetics, pointing to cultural heritage and religious commitment, which includes values of modesty that enhance attractiveness within an Islamic context. In contrast, *Tinder* highlights contemporary fashion, displaying freedom and modernity, with an emphasis on users' physical attractiveness.

Among males, formal clothes repeatedly appearing on the *Muzz* platform convey connotative meanings centered on sanctifying practical status and its importance, as well as their ability to perform traditional roles within the framework of the Islamic family as sponsor and breadwinner. This point of view finds perfect illustration in **M-MP3and M-MP5**. In the **M-MP3** profile, he wears a formal blue pilot uniform with gold accents, complete with a tie and national aviation insignia, while **M-MP5** appears in a formal black

suit with a tie. These examples demonstrate how professional attire communicates competence, stability, and the ability to fulfill traditional provider roles within Islamic family structures, suggesting the importance of traditional male roles in societal context - without forgetting attention to appearance and fitness, which highlights male vanity and pride in physical strength.

Supporting this matter, Coll-Planas and Missé (2015) argue that the norms associated with hegemonic masculinity refer to men being dominant, active, independent, strong, influential, rational, emotionally controlled, and heterosexual. As for the *Tinder* platform that features the same formal suits, it reflects a lifestyle of sophistication, suggesting social belonging in the world of modern digital dating. Here the denotative element remains constant, but the connotative meaning changes with the context.

Furthermore, the absence of any body modifications or tattoos in all *Muzz* profiles indicates adherence to religious teachings against body modifications, which are considered taboo in Islamic context. The absence of tattoos across all *Muzz* profiles (**M-FP1** through M-MP5 all note "None are visible" for body modifications) perfectly supports this argument about adherence to religious teachings. Meanwhile, *Tinder* profiles like **T-FP1** with prominent shoulder and arm tattoo with architectural design, small chest and collarbone tattoo, and **T-FP2** with extensive tattoos on arms and leg text tattoo exemplify the *Tinder* platform's absence of religious restrictions, showcasing self-expression through body modifications with diverse designs. These express individual autonomy, creative and aesthetic identity, and a departure from aesthetic conventions, indicating freedom and emotional originality.Emotional expressions also vary based on cultural context. The analysis reveals that both men and women's *Muzz* profiles emphasize modesty with controlled emotional expressions and postures, suggesting a prioritization of inner essence. In contrast,

Tinder allows both genders a much broader emotional range of expression, with friendly smiles and relaxed postures, generating connotations of accessibility and emotional warmth.

Additionally, the analysis reveals distinct environmental settings for self-presentation. Profiles on *Muzz* show simple indoor settings like **M-FP1** (indoors, likely a home environment with a white wall and a framed picture) and **M-MP1** (indoors, likely in a room or medical facility), practical backgrounds gravitating toward privacy, family orientation, and practical commitment. This focus emphasizes personal qualities and religious identity rather than lifestyle activities. Accordingly, the most powerful example of religious significance is **M-FP4**, photographed at a "religious site (Mecca), likely during Hajj or Umrah, with many pilgrims in the background" where "the Kaaba is prominently featured." The Kaaba here transcends its function as a backdrop to become a symbol of religious commitment and Islamic belonging. Meanwhile, *Tinder* users gravitate toward personal settings, social spaces and tourist places that suggest lifestyle compatibility and ease of emotional connection. T-MP3 provides an excellent example, photographed "Outdoors (historical Italian city with bridge and canal view, likely Florence)."

Moreover, technology appears consistently (like iPhone phones) in both cultural contexts in self-presentation strategies, though its meanings vary according to context, highlighting social status advancement and the balance between religious commitment and success in contemporary contexts. Additionally, verification badges emerge comprehensively on *Muzz* platform profiles, serving as digital systems that highlight confidence contexts, which include family reputation and approval as mature factors in relationship-building before any emotional considerations, as all *Muzz* profiles consistently show verification badges next to names.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights the process of adapting gender patterns in digital spaces despite religious commitment, though it does not disappear, as both platforms include

male and female patterns but with visual vocabulary specific to each cultural context and its own cultural frameworks. Both platforms operate within digital limits that do not erase cultural differences, but rather present visual options carrying layers of cultural meanings for potential partners from the same cultural background.

c. Discussion of Cultural Semiotics in Gender Identity Portrayal

The cultural semiotics embedded within dating platforms reveal fundamentally different approaches to constructing and communicating gendered identity, with each platform type employing distinct symbolic systems that reflect their underlying worldviews.

In accordance with Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotic model, centrality has distinct layers of meaning in *Muzz* compared to *Tinder*. On Muzz, religious expression forms the center of the semiosphere for females, with **M-FP4's** photograph at Mecca representing "the ultimate center in Islamic cultural geography," while professional identity serves as centrality for males. In the Arabic context, professional identity may serve as a secondary center, particularly for male users (**M-MP3's** pilot uniform, **M-MP1's** medical setting) where social status and religiosity matter most among the opposite gender. Physical appearance is positioned at the periphery, with body display minimized.

This distinct semiosphere aligns with Stoicescu's (2019) argument about online dating's capacity to both globalize and fragment dating cultures simultaneously. While Stoicescu (2019) suggests that online dating applications contribute to "the adherence of a globalized dating culture," the present analysis reveals that this globalization operates through parallel, culturally-specific semiospheres rather than a singular universal approach. The faith-based centrality on *Muzz* demonstrates how traditional cultural boundaries are not dissolved by digital technology but rather reinforced and translated into new digital contexts, supporting Stoicescu's (2019) observation that online dating remains "highly vulnerable to influences from cultural settings."

Tinder's **T-FP4** presents herself in a car at night, wearing an open veil that shows part of her brown-dyed hair. She's from Saudi Arabia, but notice how she adapts to what we might call the "global *Tinder* language." She uses an elaborate emoji system throughout her profile - heart emoji for "long-term partner" and dancing people emoji for "socializing." However, consider Muzz's **M-FP4** female user: she photographs herself at Mecca during what appears to be Hajj or Umrah pilgrimage, wearing a traditional white hijab with the sacred Kaaba dominating the background and other pilgrims visible. This example becomes brilliant evidence for Stoicescu's argument. Both women are potentially from similar religious cultural backgrounds - they're both Muslim women who might live in Arab countries - but a change in behavior occurs when they enter different digital dating environments.

Meanwhile, secular centrality on *Tinder* is embodied in physical appearance, which forms the center of the semiosphere with body exposure and modification normalized. Lifestyle experiences (**T-MP2's** social venues and travel, **T-MP4's** bar settings) serve as central value signals, while formal business attire becomes peripheral - unlike Muzz's male users.

Non-verbal cues on both platforms signal different cultural boundaries. *Muzz* displays clear boundaries around appropriate self-presentation, especially for women, with users negotiating between religious tradition and modern technology within these boundaries through verification badges that legitimize traditional identity within modern contexts. *Tinder* appears boundary-free but enforces specific secular cultural codes where visual appeal and witty communication create boundaries.Traditional cultural elements like Amazigh attire and medical profession translate into dating acceptance and ethnic belonging, while religious adherence translates into trustworthiness through verification badges and commitment signals. On *Tinder*, physical attributes translate into dating currency, with traveling and

lifestyle signals becoming desirability mechanisms, and body modifications signaling personal values and subculture affiliations.

This analysis finds compelling support in Reed et al.'s (2021) examination of stereotypical gender and dating beliefs in digital contexts. Reed (2021) demonstrated that gender stereotypes manifest differently in digital dating behaviors, directly illuminating these findings about platform-specific gender self-presentation, where *Muzz's* female users primarily signal identity through traditional dress and modest poses emphasizing cultural heritage, while male users highlight professional status alongside religious markers.

