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The Use of AI Tools and Egyptian Youth Awareness Level

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Egyptian Youth utilize artificial intelligence (AI) tools, their levels of awareness regarding these technologies, and the influence of digital culture on their engagement with AI. It also examines potential risks, including deepfakes and algorithmic bias, and how these factors affect social behavior and digital participation. Despite the increasing adoption of AI, limited research has explored users' ethical and practical concerns in Egypt's evolving digital environment. A quantitative approach was employed, based on a survey of 436 Egyptian youth. The findings reveal patterns of AI usage, critical thinking practices, and the opportunities and challenges associated with these technologies, as well as broader societal implications. Analysis emphasizes the importance of critical awareness, responsible use, and the consequences of inadequate analytical engagement. Participants frequently reported using AI for learning, content creation, entertainment, productivity, and creative purposes, underscoring the need to understand algorithmic processes and data practices. The study offers practical recommendations, including enhancing digital literacy, raising awareness, and developing policies that promote responsible AI adoption. In summary, the research highlights both the benefits and risks of AI engagement and advocates for a more thoughtful, ethical, and informed approach to technology. These insights provide a foundation for understanding how continuous AI exposure may shape future generations' ability to navigate digital environments responsibly.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Awareness, Digital Literacy, Egyptian Youth, Technology Usage

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Artificial intelligence (AI) stands as one of the most transformative technological advancements of the twenty-first century, reshaping economies, industries, and human behavior globally. AI is not only revolutionizing industrial operations but also influencing how individuals think, live, and perceive themselves. Artificial intelligence offers immediate access to information, thereby increasing convenience in daily life. Moreover, this ease of access may also foster superficial thinking and fragmented attention. As AI technologies extend beyond factories and offices into various aspects of everyday life, critical questions arise about their impact on cognition, behavior, and social interaction. Powered by extensive data and machine

learning, AI systems now perform tasks considered exclusive to human intelligence, including problem-solving, content creation, financial management, business operations, and education (Russell and Norvig 2021).

In Egypt, the significance of AI is particularly pronounced, given that Youth constitute a substantial portion of the population. Approximately 21% of Egyptians are between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNICEF 2020), and this generation has grown up with the internet as an integral part of daily life. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are central to how young Egyptians communicate, share content, and engage socially (Arab Youth Survey 2021). AI tools have the potential to revolutionize fields such as engineering, art, and education. However, as these tools become more widespread, concerns have emerged about

overreliance, accelerated workflows, and the potential erosion of creativity and qualitative aspects of work.

This study examines how Egyptian Youth utilize AI tools and assesses their understanding of the capabilities and broader effects of these technologies on learning, social interactions, and personal development. The research aims to provide insights into the knowledge, practices, and experiences of young users within the context of Egypt's Vision 2030 plan, which emphasizes digital skills and innovation to prepare Youth for the global digital economy (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development 2020). AI adoption is particularly significant among Youth, who represent over 60% of the population under the Age of 30 (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics 2022). This study explores how Egyptian Youth engage with AI tools and examines their awareness of the associated benefits, risks, and social implications. It investigates both the advantages and potential drawbacks of integrating AI into daily routines while addressing important ethical considerations. Despite the pervasive presence of AI in digital interactions, there remains a limited understanding of how young users actually engage with and comprehend these technologies. Thus, the research aims to provide technologists, policymakers, and government officials with empirical insights into AI usage in digital media, particularly regarding its impact on learning, social interactions, and personal development. Furthermore, the study highlights existing gaps in knowledge concerning youth attitudes toward AI, especially in balancing potential risks such as misuse or digital manipulation with opportunities for empowerment.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into digital media presents both significant opportunities and notable challenges for Egyptian Youth. While AI tools have the potential to enhance user experiences, foster innovation, improve digital literacy, and raise awareness of emerging technologies, there remains a substantial gap in young people's understanding and ethical use of these tools. This lack of awareness may lead to the underutilization of AI technologies and heighten ethical, social, and privacy-related risks. Despite the global surge in AI adoption, there is limited empirical research on how different demographic groups, particularly Youth, engage with and comprehend AI technologies. In Egypt, with its large and growing youth population, the integration and impact of AI tools in digital media are insufficiently explored, especially concerning awareness levels, usage patterns, and factors influencing engagement. Therefore, this study

aims to assess the level of AI awareness among Egyptian Youth and identify the key factors shaping their interaction with AI tools. Additionally, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding of AI literacy among young people and to inform policy recommendations that promote digital inclusion, responsible AI use, and ethical engagement with emerging technologies.

1.3 Significance of the Study

1.3.1 Theoretical Significance

This research examines the usage patterns and awareness levels of AI tools among Egyptian Youth, a key demographic shaping the country's digital future. By providing a comprehensive understanding of how young people interact with and perceive AI technologies, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital transformation, technological literacy, and youth adaptation in the era of artificial intelligence. The study offers insights into how AI tools influence youth behaviors, social interactions, and decision-making processes, thereby advancing theoretical frameworks on human–technology interaction, particularly within developing societies such as Egypt. By analyzing both the benefits and challenges of AI usage, the research deepens theoretical discussions on digital empowerment, risk perception, self-development, and social adaptation to emerging technologies. Furthermore, it highlights the interplay between awareness and usage behaviors, providing a foundation for future studies aiming to develop conceptual models that explain the sociocultural and psychological dimensions of AI engagement among Youth.

1.3.2 Practical Significance

This study offers valuable guidance for educators, policymakers, and media professionals seeking to enhance AI literacy among Egyptian Youth. By identifying factors that influence AI awareness, adoption, and perceptions, the research provides a basis for developing educational programs and national strategies that promote responsible and effective use of AI technologies. In educational and training contexts, the findings support the integration of AI tools into learning environments in ways that foster creativity, productivity, and critical thinking, helping bridge the gap between youth digital behaviors and the demands of an AI-driven labor market. For policymakers and technology developers, the study informs the design of awareness campaigns and user-centered technologies that mitigate risks, maximize benefits, and promote ethical AI use. Ultimately, this research supports the cultivation of a balanced AI culture among Egyptian youth culture that leverages innovation while maintaining social and ethical responsibility—and provides actionable

insights for preparing the younger generation for active participation in an AI-powered digital future.

1.3.3 Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of AI tool usage among Egyptian Youth in digital media and how Youth utilize AI tools in their daily lives.
2. To measure the awareness and understanding of AI technologies among Egyptian Youth and the preferred use of tools.
3. To identify factors influencing the engagement of Egyptian Youth with AI tools frequently.
4. To explore the implications of AI tool usage on the digital behavior of Egyptian Youth and its reflection on their social interaction (daily lives).
5. To enhance digital literacy among Egyptian Youth by using AI tools to prepare them for a future dominated by AI technologies.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.1 Defining Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its Technological Foundation

Artificial Intelligence essentially refers to machines performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as reasoning, learning, and making decisions (Tredinnick 2017). The concept originated in the 1950s, with pioneers such as Alan Turing and John McCarthy leading the way. When examining the research, the first step is always ensuring that everyone's clear on what "AI" and "digital literacy" actually mean. The review also examines how young people utilize these technologies, the core tools involved, and the risks that arise, such as deepfakes, privacy concerns, and algorithmic bias. Youth interact with AI tools more rapidly than other age groups, mainly due to the continued expansion of technology and internet access.

In fact, a 2022 survey by Egypt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology found that over 70% of Egyptian Youth regularly use AI apps.

The study highlights tools such as virtual assistants, translation tools, and even algorithms that determine what you see on social media. Therefore, digital literacy is on the rise, and the younger generation is clearly ready to embrace new technologies in the digital Age.

At its core, AI is a branch of computer science that focuses on building systems capable of handling tasks typically thought to be the domain of humans alone (Jakhar and Kaur 2020). And, as this study points out, what AI really spits out is knowledge, something that can be useful for both people and machines. However, there is more: AI shapes large social networks, powers search engines, and even drives surveillance programs at various scales (Berendt 2019).

Machine Learning and Deep Learning: An Introduction to AI Tools. AI has seen groundbreaking advancements due to enhanced data availability and the development of new AI technologies. These technologies have improved algorithms and the power of computing systems.

2.1.1 Key Developments Include

A) Machine Learning (ML) AI tool, which is about teaching computers to learn from data and make decisions. You see ML shaking up industries like education, media production, healthcare, or finance by making predictions that help people act fast (LeCun *et al.* 2019).

B) Deep Learning sits inside ML. It utilizes artificial neural networks to a simplified version of the human brain—to recognize images, understand speech, or recommend products online (Domingos 2015).

C) Generative AI, about creating new things: think text, images, even videos (Kirelli 2023). These tools are changing the game.

2.1.2 The Role of AI tools usage Among Youth

Youth in Egypt are rapidly embracing AI tools, primarily due to the increased accessibility of technology and the internet. According to a 2022 survey by the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, more than 70% of Egyptian Youth regularly use AI-driven apps such as virtual assistants, translation tools, and those sneaky social media algorithms. It is becoming more digitally savvy and ready to adopt new technology as it emerges.

The awareness and understanding of AI concepts among university students revealed a moderate level of awareness, with significant variations based on academic discipline and access to technological resources. Fields demonstrated higher levels of AI awareness compared to those in the humanities and social sciences (Alawneh *et al.* 2022). Other studies

back this up. Approximately 65% of young Egyptians are familiar with AI, and nearly half—around 45%—utilize these tools daily (El-Sherif and Wahby 2021). Youth found real purpose on social media. Youth utilize AI to drive positive changes in their communities and view it as playing an active role in social and economic development (Ayish 2018). Social media, for Youth, is a virtual gathering space where their voices can actually make waves in the Arab world. Influencers in the region are also a significant presence. The Arab Media Outlook, 2016, notes that these voices can significantly shape local culture and do a great deal of good beyond just posting for likes.

AI tools usage among Egyptian Youth is influenced by factors such as ease of use, perceived usefulness, and trust in technology (Zaki 2020). Studies indicate that Youth prefer AI applications that offer personalized experiences and enhance productivity. This preference is evident in the high adoption rates of AI-driven educational tools and entertainment applications that could generate full insight and an accurate response for the user using the tools (ElBakry, 2018). Artificial Intelligence is increasingly present in young people's lives, particularly in education and entertainment. Their rise can be attributed to several factors: the region's young population, the rapid adoption of new technology, the allure of social media, the surge in short-form content, and the ease of use of these platforms (Ezzat 2020).

Apps that utilize AI help personalize the content users see and learn, making it more engaging and easier to absorb (Hassan and Shouman 2019). Since smartphones and internet access are almost ubiquitous, more Egyptian Youth are turning to AI for school research, creating content for social media, or simply gaming (Gedeen 2020). However, here's the thing: even though many young people use AI, not many truly understand how it works or what it means for them (Frag and Osman 2018).

2.1.3 AI and Youth Awareness Patterns

AI use among young people in Egypt is on the rise, mainly because technology is more accessible than ever. Over 70% of Egyptian Youth now utilize AI-powered apps, including virtual assistants, language tools, and constantly suggested social media feeds (Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology 2022). Most of them rely on AI for learning, entertainment, and staying connected (Smith *et al.* 2021). Siri, Alexa, Duolingo, Grammarly, and AI-driven video games are no longer just trendy buzzwords (Johnson and Zhang 2022). What draws Youth in?

Customization and efficiency. Mostly, Youth prefer apps that cater to their individual preferences and help them accomplish tasks (ElBakry 2018). In schools, AI takes over repetitive tasks, such as automated grading and personalized lessons, freeing teachers to focus more on genuine teaching and engaging with students (Johnson *et al.* 2019). The way young people interact with AI is shaped by their education, technical knowledge, and socioeconomic status. In Egypt, universities have begun offering AI courses to improve students' skills, but these only reach a limited portion of the student population (Mohamed and Youssef 2020).

The effects of artificial intelligence extend far beyond theoretical frameworks. (Johnson *et al.* 2019) demonstrate that chatbots and automated grading systems significantly reduce administrative workloads for university staff, allowing educators to devote more time to direct student engagement. However, despite the widespread adoption of such technologies, many young users lack a clear understanding of how AI algorithms function and how these systems shape their everyday academic and social experiences (Carter and Lin 2023). Ramos *et al.* (2020) found that fewer than 30% of young people were able to accurately explain how AI recommendation systems function. This limited understanding suggests that many users engage with AI technologies in a largely passive manner, raising concerns related to digital literacy. In contrast, a smaller and more technologically proficient group—typically individuals with stronger academic backgrounds or a particular interest in technology—actively seeks to understand the mechanisms and implications of AI systems. These changes demonstrate the significant impact of AI on education, making processes more efficient, streamlining tasks, and creating opportunities for deeper learning (Johnson *et al.* 2019). Higher digital literacy is closely tied to a greater awareness and understanding of AI. Building AI literacy is not just helpful; it is crucial if we want young people to truly benefit from these tools both in and out of the classroom (Hassan 2022).

Digital technologies have significantly simplified daily life by providing immediate access to vast amounts of information. While this convenience enhances efficiency, it also presents notable cognitive challenges. When information is readily available, users may be more inclined to skim content rather than engage with it critically, encouraging passive consumption over deeper intellectual engagement. (Fromm 2023) warns that excessive reliance on readily accessible information may reduce an individual's motivation for active effort and critical reflection. Such patterns of passive consumption risk diminishing curiosity,

weakening cognitive engagement, and undermining personal development. As artificial intelligence and digital technologies continue to expand, there is an increasing danger that individuals may equate access to information with genuine understanding, rather than cultivating meaningful knowledge and analytical skills.