Both platforms reveal distinct diversity patterns operating through different mechanisms. On Muzz, heterogeneity emerges within a shared religious framework, where individual expression manifests through varied faith interpretations - from **M-FP3's** pink niqab personalizing traditional modest dress to **M-MP4's** conventional thobe maintaining classical religious presentation. Professional identities integrate seamlessly with spiritual commitments, while ethnic variations preserve cultural distinctiveness within the broader Islamic context. This ultimately demonstrates that gender identity construction is never culturally neutral but always embedded within specific systems of meaning that privilege certain forms of expression while constraining others.

The semiotic rules governing self-presentation operate through intersecting layers of platform architecture and gender performance, revealing that neither Muzz nor Tinder represents monolithic cultural constructs but rather sophisticated systems where gender codes shift according to contextual demands. On Muzz, female users like M-FP4 employ "sacred geography semiotics" through her Mecca photograph, positioning religious devotion as primary feminine virtue, while male users such as M-MP3 utilize "professional authority semiotics" via his pilot uniform to establish both economic viability and religious compatibility as masculine traits. Tinder's T-FP4 demonstrates "adaptive secular femininity"

through her car photograph with partially visible hair beneath an open veil, strategically modifying traditional modesty markers to signal cultural authenticity while maintaining accessibility to diverse dating pools. These examples illuminate how both platforms function as sophisticated cultural laboratories where traditional gender performances are strategically reconfigured through platform-specific symbolic systems, allowing users to navigate competing cultural demands while maintaining coherent gendered identities.

2.2.2. Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several methodological constraints that, without undermining the validity of findings, caused a sort of adversity while conducting this research. Regional access restrictions for *Tinder* application in Algeria necessitated collaboration with international contacts to obtain profile data as it was previously mentioned in the data collection procedures both researchers were unable to open a *Tinder* profile with Algerian ID, limiting direct control over profile selection, due to these access constraints, the research inevitably opted for nonverbal elements (primarily images) as the only consistently reliable data points across all collected profiles, but enabling a more globally representative sample across three countries (which typically displays profiles from the user's own nationality due to proximity features). Technical challenges included Muzz's screenshot prevention features, requiring documentation via secondary devices, besides the instant update of dating profiles pictures and even interests that changed throughout the research period. The sample size of 20 profiles, though appropriate for qualitative semiotic analysis, reflects the practical constraints of digital ethnographic research and the focus on depth rather than statistical representation. These limitations were actively managed through methodological rigor, including dual researcher analysis to enhance inter-rater reliability, clear focus on consistently available nonverbal elements, and careful consideration of cross-cultural variables. The constraints encountered reflect the genuine challenges of conducting

research on culturally sensitive digital platforms and provide valuable methodological insights for future studies in this emerging field.

The technical challenges with platform restrictions and dynamic profile content highlight the need for real-time data collection protocols and raise important questions about temporal validity in digital identity research. Future investigations might explore longitudinal approaches that account for the fluid nature of digital self-presentation or develop automated data collection tools that can capture profile changes over time.

2.2.3. Future Research Directions

Further research is needed to establish a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural semiotics operate in digital dating environments by incorporating the textual dimension of profile construction. While the current study provides valuable insights into non-verbal cues and their cross-cultural interpretations, future investigations should examine how written profile descriptions, bio statements, and messaging patterns interact with visual elements to create complete semiotic packages. This integrated approach would reveal whether textual and visual elements reinforce or contradict each other across different cultural contexts, particularly when comparing Western-oriented platforms like *Tinder* with culturally-specific applications like *Muzz.*

Avenues for future research include expanding the geographical and cultural scope beyond the current sample to include emerging markets and non-Western dating platforms, which would test the generalizability of findings about cross-cultural semiotic representations. Researchers might also explore how artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms on these platforms influence or bias the visibility and interpretation of certain semiotic choices, potentially creating feedback loops that reinforce or challenge cultural stereotypes. Furthermore, investigating the effectiveness of different semiotic

strategies in terms of actual matching success rates and relationship outcomes would bridge the gap between semiotic analysis and practical dating success across cultural boundaries. Future research endeavors should consider employing mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative semiotic analysis with qualitative ethnographic studies, or opting for triangulation and using interviews or questionnaires, allowing researchers to understand not only what semiotic choices users make but also their conscious and unconscious motivations behind these decisions.

Collaborative research frameworks involving scholars from anthropology, communication studies, computer science, and cultural studies would enrich the theoretical foundation for understanding cross-cultural semiotic representations in digital spaces. Such interdisciplinary partnerships could develop more sophisticated analytical tools and theoretical models that account for the complex interplay between technology, culture, and human behavior in online dating contexts.

Finally, future research should investigate the broader social implications of cross-cultural semiotic representations in online dating, including their potential impact on intercultural relationships, cultural exchange, and social integration in increasingly diverse societies. Understanding how digital dating platforms facilitate or hinder cross-cultural romantic connections could provide valuable insights for policymakers, platform designers, and social scientists interested in promoting intercultural harmony and understanding in the digital age.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have provided an overview about the research methodology adopted to examine Cross-Cultural Semiotic Representations in online dating profiles through non-verbal visual sign system across faith-based (*Muzz)* and globalized secular (*Tinder*) semiospheres. By employing Lotman's *semiosphere* model (1990) to explore the functioning

of cultural boundaries within digital environments and Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation, the study uncovers layered cultural meanings embedded in visual representations. Furthermore, the chapter outlined the limitations and future researchers' directions.

The study reveals that the visual elements used on both platforms, *Muzz* and *Tinder*, are strategic elements that construct identities. The semiotic systems operating on each platform reflect different cultural perspectives and priorities. *Muzz* serves as a dimension where religious identity, cultural heritage, and adherence to Islamic principles are shaped, with users embodying traditional dress, religious symbols, and emotionally reserved body language to signal religious affiliation and conformity. In contrast, *Tinder* serves as a secular dimension, emphasizing physical appearance, lifestyle, and individual self-expression, signaling secular communication within the modern dating landscape.

General conclusion

This research has examined the application of cultural semiotics in representing distinct sign systems and cultural codes across *Muzz* and *Tinder*, demonstrating how these platforms function as spaces of meaning-making through non-verbal communication. The study has specifically addresses the significant gap in comparative semiotic analysis between faith-based and secular dating platforms by analyzing how male and female users construct culturally appropriate digital identities through visual elements.

Two complementary theoretical frameworks guided this investigation. Yuri Lotman'sSemiosphere Model (1990) provided the analytical foundation for understanding cultural boundaries and translation processes between different cultural codes within online dating contexts. Roland Barthes' cultural semiotic theory of orders of signification (1972) enabled the examination of denotation and connotation in non-verbal signs across cross-cultural dating profile representations. Through qualitative analysis of a purposively selected corpus of dating profiles from both platforms, this research addressed how cultural boundaries and values shape self-presentation in digital dating environments.

The semiotic analysis reveals that *Muzz* and *Tinder* operate as distinct cultural semiospheres with different boundary systems and meaning-making mechanisms, allowing users to navigate each platform according to their specific cultural contexts. The denotative level analysis demonstrates both differences and similarities in the literal visual elements' users select across platforms, including clothing choices, facial expressions, body modifications, and posture. However, the connotative analysis exposes deeper cultural associations and implied meanings related to values such as modesty, authenticity, family orientation, romance, and gender roles.