2.1.4 Challenges in AI Integration

Artificial intelligence occupies a complex position in contemporary digital life, at times enhancing user awareness while at other times diminishing critical engagement. Educational technologies, such as AI-based tutoring systems and coding platforms, have demonstrated positive outcomes in supporting young people's understanding of technological concepts. (Nguyen and Patel 2022). Moreover, excessive reliance on automated systems can reduce users' tendency to question and critically evaluate AI outputs. When AI-generated content is accepted uncritically, users may overlook issues of accuracy, bias, and contextual relevance (Garcia and Thomas 2021). Empirical evidence indicates that AI adoption among Youth is widespread: (Smith 2021) reports that 68% of individuals aged 15 to 24 regularly use AI-driven tools, including voice assistants, adaptive learning platforms, and AI-powered digital games. Similarly, applications such as Gemini and Grammarly have gained popularity due to their ability to personalize learning experiences (Johnson and Zhang 2022). In addition to formal education, workshops and extracurricular initiatives—such as AI hackathons encourage more active and exploratory engagement with AI concepts. Nevertheless, unequal access to educational resources continues to limit participation in such initiatives, resulting in uneven benefits across socioeconomic groups (Ahmed *et al.* 2021). Contemporary Youth are not merely passive consumers of digital content; they are increasingly regarded as agents of social change within societies that place high expectations on their civic and developmental roles (UNDP 2016). Many young people have found a sense of purpose through social media platforms, viewing them as spaces for expression, participation, and community-driven progress (Ayish, 2018). These platforms, however, are deeply shaped by artificial intelligence. Algorithmic systems on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube create personalized content streams that maximize user engagement and significantly increase time spent online. Despite this pervasive influence, users often remain unaware of the extent to which their personal data is collected and used to train these algorithms, raising serious concerns related to privacy, manipulation, and misinformation (Johnson and Lee 2023). While social media platforms offer opportunities

to disseminate educational content related to AI and its societal implications, empirical evidence suggests that youth engagement with such material remains limited (Martin *et al.* 2022). Conversely, excessive exposure to algorithm-driven content has been linked to negative outcomes, including reduced productivity, diminished critical thinking, and adverse effects on mental well-being.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Digital Literacy

This study is grounded in Digital Literacy Theory, which provides a framework to examine how Egyptian Youth engage with Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and their level of awareness regarding these technologies. Gilster (1997) defines digital literacy as the ability to understand and utilize information from diverse digital sources, emphasizing that literacy extends beyond access to content to include comprehension of the processes and contexts behind it. Livingstone (2004) later expanded this definition to encompass the social and cognitive dimensions of digital engagement. Digital literacy encompasses not only technical proficiency but also critical thinking, evaluation of digital content, contextual understanding, and responsible, ethical use of technology. These competencies are essential for meaningful participation in education, society, and the workforce. In Egypt, where Youth represent a significant segment of the population and drive digital transformation, digital literacy is critical for effective adoption, interpretation, and integration of AI into daily life. Familiarity with digital tools influences both usage frequency and depth of engagement, shaping critical thinking and ethical decision-making in digital environments (Ng 2012).

Digital Literacy Theory provides a lens to understand these gaps, encompassing four interrelated domains—technical, cognitive, social, and ethical literacy, which collectively offer a framework for engaging with technology responsibly and reflectively (Ng 2012).

A- Technical Literacy

Technical literacy involves practical skills for operating digital tools effectively, including accessing, navigating, and managing digital content (Eshet-Alkalai 2004). In the context of AI, technical literacy extends to using platforms such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, or Midjourney to support learning, creativity, and work. Assessing technical literacy enables evaluation of whether Youth can use AI effectively and productively.

B- Cognitive Literacy

Cognitive literacy refers to the ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate digital information critically (Gilster 1997; Ng 2012). For AI, this involves understanding how tools function, recognizing algorithmic influences, assessing output reliability, and detecting biases. Cognitive literacy reveals whether users can critically engage with AI outputs and make informed decisions about their use.

C- Social Literacy

Social literacy concerns how individuals interact and collaborate within digital environments (Hobbs 2010; Livingstone 2004). It encompasses digital citizenship, responsible online behavior, and participation in online communities

D- Ethical Literacy

Ethical literacy involves awareness of moral and societal issues in digital technology use, including privacy, data protection, intellectual property, and algorithmic biases (Ribble 2015). In the context of AI, ethical literacy addresses youth understanding of data privacy risks, misinformation, and overreliance on automated systems

2.2.2 Relevance to the Study

Applying Digital Literacy Theory enables a multifaceted analysis of how Egyptian Youth adopt and interact with AI tools. By examining technical, cognitive, social, and ethical literacy, this study identifies both enablers and barriers to responsible AI use. The theory underscores that effective and ethical AI engagement requires more than technical competence; it also necessitates critical thinking, ethical awareness, and contextual understanding.

2.3 Research Questions

1. What is the extent of AI tool usage among Egyptian Youth in digital media?
2. How aware are Egyptian Youth of the functionalities and implications of AI tools?
3. What factors influence the engagement of Egyptian Youth with AI technologies?
4. What are the potential benefits and challenges of AI tool usage for Egyptian Youth?
5. How effective are AI tools in influencing the

awareness level among Egyptian Youth?

2.4 Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of AI tools usage among Egyptian Youth and their awareness level regarding Artificial Intelligence.

H1a: There is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of AI tools usage and the perceived benefits of AI tools.

H1b: There is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of AI tools usage and the perceived challenges of AI tools.

H1c: There is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of AI tools usage and the practical uses of AI tools.

H1d: There is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of AI tool usage and the perceived risks of AI.

H1e: There is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of AI tools usage and the reflection impact (i.e., how AI use shapes users' awareness, thinking, and behavior).

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between the starting time of AI tools adoption among Egyptian Youth and their awareness level regarding Artificial Intelligence.

H2a: There is a statistically significant relationship between the starting time of AI tools adoption and the perceived benefits of AI tools.

H2b: There is a statistically significant relationship between the starting time of AI tools adoption and the perceived challenges of AI tools.

H2c: There is a statistically significant relationship between the starting time of AI tools adoption and the practical uses of AI tools.

H2d: There is a statistically significant relationship between the starting time of AI tools adoption and the perceived risks of AI.

H2e: There is a statistically significant relationship between the starting time of AI tools adoption and the reflection impact.

H3: There are statistically significant differences among Egyptian Youth in their awareness level regarding Artificial Intelligence according to their demographic characteristics (namely, Age, educational level, place of residence, and family living standard.

H3a: There are statistically significant differences among Egyptian Youth in their awareness level regarding Artificial Intelligence according to their Age.