The employment of Barthes' framework reveals those non-verbal cues function simultaneously at both denotative and connotative levels. While explicit visual elements

constitute the surface layer of communication, culturally-particular meanings emerge through connotative analysis. For instance, the hijab connotes respectability and modesty within Islamic contexts, while other sartorial and aesthetic choices may signify varying degrees of traditionalism, modernity, or personal freedom depending on the cultural framework of interpretation.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that although both platforms serve similar relationship-seeking functions, users employ substantially different semiotic strategies based on platform-specific cultural contexts and user expectations. Non-verbal cues emerge as crucial identity markers that communicate not only personal preferences but also cultural and religious belonging, revealing the complex interplay between cultural identity, gender expression, and technological mediation in contemporary dating practices.

This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge surrounding digital dating, cross-cultural semiotics, and online relationship formation by illuminating how users navigate cultural boundaries through visual self-presentation. The findings highlight the sophisticated ways individuals adapt their identity performance to align with platform-specific cultural expectations while maintaining authentic self-expression.

Future research should establish clearer understanding of how cultural identity markers evolve across different demographic groups and geographic regions. While this study examined visual elements through established semiotic frameworks, longitudinal investigations are needed to explore whether these semiotic strategies shift over time as platforms develop and user expectations evolve, potentially revealing new patterns of cross-cultural digital communication.

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Appendix A

Muzz Female Profile pictures (M-FP1 through M-FP5)

Figure A1

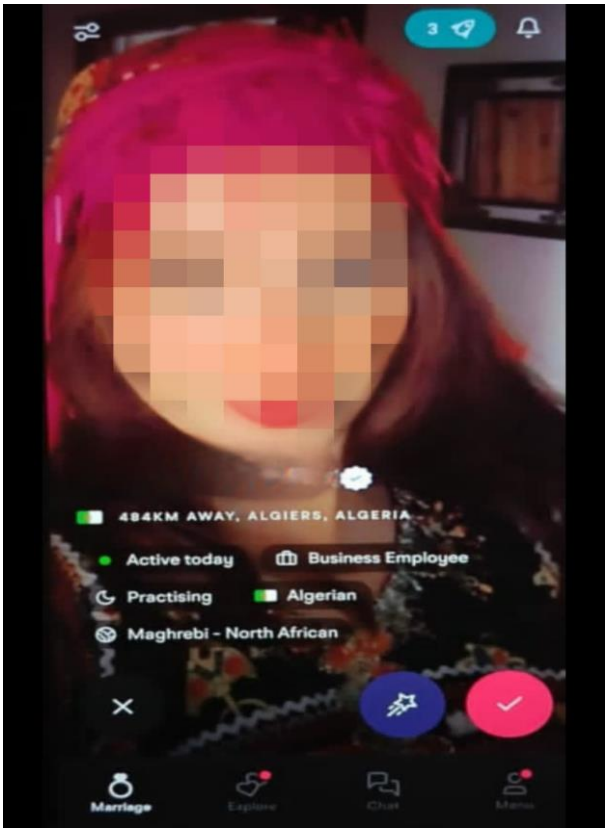


Figure A2

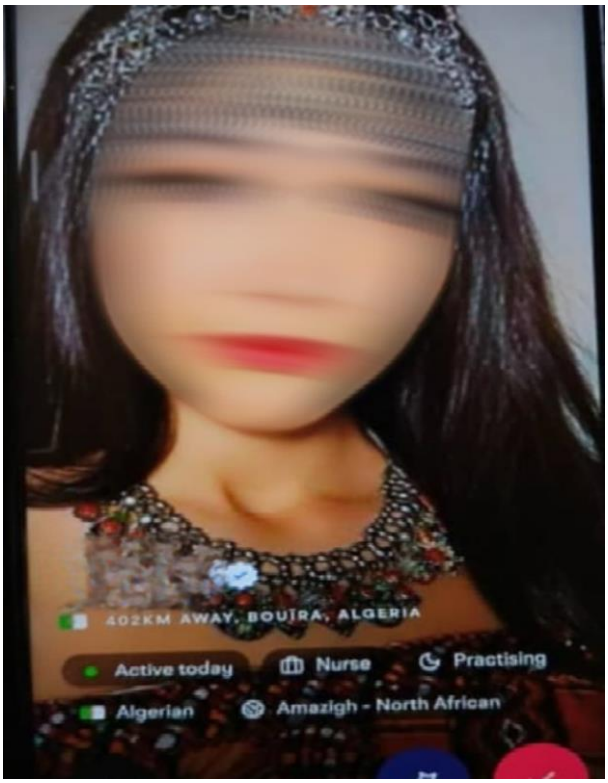


Figure A3

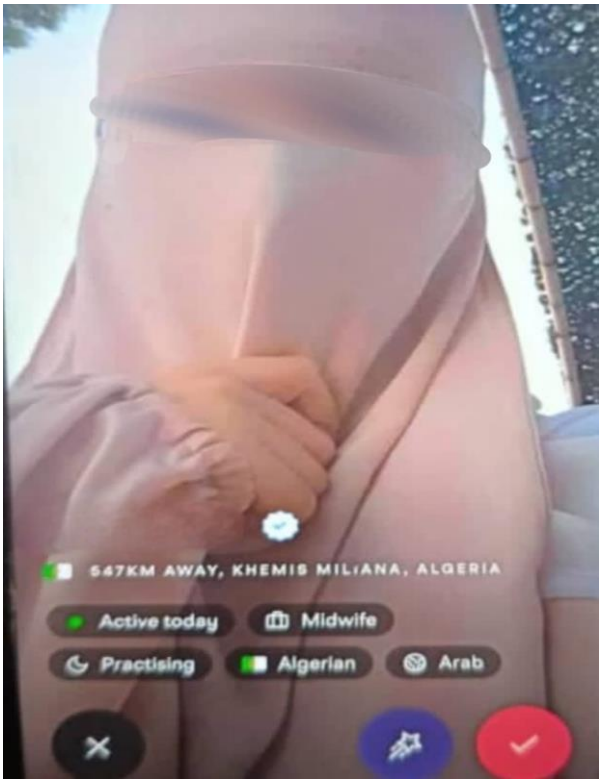
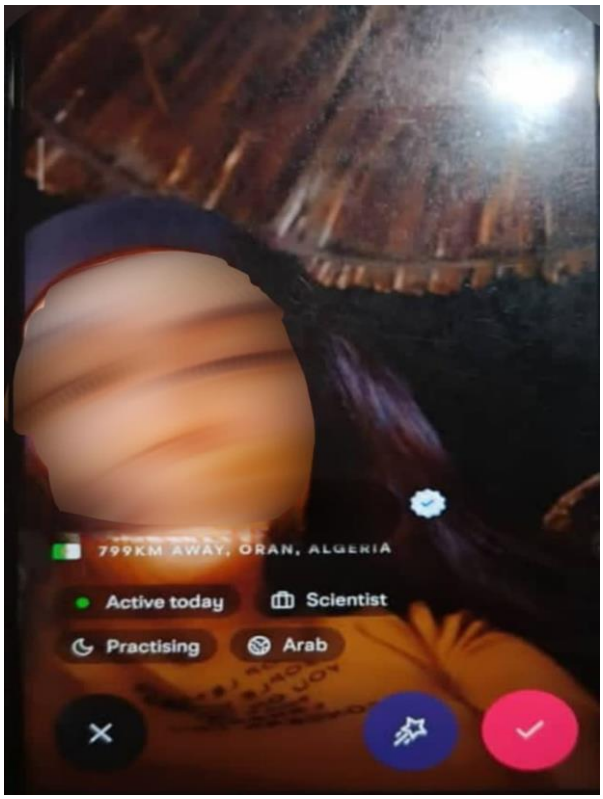


Figure A4



Figure A5


799KM AWAY, ORAN, ALGERIA
Active today
Scientist
Practising
Arab

Appendix B

Muzz Male Profile pictures (M-MP1 through M-MP5)

Figure B1

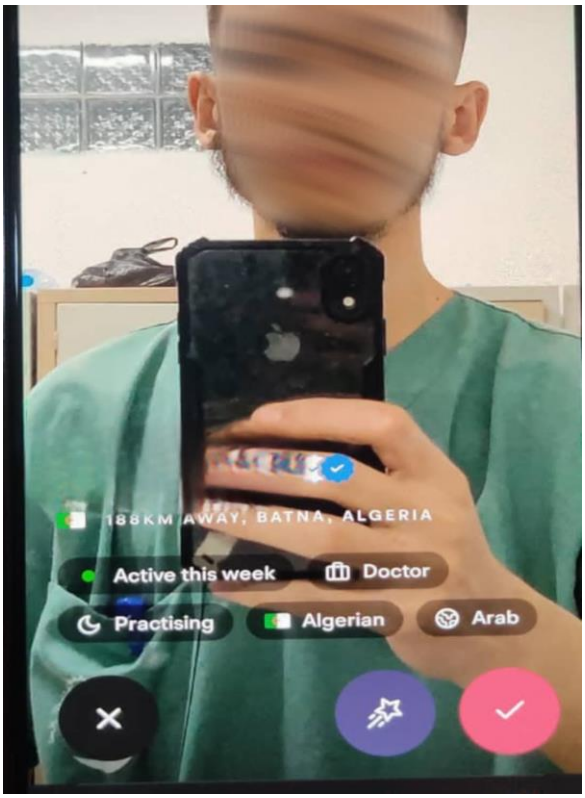


Figure B2

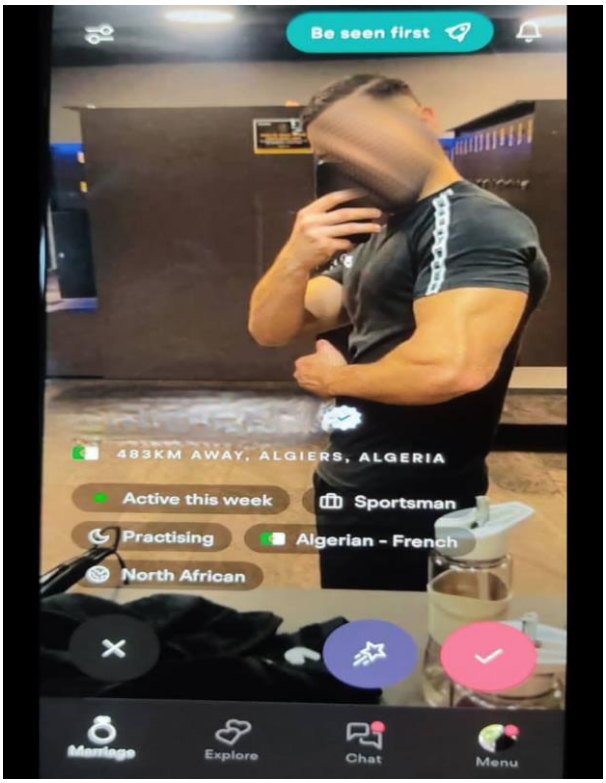


Figure B3

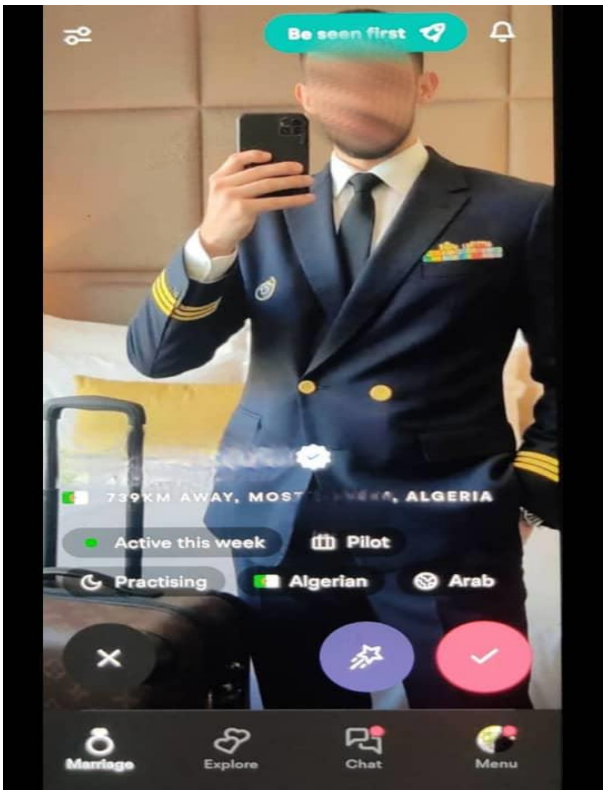


Figure B4

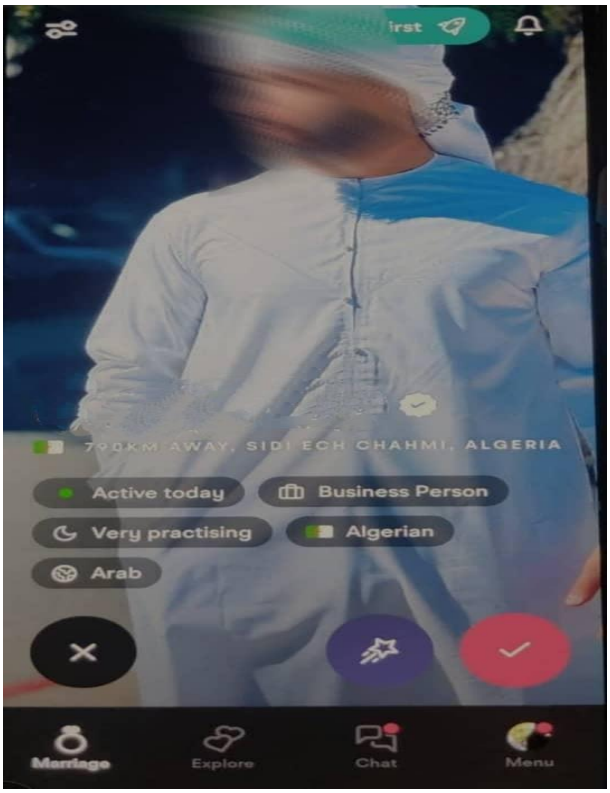
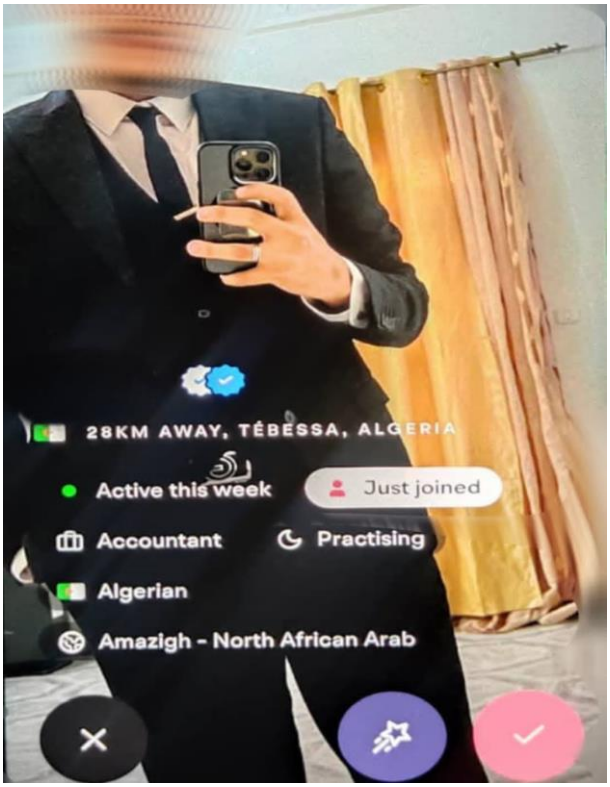