H3b: There are statistically significant differences among Egyptian Youth in their awareness level regarding Artificial Intelligence according to their educational level.

H3c: There are statistically significant differences among Egyptian Youth in their awareness level regarding Artificial Intelligence according to their place of residence.

H3d: There are statistically significant differences among Egyptian Youth in their awareness level regarding Artificial Intelligence according to their family living standard.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine patterns of artificial intelligence (AI) tool usage and levels of awareness among Egyptian Youth. A quantitative approach is appropriate for identifying trends, relationships, and variations in technology engagement across a relatively large population. The survey was designed to capture multiple dimensions of AI engagement, including frequency of use, preferred applications, perceived benefits, ethical and social concerns, and the perceived impact of AI on academic, professional, and social practices. This design enables a systematic and comprehensive assessment of AI integration within youth digital behavior.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered primarily through online platforms, with limited in-person distribution to enhance accessibility and participation. Prior to participation, respondents were informed of the study's objectives and assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent

was obtained from all participants. The questionnaire measured AI usage patterns, awareness levels, attitudes toward AI, ethical and social concerns, and perceived impacts on daily activities, allowing for an in-depth examination of youth engagement with AI technologies.

3.3 Population and Sampling

• Target Population

The target population comprised 436 Egyptian youth, both male and female, aged 18 to 40 years, who actively use digital platforms and AI tools. This age group represents one of the most digitally engaged segments of Egyptian society and frequently interacts with AI technologies in educational, professional, and social contexts. Participants were recruited from urban and semi-urban areas to reflect variations in access to digital infrastructure and AI-enabled media environments.

• Sampling Technique and Justification

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants with direct experience using AI applications, such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Grok, Microsoft Copilot, and AI-powered features embedded in digital and social media platforms. This sampling strategy prioritizes analytical relevance rather than statistical generalization, enabling a focused exploration of AI awareness and engagement among active users. Participants represented diverse academic and professional backgrounds, including media and communication, marketing, business, and engineering. Demographic variables such as Age, gender, education level, and location were incorporated into the analysis to examine variations in AI usage and awareness.

• Sample Size

The final sample consisted of 436 participants, which provided sufficient data to support descriptive and inferential statistical analysis

3.4 Data Analysis

Survey responses were coded, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were used to summarize demographic characteristics, AI usage patterns, and awareness levels. Inferential

analyses, including cross-tabulation and correlation analysis, were conducted to examine relationships between demographic variables and AI engagement. Hypothesis testing was applied to identify statistically significant differences in awareness, attitudes, and behaviors across participant groups. Results were presented using tables and figures to support a clear, evidence-based interpretation of the findings.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Quantitative Results

4.1.1 Field Study Results Analysis

This survey was distributed to 436 Egyptians to assess their awareness, perceptions, experiences, and satisfaction with AI tools. The goal was to understand their level of awareness and their usage of the AI tools. This section presents the quantitative findings of the survey on Egyptian youth engagement with artificial intelligence (AI) tools and their levels of awareness.

The results are reported using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, to provide a clear representation of AI usage patterns and awareness among participants. Figures and tables are included to illustrate the intensity of AI tool usage, awareness levels, and variations across demographic groups such as Age, gender, and education level.

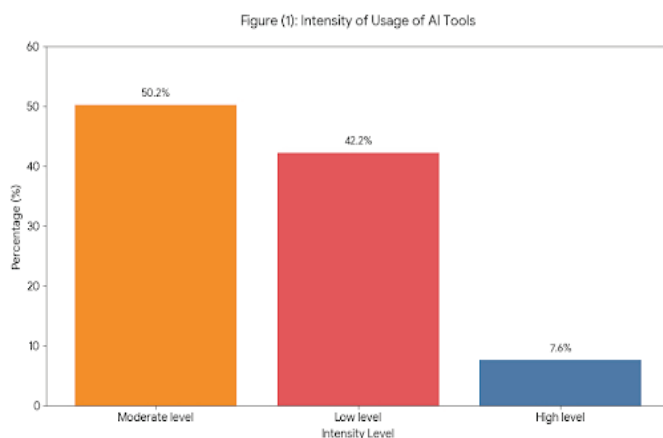


Figure 1: Intensity of AI Tools Usage

Figure 1 shows that roughly half of those surveyed—50.2%—describe how they use AI tools as moderate. Another 42.2% use them only a little, while just 7.6% say they use them extensively. It is evident that AI is entering everyday life, but for the majority, it is not yet an indispensable tool. The large group of

moderate users suggests that many young people are experimenting with AI but have not made it a natural part of their lives. This observation lines up with Digital Literacy Theory (Glister 1997), which describes the slow

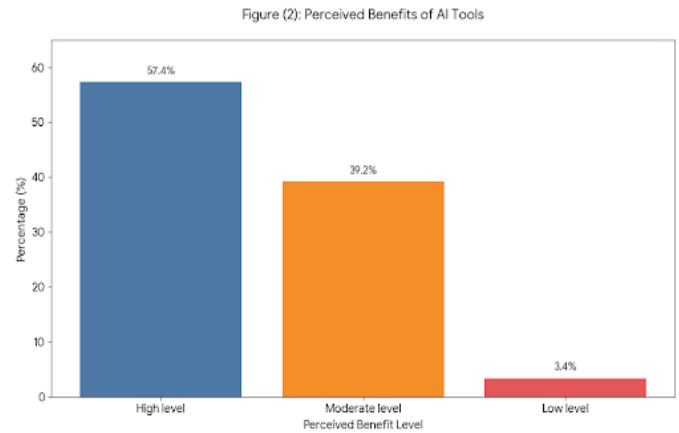


Figure 2: Perceived Benefits of AI Tools

Figure 2 indicates that most respondents—57.4%—perceive substantial benefits in using AI, while 39.2% remain neutral, and only 3.4% are not convinced at all. Clearly, many young people recognize the ways AI can improve productivity, inspire creativity, and accelerate learning. These findings align with previous research, which showed that young people often associate digital technologies with empowerment and expanded possibilities (Na 2012). However, the significant

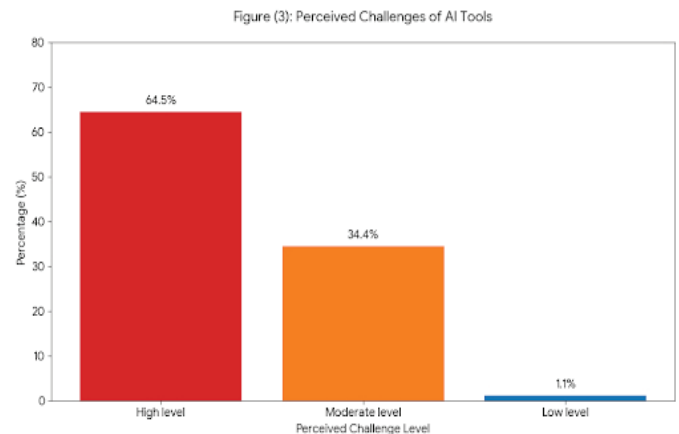


Figure 3: Perceived Challenges of AI Tools

Figure 3 presents a clear trend: 64.5% of respondents believe that AI poses significant challenges, 34.4% perceive moderate challenges, and only 1.1% consider the challenges to be minimal. So, despite the enthusiasm, most young people are cautious about the complexity and risks of AI, such as data privacy, ethics, and concerns about job displacement. It is not just a matter of hype; there is genuine awareness of the potential negatives. This combination of excitement and caution is significant. It highlights how optimism about technology and skepticism about its drawbacks often coexist, especially in rapidly digitizing societies.