Figure B5



Appendix C

Tinder Female Profile pictures (T-FP1 through T-FP5)

Figure C1



Figure C2

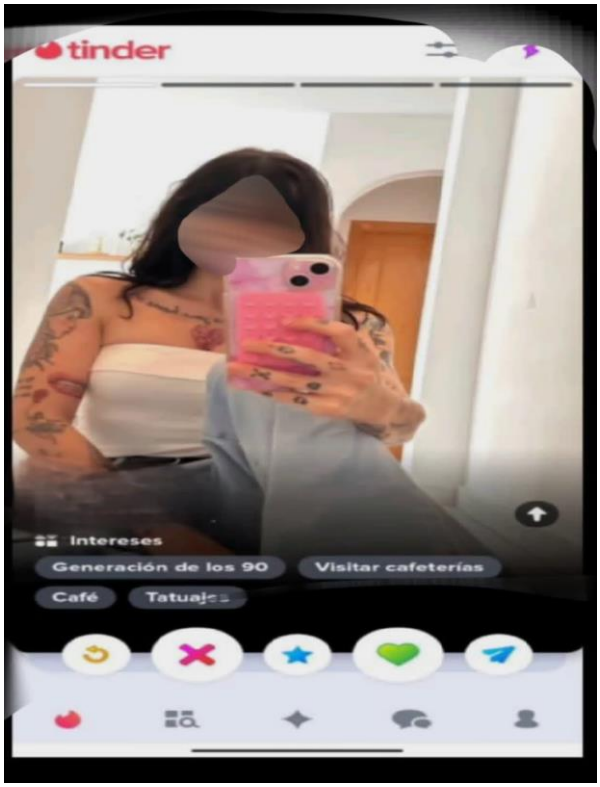


Figure C3



Figure C4

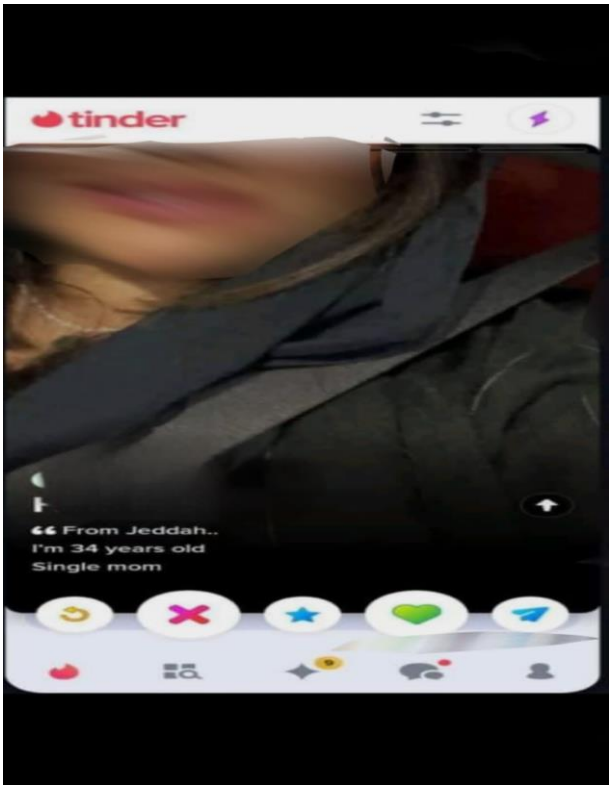
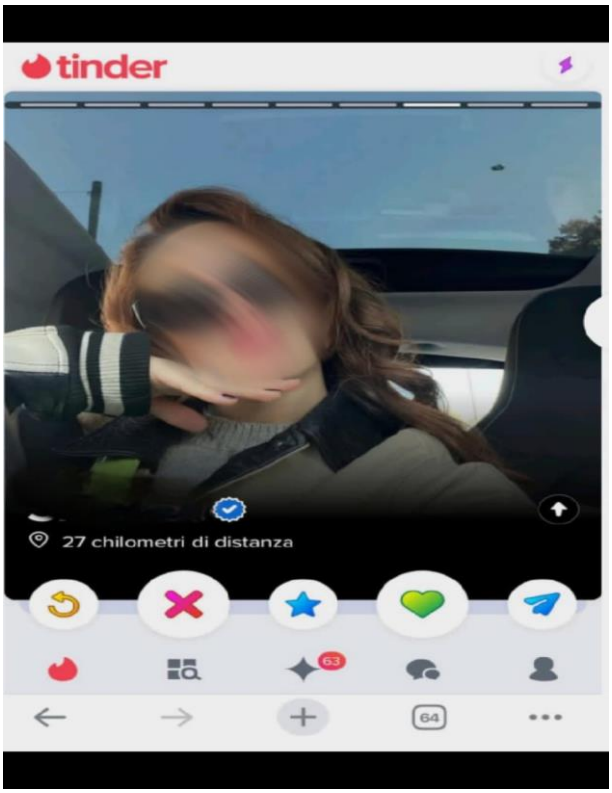


Figure C5



Appendix D

Tinder Male Profile pictures (T-MP1 through T-MP5)

Figure D1

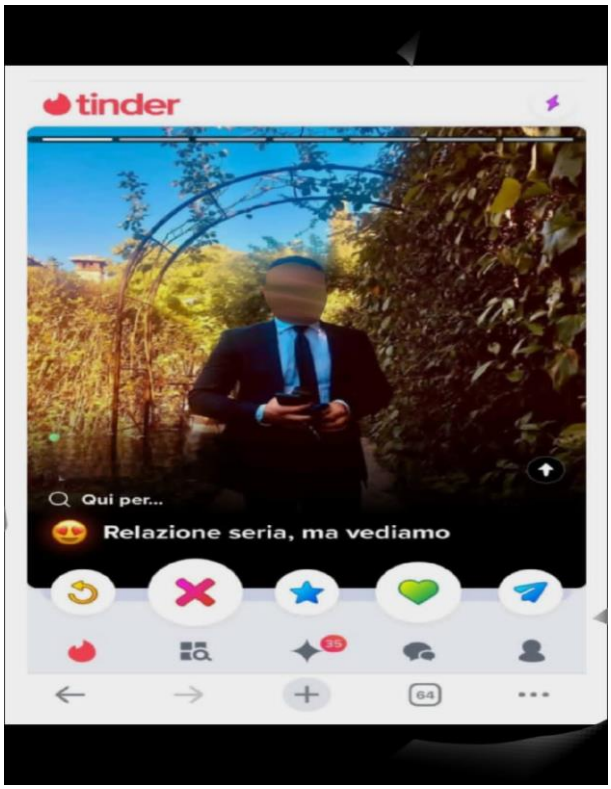


Figure D2

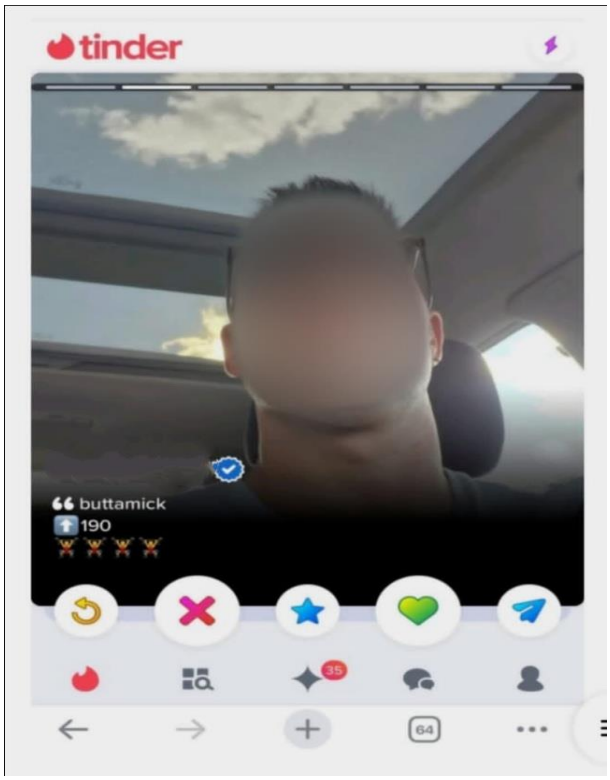


Figure D3

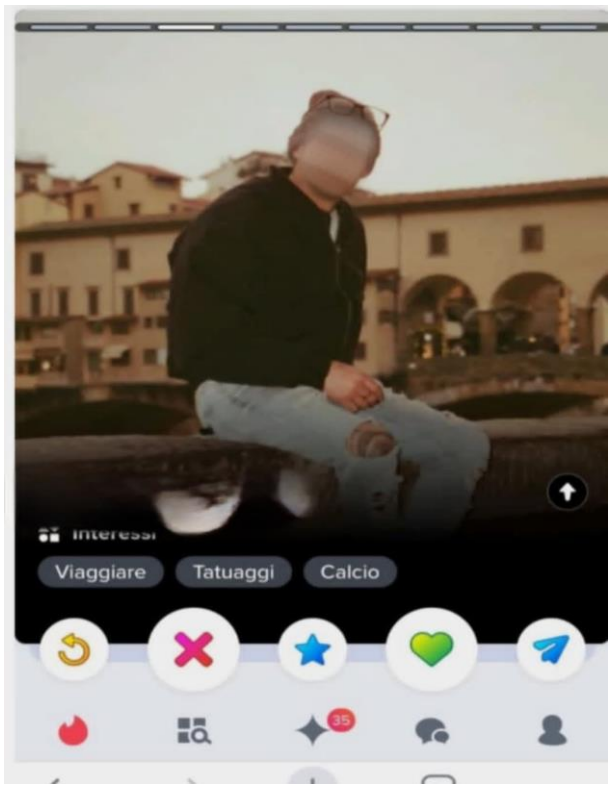


Figure D4

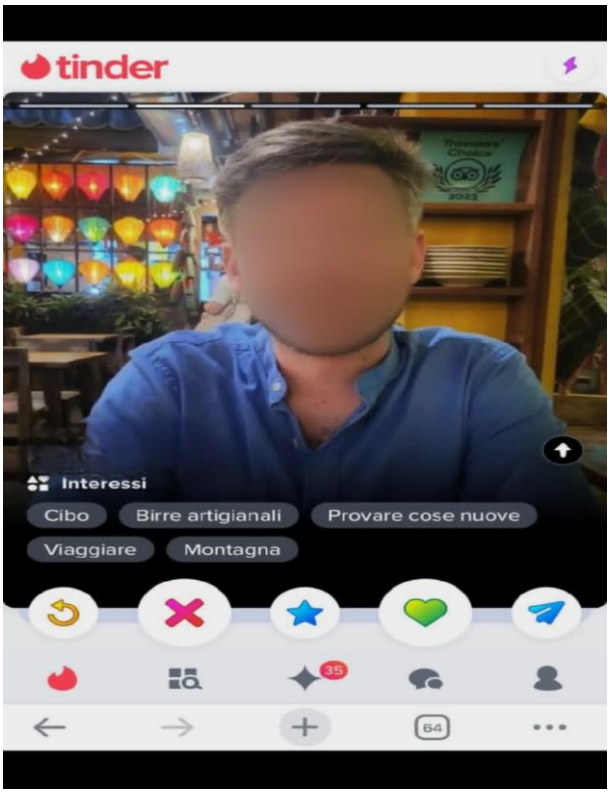
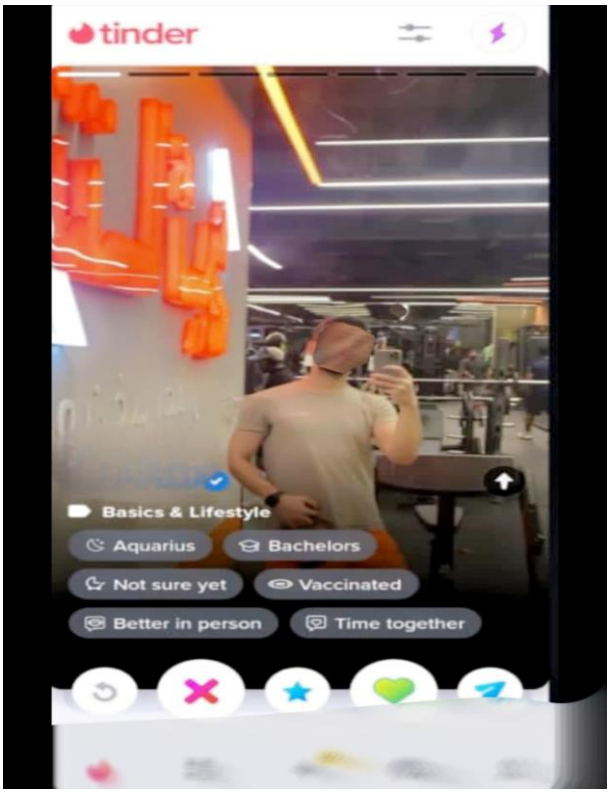

tinder
Interessi
Cibo
Birre artigianali
Provare cose nuove
Viaggiare
Montagna
35
64

Figure D5


tinder
Basics & Lifestyle
Aquarius
Bachelors
Not sure yet
Vaccinated
Better in person
Time together

Appendix E

Muzz Female Profile Analysis (M-FP1 through M-FP5)

Female profiles	Profile photographs	Profile sections
M-FP1	Setting: indoors, likely a home environment with a white wall and a framed picture. Pose: The pose is casual and she is facing the camera directly . Clothing: casual, amazigh (chaoui) attire with intricate embroidery from the neck side also vibrant pink headband and makeup. Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects:No specific objects are visible. Facial expressions: warm and neutral expression . Body tattoos or modifications: No visible tattoos or body modifications.	Presence and order of sections: structured with basic sections, including name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity. Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators:There is a badge visible next to the name, indicating profile verification.

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-FP2	Setting: appears to be a plain background, likely a home or indoor setting. Pose: formal, directly facing the camera with a slight smile. Clothing: traditional Kabyle attire, with a traditional Algerian headpiece and necklace. Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects:a bejeweled headpiece and necklace Facial expressions: a subtle smile with straightforward gaze Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible.	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators:There is a verification badge next to the name .

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-FP3	Setting: appears to be outdoors, with a natural backdrop of trees and blue sky. Pose: is straightforward, facing the camera directly in a contemplative manner, with her hand near her niqab. Clothing: an Islamic attire consisting of a light pink niqab (a face-covering veil that leaves only the eyes visible) and a hijab. Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects: No specific objects are visible besides her attire (niqab) .Facial expressions: Not fully discernible due to the niqab, her serene gaze is subtle. Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators:There is a verification badge next to the name .