These results reflect ongoing global discussions about algorithmic bias, misinformation, and over-reliance on automation (Hausken 2024). For policymakers and educators, this serves as a reminder: young people require more than just access to AI; they need comprehensive, practical programs that promote AI literacy and understanding. These will help them engage with these technologies thoughtfully and responsibly, rather than passively.

In Figure 5, these findings present another clear image. Around 76.4% of participants perceive AI as carrying significant risks; 22% view the risks as moderate, and only 1.6% consider them low. Egyptian Youth are not oblivious to the potential drawbacks. They express concern about privacy, misinformation, and becoming overly reliant on these technologies. It is more than just abstract worry; there is tangible caution and an increasing awareness that technology influences society and ethics, for better or worse. Awareness connects directly to the critical literacy aspect of Digital Literacy Theory. Young people are not simply utilizing AI; they are starting to question it, examining how these systems operate and what they signify. While this process is still in its early stages, the shift is underway. For educators and policymakers, this represents a valuable opportunity. There is a clear mandate to promote stronger ethical education, greater transparency, and initiatives that help everyone grasp AI's impact—not just its practical use, but also its broader implications.

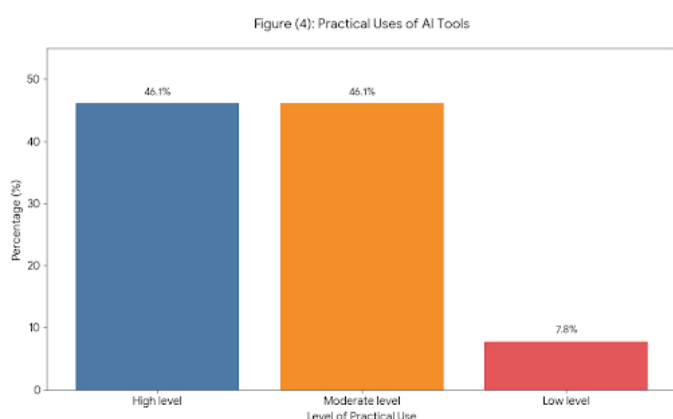


Figure 4: Practical Usage of AI Tools

Figure 4 illustrates the extent to which participants practically use AI tools in their daily or academic activities. The results show that 46.1% of respondents indicated a high level of practical use, while an equal percentage (46.1%) reported a moderate level of use. Only 7.8% of participants reflected a low level of practical use of AI tools. These findings suggest that AI tools have become an integral part of most respondents' routines, whether for learning, content creation, research, or communication. The balanced distribution between high and moderate users implies that a significant majority (over 92%) are already engaging with AI tools to varying extents. This widespread adoption highlights the growing normalization of AI technologies among Youth, likely driven by their accessibility and usefulness in improving efficiency and creativity.

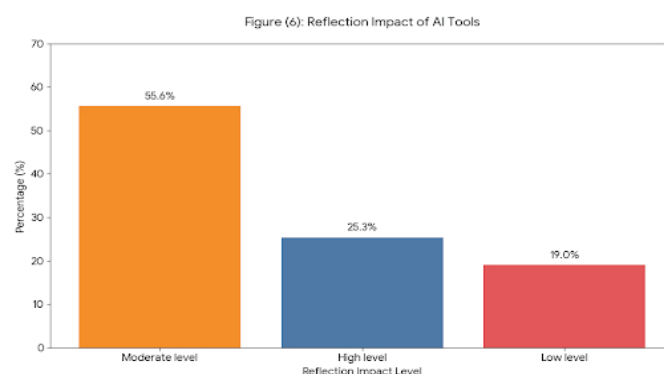


Figure 6: Reflection Impact of AI Tools

Figure 6 illustrates a clear division: 55.6% of respondents report that AI has a moderate impact on how they reflect, 25.3% say the effect is high, and 19% consider it low. AI tools are not for tasks; they're also influencing how people think and perceive technology. Over half of those surveyed indicate that working with AI has begun to change the way they tackle problems, process information, and even their general perspective. It reflects the concept of transformative digital literacy, a move beyond simply knowing how to use tools toward considering their wider effects on personal growth. The fact that most people notice only a moderate effect is consistent with the theory of digital literacy. Continued interaction with intelligent systems gradually shapes users' thinking and attitudes about technology. The findings are clear: AI is encouraging more independent learning and greater curiosity, even if it has not fundamentally changed people's thinking just yet.

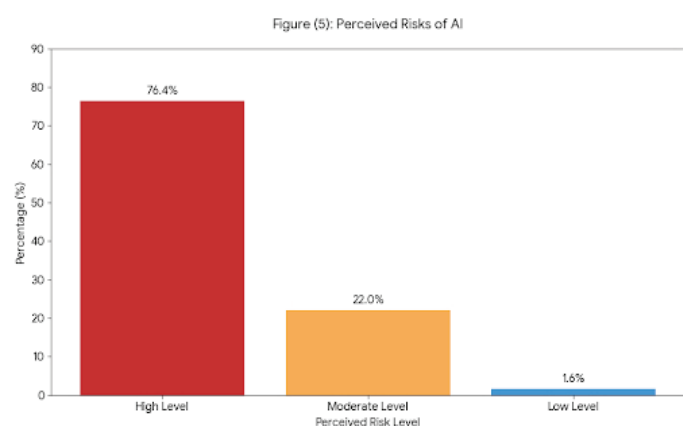


Figure 5: Perceived Risks of AI Tools

4.2 Discussion of Research Questions

RQ1: What is the extent of AI tool usage among Egyptian Youth in digital media?

The findings revealed that AI tools have become an essential part of Egyptian youth digital practices, with a majority demonstrating moderate to high levels of usage intensity. Based on the survey data, 46.1% of respondents reported high use, 46.1% indicated moderate use, while only 7.8% showed low engagement. This pattern suggests that Egyptian Youth have deeply integrated AI tools into their digital routines, using them for various purposes such as content creation, learning support, information retrieval, and entertainment. The analysis also shows that AI usage extends beyond casual interaction, reflecting a strong adoption of practical tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and AI-based editing or translation systems. These results align with the Digital Literacy Theory, which emphasizes that frequent digital interaction fosters adaptive technological skills and literacy over time.