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-FP4	Setting: religious site (Mecca) , likely during Hajj or Umrah, with many pilgrims in the background. Pose: casual , is posing for a selfie capturing. Clothing: a light white hijab (a common Islamic attire), a black backpack. In the photograph, there are many pilgrims in the background, Kaaba. Objects: In the photograph, the Kaaba is prominently featured with many pilgrims wearing religious attire (white) in the background. Facial expressions: relaxed look around eyes, slightly smiling , a subtle and cheerful expression Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible.	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators:There is a verification badge next to the name .

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections

M-FP5	Setting:appears natural , with a wooden or thatched roof visible in the background, suggesting a beach setting at night , soft lighting Pose: casual ,looking directly at the camera, with a slight inclination of head . Clothing: black headand , yellow t-shirt Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects: No specific objects are visibleFacial expressions: calm expression, neutral Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: The ringed planet emoji , accompanied by a white heart and sparkling stars beside the name Profile Verification Indicators: There is a verification badge next to the name .

Appendix F

Muzz Male Profile Analysis (M-MP1 through M-MP5)

Male Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-MP1	Setting: indoors, likely in a room or a medical facility, given the clinical background and the mirror selfie nature of the photo. Pose: casual, looking directly at the camera Clothing: green medical scrub top Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects:a black iPhone, given the Apple logo visible on the back, closet in the back. Facial expressions : neutral expression , slightly serious. Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators:There is a blue verification badge next to the name .

Male Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-MP2	Setting: indoors, likely in a gym or fitness center . Pose: capturing himself in a mirror , flexing his arm ,looking directly at the camera. Clothing: black t-shirt with sports pants Objects:a smartphone in his hand , black bag , bottle of water, gym lockers in the back Facial expressions : neutral expression , slightly serious. Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators:There is a blue verification badge next to the name .

Male Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-MP3	Setting: indoors,likely in a hotel room or similar accommodation Pose*:* looking directly at the camera,capturing himself Clothing*:* a formal blue pilot uniform with gold accents, complete with a tie and national aviation insignia. Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects:a black iPhone,a suitcase and a bed are in the backgroundFacial expressions *:* friendly gaze Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators:There is a blue verification badge next to the name

Male Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-MP4	Setting : appears to be outdoors , likely in a natural environment or street indicated by bright lighting , trees . Pose: looking away from the camera. Clothing: Traditional Islamic white thobe with a head covering (turban). Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects: No specific objects are visibleFacial expressions :.serious and calm expression Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible	Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. Profile verification indicators: There is a blue verification badge next to the name .

Male Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile sections
M-MP5	-Setting : appears to be indoors, likely in a home -Pose:formal, capturing himself , looking directly at the camera -Clothing: a formal black suit with a tie - Alone in the photograph with no family members. -Objects: a black iPhone,eyeglasses , a silver ring in the left hand ,a curtains in the background-Facial expressions :.serious expression -Body tattoos or modifications: Non are visible	-Presence and order of sections: includes basic sections (name, age, location, activity status, occupation, and ethnicity.) -Emojis: There are no emojis used in the visible parts of the profile. -Profile verification indicators:There is a bleu verification badge next to the name .

Appendix G

Tinder Female Profile Analysis (T-FP1 through T-FP5)

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile Sections
T-FP1	Setting: home (indoor portrait with neutral background) Pose: casual, smiling, slightly angled face with direct eye contact Clothing: Visible Dark strap (likely tank top or similar casual attire) Alone in the photograph with no family members. Objects: minimalistic necklace with small earrings. Facial expressions: warm smile showing teeth. Body tattoos or modifications: prominent shoulder/arm tattoo with architectural design, small chest/collarbone tattoo.	Presence and order of sections:Structured with relationship preferences first, followed by personal info, zodiac sign, education, lifestyle factors, and interests. Emojis: Heart-eyes emoji used with relationship statement. Profile verifications indicators: there was no badges or check markers.

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile Sections
T-FP2	Setting: home (bathroom mirror selfies)domestic settings Pose: casual, multiple styles – first photo is showing full body seated on floor, the second photois showing standing mirror selfie, casual self-portraiture. Clothing: black outfit in seated pose; white top with light jacket in standing pose. Alone in the photograph without family members. Objects: pink smartphone visible in mirror selfies. Facial expressions: neutral expression in standing photo, face partially obscured in seated photo. Body tattoos or modifications: extensive tattoos on arms, leg text tattoo visible in seated photo.	Presence and order of sections: Structured with relationship statement first, basic info, lifestyle factors, interests, and communication preferences. Emojis: Heart-eyes emoji used with relationship statement. Profile verifications indicators: there was no badges or check markers.

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile Sections
T-FP3	Setting: indoor bathroom mirror selfie. Pose: casual, side angle face with hand in hair. Clothing: dark gray sweatshirt with graphic design. Alone in the photograph. Objects: checkered pattern phone case, visible tall red polished nails. Facial expressions: neutral/slight smile, side profile emphasis. Body tattoos or modifications: small neck tattoo visible (Firearm).	Presence and order of sections: Structured with relationship status and uncertainty first, followed by basic info, lifestyle factors, personal details, and interests. Emojis: Thinking face emoji with uncertainty rockand roll hand sign and heart emoji in bio Profile verifications indicators: there was no badges or check markers.

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile Sections
T-FP4	Setting: car interior. Night time. Nationality: Saudi Arabia Pose: Partial face visible only (lips and chin area) Clothing: Wearing an open veil (dark colour) showing part of the brown dyed hair . Objects: Minimalistic thin pearls necklace and visible gray seat belt. Facial expressions: Slight smile visible (showing the upper teeth) Body tattoos or modifications: No visible tattoos.	Presence and order of sections:(detailed sections) workout, social media, basics section (zodiac, family plans, COVID vaccine,personality), interests, weekend activities, "about me" section, essentials (location, work, city), and lifestyle details. Emojis:Uses heart emojifor*"Long-term partner,"*dancing people emoji for *"socializing,"*couchemoji for *"cozy nights in,"*self-care emoji, cat emoji, talking emojifor*"socializing,"*capemojifor*"dress down,"*hourglassemojifor "*fashionably late,"* and wave emojifor*"say bye first."* Profile verification indicators:there was no badges or check markers.

Female Profiles	Profile Photographs	Profile Sections

T-FP5	Setting: Car interior. Daytime. Nationality: Italian Pose: Casual, seated in car, hand supporting the chin part of the face, head slightly tilted Clothing: Gray sweater with black jacket that has white stripes Alone in photograph: Yes Objects: Black rectangular sunglasses, visible manicured nails (dark color) Facial expressions: Neutral expression with slightly pouted lips with pink lipstick. Body tattoos or modifications: No visible tattoos	Presence and order of sections: Simple structure with only About me section with minimal information, and location information Emojis: Thinking face emojiused with uncertainty statement. Profile verification indicators: blue verification check mark next to name

Appendix H : Tinder Male Profile Analysis (T-MP1 through T-MP5)

Male profiles	Profile photographs	Profile Sections
T-MP1	Setting: outdoor garden setting with a curved metal structureand foliage (climbing green plants and leaves), bright sunny day with blue sky Pose: Standing upright, directly facing camera, holding what appears to be a drink/cup Clothing: Formal business attire - dark suit with light blue dress shirt and dark tie Alone in photograph: Yes Objects: Glasses (dark frames), wristwatch visible, holding a drink/cup in hands Facial expressions: Smiling broadly at camera Body tattoos or modifications: None visible	Presence and order of sections: section with relationship goals *(About me)* section with location *(Things to know about me)* with distance and languages *(Other info about me)* with zodiac sign and communication style (*Interests)* section with hobbies Emojis: Heart-eyes emoji used with relationship statement. Profile verification indicators: there was no badges or check markers.

Male profiles	Profile photographs	Profile Sections

T-MP2	Setting: Car interior with sunroof visible Pose: Casual selfie, looking up at camera, smiling Clothing: casual gray gym shirt Objects: Sunglasses worn, car interior visible Facial expressions: Smiling, showing teeth Body tattoos or modifications: No visible tattoos	Presence and order of sections: Structured with basic info first (age, verification), followed by username/height, lifestyle factors (drinking, smoking), education, zodiac sign, work information, and communication preferences Emojis: Weight lifting emojis (4x) used with personal information Champagne glasses emoji used with casual dating statement Profile verification indicators: blue verification checkmark present

Male profiles	Profile photographs	Profile Sections

T-MP3	Setting: Outdoors (historical Italian city with bridge/canal view, likely Florence) Pose: Casual, sitting on stone bridge, looking at camera Clothing: Black jacket with light t-shirt underneath, ripped light blue jeans Alone in photograph Objects: Wearing grey beanie hat with glasses perched on top, ring visible on hand Facial expressions: Neutral/slight smile, looking directly at camera Body tattoos or modifications: text tattoos on the knees.	Presence and order of sections: Profile structured with name and age first, followed by lifestyle sections (animals, drinking, smoking), interests, and personal info sections *Emojis*: no use of emojies **Profile verification indicators**: No badges or check markers visible

Male profiles	Profile photographs	Profile Sections

T-MP4	Setting: he background shows what looks like a bar or restaurant with colorful lanterns (in various colors like blue, yellow, pink, and orange) hanging from the ceiling. There's also what appears to be a "Travelers' Choice 2023" award visible on a shelf in the background, suggesting it's a well-rated establishment. Pose: Casual seated position, looking directly at camera with a friendly smile Clothing: Blue button-up shirt (casual style) Alone in photograph: Yes Objects: None particularly visible in the image Facial expressions: Warm, genuine smile showing teeth Body tattoos or modifications: None visible in the photo	Presence and order of sections: Basic information section (name and age) at top. (About me) section with self-description. (Things to know about me) with personal details. Lifestyle sections. (Interests) section with hobbies. Location and work information. Emojies: No custom emojis are used in the text sections of the profile. There are interface emojis/icons throughout the profile to indicate different sections. **Profile verification indicators**: No visible verification badge.

Male profiles	Profile photographs	Profile Sections

T-MP5	Setting: Gym or fitness center. The photo is taken in what appears to be a large commercial gym. Floor-to-ceiling mirrors typical of fitness facilities are visible. The most distinctive visual element is the bright orange/red neon sign or lighting feature on the wall. The entire setting has an industrial, modern fitness facility aesthetic Nationality: Saudi Arabian (based on location showing Jeddah) Pose: Standing mirror selfie, taking the photo himself while looking at his phone in a gym mirror. Clothing: Casual athletic wear - specifically a plain beige/light brown t-shirt that appears to be a fitness/workout shirt Alone in photograph: Yes, standing alone taking a selfie in the gym mirror Objects: Smartphone visible in hand as he's taking the mirror selfie Facial expressions: Neutral expression, looking directly at his phone screen while taking the selfie Body tattoos or modifications: None visible in the photo	Presence and order of sections: Profile starts with basic identity (name, age, verification badge). "Looking for" section with emoji and statement. "Essentials" section (location, height, city, languages). "Lifestyle" section (pets, drinking, workout, dietary preference). 0 "Basics" section (zodiac, education, family plans, COVID vaccine). Profile messaging feature at bottom Emojis: Thinking face emoji used with "Still figuring it out" statement Profile verification indicators: Blue verification checkmark visible next to name

Appendix I : Research Interview Request - Email to Muzz Dating Platform



Résumé

La sémiotique reste essentielle pour décoder les représentations culturelles dans les espaces numériques comme les plateformes de rencontres, où l'identité se construit par des éléments visuels et symboliques. Les études comparatives entre plateformes confessionnelles et laïques étant rares, ce travail analyse comment les utilisateurs de Muzz (islamique) et Tinder (laïque) emploient des stratégies visuelles non-verbales pour créer des identités culturellement appropriées. Utilisant une approche comparative qualitative, nous intégrons la théorie de la sémiosphère de Lotman et le cadre dénotation-connotation de Barthes pour examiner vingt profils sélectionnés (équilibrés par plateforme et genre). La recherche étudie comment les valeurs culturelles se manifestent à travers les stratégies sémiotiques visuelles. Les résultats montrent que les plateformes utilisent des éléments visuels similaires portant des significations culturelles différentes. Sur Muzz, les vêtements formels signalent les rôles traditionnels et l'engagement religieux, tandis que sur Tinder ils représentent la sophistication lifestyle. Les symboles religieux (hijabs, photographies de La Mecque) n'apparaissent que sur Muzz pour communiquer l'identité spirituelle, alors que Tinder privilégie tatouages et modifications corporelles comme expressions d'émancipation individuelle. Cette recherche contribue à la sémiotique culturelle numérique en fournissant la première analyse comparative systématique des plateformes confessionnelles versus laïques, établissant des cadres méthodologiques pour futures études de communication numérique interculturelle.

Mots-clés : rencontres numériques, sémiotique, identité culturelle, communication en ligne, analyse interculturelle.

الملخص

تبقى السيميائية أداة مهمة لفك تشفير التمثيلات الثقافية، بما في ذلك الفضاءات الرقمية مثل منصات المواعدة، حيث يتم بناء الهوية من خلال العناصر المرئية والرمزية. ومع ذلك، فإن الدراسات المقارنة بين المنصات القائمة على الإيمان والعلمانية باستخدام السيميائية قليلة أو معدومة لذلك.يعمل هذا البحث على سد هذه الفجوة من خلال تحليل كيفية استخدام المستخدمين على المنصتين لاستراتيجيات المرئية الغير لفظية لصياغة هويات ثقافية مناسبة. باستخدام منهج مقارن نوعي، يقوم البحث بدمج نظرية السيميوسفير لـ***"لوتمان"*** وإطار الدلالة والتضمين***لـ"بارت"*** لفحص عشرين حساب شخصي مختارا بعناية. (مع توازن بين المنصتين والجنسين). يبحث الدراسة في كيفية تجلي القيم الثقافية من خلال الاستراتيجيات السيميائية المرئية، وتخص المعاني الدلالية والتضمينية المضمنة في خيارات تقديم الذات للمستخدمين.تظهر النتائج أن كلا المنصتين تستخدمان عناصر مرئية متشابهة مثل الملابس والخلفيات، تشير الملابس الرسمية إلى الأدوار التقليدية كالمسؤول. بالنسبة لأنماط الحياة حيث تظهر الرموز الدينية حصريا على ماز، بينما يميل نفس الملابس على مثل الحجاب وصور مكة، كتعبير عن الهوية الروحية.في حين يعرض مستخدمو ماز على ملفات الوهم وتعقيدات الجسد كتعبير عن التحرر الفردي. يتكيف المستخدمون مع استراتيجيات تِندر لتتناسب مع التوقعات الثقافية لكل منصة مع الحفاظ على التعبير الأصلي عن الهوية.يساهم هذا البحث في السيميائية الثقافية الرقمية من خلال تقديم أول تحليل مقارن منهجي بين منصات المواعدة القائمة على الإيمان والعلمانية، مما يضع إطارا منهجية لدراسات الاتصال الرقمي عبر الثقافات في المستقبل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللقاءات الرقمية، السيميائية، الهوية الثقافية، التواصل عبر الإنترنت، التحليل المقارن