RQ2: How aware are Egyptian Youth of the functionalities and implications of AI tools?

The study found that while Egyptian Youth actively use AI tools, their awareness level of how these tools function and their broader implications remains moderate. Data analysis indicates a 55.6% moderate reflection impact, 25.3% high, and 19% low. This implies that although many users can effectively operate AI applications, a considerable portion lacks a deep understanding of how AI algorithms work, or of the ethical and privacy concerns surrounding them.

RQ3: What factors influence the engagement of Egyptian Youth with AI technologies?

Analysis of the statistical data indicates that education level, income, and digital familiarity are key factors influencing AI engagement. According to the LSD test, Youth with higher education and income levels showed significantly greater use and perceived benefits of AI tools compared to lower-income groups. Educational exposure enhances confidence in using AI tools effectively, while socioeconomic status affects access to technology and internet resources. Additionally, digital literacy and early exposure to technology also emerged as significant determinants of engagement. Participants who began using AI tools earlier displayed higher reflection impacts and more advanced integration of these technologies in learning and work. These results confirm Hypothesis 2 (H2e), which established a statistically significant relationship between the starting

time of AI adoption and its reflective impact ($r = 0.084$, $\text{Sig.} = 0.078$). Thus, both educational and experiential factors collectively shape how Youth engage with AI tools.

RQ4: What are the potential benefits and challenges of AI tool usage for Egyptian Youth?

Findings from the “Perceived Benefits” and “Perceived Challenges” analyses reveal a nuanced relationship between opportunity and risk. Most respondents acknowledged moderate to high benefits of AI tools, improved productivity, easier access to knowledge, enhanced creativity, and more effective communication. These tools were perceived as helpful in academic work, professional tasks, and content creation, aligning with the theory’s emphasis on technology as an enabler of learning and empowerment. On the other hand, 76.4% of respondents reported high levels of perceived risks, indicating concerns about accuracy, misinformation, over-reliance on AI, and ethical implications. The most significant challenges were linked to a lack of critical evaluation skills and a limited understanding of AI’s decision-making processes, which can affect the accuracy and credibility of outputs. These findings highlight that while AI offers meaningful benefits, its challenges are primarily rooted in limited digital literacy and critical awareness, suggesting that targeted education and regulation are essential to balance both sides.

RQ5: How effective are AI tools in influencing the awareness level among Egyptian Youth?

The research findings demonstrate that AI tools have a moderate positive impact on awareness among Egyptian Youth. While 55.6% of participants reflected a moderate awareness impact, 25.3% showed high awareness, and 19% exhibited low awareness. This indicates that AI exposure contributes to developing certain analytical and information-handling skills, but this development remains incomplete without structured guidance.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 General Discussion

The survey findings portray Egyptian Youth as enthusiastic yet cautious participants in the country’s digital transformation. Respondents recognize the benefits of AI, including increased efficiency, innovation, and convenience, while remaining aware of its potential risks and ethical complexities. Most participants

demonstrate moderate familiarity with AI, understanding its practical applications but lacking the critical skills necessary to evaluate or influence these technologies effectively. This highlights the need to move beyond functional training toward fostering ethical, reflective, and creative engagement with AI. Integrating AI literacy topics such as data ethics, privacy, algorithmic bias, and the societal implications of automation into school curricula and policy initiatives is essential to equip Youth with the knowledge and judgment required for responsible AI use.

Youth Perception and Trust

Survey data indicate that participants often accept AI outputs at face value, rarely verifying their accuracy. Tools such as ChatGPT or Grammarly are frequently treated as authoritative sources, with limited critical assessment of potential errors or biases. Previous research corroborates this phenomenon, suggesting that excessive trust in AI can lead to uncritical consumption of digital content (Garcia and Zhang 2023). Digital Literacy Theory (Gilster 1997; Ng 2012) conceptualizes this as limited cognitive literacy, where users can operate digital tools but lack the evaluative skills necessary to judge the reliability or objectivity of the outputs.

Ethical and Legal Implications

Ethical awareness among young users, particularly concerning plagiarism, data privacy, and intellectual property, remains underdeveloped (Abdel-Fattah and Hassan 2022). While many Arab youths are proficient in using digital tools, their understanding of the ethical responsibilities associated with AI remains limited (Ribble 2015). These findings reinforce the importance of incorporating AI ethics into higher education and vocational programs, ensuring that young people can make informed, accountable decisions as they navigate digital environments.

Deepfakes and Privacy Concerns

Participants expressed increasing concern regarding deepfakes, misinformation, and privacy risks, particularly on social media platforms where AI operates in the background. AI-generated content can distort reality and influence public perception, highlighting the urgent need for both ethical and technical literacy. Prior studies emphasize similar challenges, indicating that inadequate awareness of AI's data practices can amplify misinformation and privacy violations (Carter and Zhang 2023; Johnson and Lee 2023).

Regulatory and Educational Needs

The study underscores the necessity of coordinated national and institutional frameworks to support AI literacy and ethical usage. While regulations are important, Digital Literacy Theory suggests that rules alone are insufficient; education must empower Youth to think critically, act ethically, and understand the broader societal implications of AI. Embedding AI literacy into curricula, alongside teacher training and public awareness programs, can ensure that young people not only engage effectively with AI but do so in a responsible and socially conscious manner.

5.2 Conclusion

This study examined the usage patterns of artificial intelligence (AI) tools among Egyptian Youth aged 18 to 40 and assessed their levels of awareness through the framework of Digital Literacy Theory. Based on survey data from 436 respondents, the findings indicate that AI technologies are widely adopted and generally perceived as beneficial, particularly for educational, creative, and productivity purposes. Participants reported that AI enhances learning efficiency, facilitates access to information, and supports creative output, aligning with previous studies highlighting AI's potential to foster active learning and innovation (Ng 2012; Paik *et al.* 2023).

Despite these positive perceptions, the study reveals a notable gap in critical and ethical understanding. Many participants demonstrated practical proficiency in using AI for tasks such as research, translation, and content generation, but fewer understood the underlying mechanisms, data dependencies, or ethical implications of these systems.

5.3 Ethical Concerns and Future Outlook

A key ethical concern is the growing overreliance on artificial intelligence (AI) tools among Egyptian Youth and their potential impact on human agency. Excessive dependence on AI for learning and decision-making may reduce critical thinking, creativity, and personal accountability. When AI outputs are used without evaluation, users risk weakening their ability to exercise independent judgment. Addressing this issue requires promoting reflective AI use and reinforcing human oversight in educational and digital practices.

Future Outlook: Integrating critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and technical proficiency into formal education offers a strategic pathway to cultivating digitally empowered citizens. Embedding AI literacy

into curricula can enable Youth to utilize AI tools responsibly, creatively, and ethically. The potential of AI among Egyptian Youth is considerable, provided that its adoption is guided by principles of human-centered innovation, ethical responsibility, and social accountability. Strengthening AI literacy is therefore essential to ensure that AI functions as a tool for empowerment rather than dependency, supporting equitable, responsible, and sustainable digital development in Egypt.

5.4 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into AI usage and awareness among Egyptian Youth, several limitations should be noted. First, the reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce response bias, as participants could overestimate or underestimate their actual use of AI tools or their understanding of associated ethical and technical implications. Second, the study focused exclusively on Egyptian Youth aged 18 to 40, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, cultural contexts, or regions where digital literacy levels and access to technology differ. Future research could expand the sample to include diverse demographic groups, such as different educational backgrounds, geographic locations, or professional sectors, which would further strengthen the generalizability of results and provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI adoption and digital literacy in Egypt.

5.5 Theoretical and Practical Recommendations

This study concludes with several important recommendations that aim to create a balanced environment where Egyptian Youth can benefit from Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies while maintaining awareness of their ethical, educational, and cultural implications. The researcher presents these recommendations in the form of a proposed strategy based on theoretical and practical dimensions, **aligned with Egypt's Vision 2030 and the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy established by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT).**

5.5.1 Theoretical Recommendations

- **Expanding the Digital Literacy Theory:** Future research should develop the Digital Literacy Theory to include new dimensions related to AI awareness, such as ethical understanding, critical evaluation, and emotional perception, to ensure it remains relevant in

today's rapidly changing technological environment.

- **Bridging Awareness and Application:** Scholars are encouraged to study how digital literacy evolves from basic awareness to practical and responsible AI application. This will deepen understanding of how knowledge, perception, and ethical engagement intersect in real-life digital contexts.
- **Cross-Cultural and Socioeconomic Perspectives:** Future theoretical models should account for cultural and socioeconomic differences that influence youth attitudes toward AI, particularly in developing nations. These insights will help in creating culturally adaptive literacy frameworks.
- **Longitudinal Research Approach:** Long-term studies are needed to explore how continuous interaction with AI tools impacts digital literacy, ethical reasoning, and social behavior among Youth over time. This approach can guide sustainable educational and policy interventions.
- **Youth Engagement Strategies:** Further studies should explore the effectiveness of various youth engagement strategies in promoting responsible use of Artificial Intelligence tools among Egyptian Youth. This research could identify the most impactful approaches for different educational and socioeconomic groups, contributing to more tailored awareness programs that enhance critical thinking and ethical understanding in digital environments.

- **AI Literacy and Gender-Specific Impacts:** Future research should focus on examining the role of AI literacy interventions and their effectiveness in fostering analytical and ethical skills among Youth. Additionally, investigating gender-specific patterns in AI tool usage can help develop targeted educational and policy strategies that address differences in perception, motivation, and engagement, ensuring equitable and inclusive access to AI knowledge and practice across all segments of Egyptian society.

5.5.2 Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings regarding Egyptian Youth's awareness and use of AI tools, as well as their perceptions of risks, benefits, and challenges, several practical strategies are proposed to enhance responsible AI engagement among Youth.

- **Educational programs and curriculum development**

These strategies target educational institutions, policymakers, media organizations, and community stakeholders to ensure that AI technologies are used effectively, ethically, and creatively.

A. Integrate AI Literacy as a Core Subject: Schools and universities should include AI literacy as a foundational component of technological education, focusing on critical thinking, data privacy, and ethical use

B. Teacher Training and Capacity Building: Specialized training must be provided for educators to ensure they are equipped with modern AI skills and knowledge before teaching students.

C. Competency-Based Learning: Educational systems should shift from traditional lectures to hands-on, competency-based models that emphasize analysis, evaluation, and creative problem-solving using AI tools.

D. Equitable Access to AI Education: To reduce the digital divide, the Ministry of Education and MCIT should ensure equal opportunities for Youth from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds

by providing accessible AI learning resources and national training initiatives.

- **Policy and Governance Frameworks.**

Policymakers play a critical role in ensuring that AI development and usage align with ethical standards and national objectives.

A. Activate the Egyptian National AI Strategy: Accelerate implementation of the national strategy, focusing on transparency, responsible AI use, and combating misinformation and deepfakes.

B. Human-Centered AI Governance: Policies must ensure AI complements human decision-making rather than replacing it. Accountability for AI-related errors should be clearly defined within legal and institutional frameworks.

C. Transparency in Media and Digital Platforms: Media organizations should be required to label AI-generated content and adopt multi-layer verification systems (AI Tool + Human Editor + Primary Source) to ensure accuracy and credibility.

D. Ethical Regulations and Data Protection: Establish firm policies on data privacy, intellectual property, and responsible AI practices across social and educational sectors.

- **Public Awareness and Community Engagement**

A. National Awareness Campaigns: The government, media organizations, and private sector should collaborate to raise awareness of AI benefits and risks through campaigns targeting Youth via popular digital platforms.

B. Focus on Ethical and Safe AI Use: Awareness efforts should address key risks such as dependency, misinformation, and privacy violations while promoting responsible and balanced AI engagement.

C. Youth-Led Initiatives: Civil society institutions should encourage innovation through youth-led projects, hackathons, and AI literacy clubs that empower young individuals to use AI responsibly and creatively.

D. Parental Mediation and Family Workshops: Organize workshops to educate parents on guiding their children's digital behavior, helping families navigate AI tools safely and effectively.

- **Institutional Coordination and National Integration**

Effective AI literacy and awareness require cooperation among Egypt's key institutions.

A. MCIT – Develop national AI literacy and capacity-building programs.

B. Ministry of Education – Integrate AI subjects and ensure teacher training.

C. SCMR (Supreme Council for Media Regulation) – Oversee ethical use of AI in media.

D. IDSC (Information and Decision Support Center) – Monitor AI policy outcomes and data ethics compliance.

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Framing Inclusive Education: The Role of Ethiopian Media Outlets-A Qualitative Study of Broadcast Media Professionals in the Somali Regional State

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Ethiopian broadcast media in promoting inclusive education, with particular attention to how media professionals perceive, produce, and disseminate content related to disability and inclusion in the Somali Regional State. Despite national and international policy commitments to inclusive education, persistent social misconceptions and stigmatizing attitudes toward persons with disabilities continue to shape public understanding, a challenge that has been widely associated with media representation and framing practices. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws on thirty semi-structured interviews conducted with journalists, editors, producers, and presenters from three regional media outlets-Somali Regional Television (SRTV), Jigjiga FM Radio, and SHAKAAL TV. The interview data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software to explore patterns in professional understanding, editorial practices, and institutional constraints related to inclusive education coverage. The findings indicate that while media professionals acknowledge the potential of broadcast media to influence public awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education, coverage remains sporadic and largely dependent on externally funded initiatives. Participants identified limited knowledge of inclusive education, absence of clear editorial guidelines, financial constraints, and reliance on government and non-government organizations for story generation as key challenges affecting both the frequency and framing of media content. Although the study is context-specific and limited to three regional media houses, it contributes empirical insights into an under-researched area of Ethiopian media scholarships. The findings underscore the need for sustained professional training, stronger institutional support, and rights-based editorial policies to enhance the media's role in shaping inclusive education discourse and promoting more informed and inclusive public attitudes toward disability.

Keywords: Media, Inclusive education, disability, Ethiopia, Awareness, Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education: From Theory to Practice

Inclusive education is widely recognized as an educational approach that seeks to ensure equitable participation, learning, and achievements for all learners, regardless of disability, gender, socio-economic background, language, or other forms of marginalization. Rooted in international human-rights frameworks such as the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights and reinforced by the Salamanca Statement and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), inclusive education emphasizes not only access to schooling but also meaningful participation and social recognition (Ainscow 2020; Florian and Beaton 2018). For learners with disabilities, inclusive education is increasingly

conceptualized as a rights-based obligation rather than an optional pedagogical approach (United Nations [UN] 2018; Slee 2019).

Over the past three decades, inclusive education has received growing policy attention in Ethiopia, as reflected in national frameworks such as the Education and Training Policy, successive Education Sector Development Programs, and the Special Needs/ Inclusive Education Strategy (Ministry of Education [MoE] 1994; 2006; 2012; 2015; 2016). However, empirical research indicated that implementation gaps persist, particularly in low-resource and marginalized contexts where social stigma, limited infrastructure, and insufficient public awareness continue to affect school participation and learning outcomes for children with disabilities (Mebratu et al. 2024).

Recent studies across the Global South context demonstrate that negative social perception and persistent stereotypes surrounding disability remain a major barrier to inclusive education, often reinforced by dominant cultural narratives and limited public dialogue (Adugna et al. 2024; Grech 2016). Media representation plays a critical role in shaping these perceptions, as repeated exposure to deficit-based or charity-oriented portrayals can normalize stigma and marginalization, while rights-based and empowering narratives can foster social acceptance and policy support (Johanssen and Garrisi 2020).

In this regard, broadcast media occupy a particularly influential position. Communication scholarship has consistently shown that television and radio remain powerful agenda-setting platforms, especially in contexts characterized by low literacy levels and limited access to digital media (McCombs and Valenzuela 2021). Studies focusing on disability and media further suggest that broadcast content significantly influences public understanding of inclusion by shaping both the visibility of disability-related issues and the interpretive frames through which they are understood (Shakespeare et al. 2021). Where inclusive education receives sustained and positively framed media attention, public attitudes toward disability and schooling tend to be more supportive.

Despite this growing body of international research on media representation of disability and inclusion, empirical studies examining how Ethiopian broadcast media address inclusive education remain limited, particularly at the regional level. International evidences suggest that media coverage of disability often remains sporadic and framed through narrow, stereotypical lenses rather than rights-based engagement (Kerzner

et al. 2020; Christensen- Strynø 2024). This gap is especially pronounced in under-researched regions such as the Somali Regional State, where regional broadcasters serve as primary sources of information and cultural narration for large segments of the population. International evidences suggest that media coverage of disability often remains sporadic and framed through narrow stereotypical lenses rather than rights-based engagement (Atkinson et al. 2024).

Drawing on agenda-setting theory (McCombs and Shaw 1972) and framing theory (Goffman 1974; Entman 1993), this study examines how broadcast media professionals in the Somali Regional State understand, prioritize, and frame inclusive education. By centering on the perspective and professional practices of journalists, editors, and producers working within regional media institutions, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence on the media's role in shaping inclusive education discourse in a context characterized by socio-cultural complexity and structural constraints.

Research Questions

- (1) To what extent do media professionals in broadcasting media outlets in the Somali Region understand the concept of inclusive education, and how do they interpret it?
- (2) Which kinds of inclusive education coverage are first-hand produced, and what are their framing?
- (3) What kind of issues do media professionals encounter when they are reporting on inclusive education?
- (4) What tactics do they suggest for the media to play a better role in the advancement of inclusive education?

The study, by emphasizing these questions, intends to present evidence-based insights that have the potential to inform media practice, policy design, and advocacy strategies, thereby making a contribution to the fulfillment of Ethiopia's inclusive education commitments.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 *Inclusive Education and Ethiopian Media Houses*

Inclusive education has become the basis of a fair and excellent educational system that is universally

accepted. Its aim is to let students learn together in the same environment without any distinctions between those with disabilities, coming from poor families, speaking different languages, and of different genders and races. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCPRD] (2006) are global frameworks that recognize inclusive education as a fundamental human rights, while the Education 2030 Framework for Action [UNESCO] (2016) guides the implementation of inclusive and equitable education policies worldwide. However, a move from theory to reality implies diversified cooperation. This includes the social actors that are now required to come forward and not only support the inclusion policy but also help create the necessary positive changes in the mindset of society that would ensure equitable access.

The European continent is an area where the educational system has considerable success and strength in the adoption of an inclusive approach; however, the gap between what the policies say and what is really practiced in the classrooms is quite noticeable (Ramberg and Watkins 2020). In Asia, adoption of an inclusive system is standing back because of limited infrastructure, not-so-good teacher preparation, and social stigmatization (Parveen and Qounsar 2018). The African continent sees inclusive education as a tool for societal transformation, but its spread in the continent is not even, and it is mostly impeded by poverty, political instability, and lack of institutional capacity (Mwendwa 2014).

According to Ministry of Education [MoE] (MoE 2012; 2015; 2016), in Ethiopia, inclusive education has been the centerpiece of the country's Education Sector Development Programs three to five (ESDP III–V) and has been backed by the setting up of Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs) and more importantly, the support of an itinerant teacher system. Nevertheless, while the political commitments are commendable, the actual practical execution is still encountering the same barriers, stigma against persons with disabilities, lack of resources, limited teacher training, and low public awareness have been mentioned by most of the respondents. If the media were properly utilized, they could be a great help in disseminating information to the public to remove these barriers that will result in the acceptance of inclusive education.

2.2 The Role of Broadcast Media in Promoting Inclusive Education

Broadcast media, especially television and radio, are still one of the most influential communication channels

in Ethiopia. They are able to reach large and diverse audiences, including rural and pastoralist communities where literacy levels are lower. In addition, TV and radio can help to magnify the messages of inclusive education, show positive examples, and also remove stigma by making the presence and the achievements of people with disabilities a regular part of daily life.

Research has demonstrated that regular broadcast coverage of inclusion issues can change societal attitudes and lead families to send children with disabilities to school (Okaka and Nagasha 2017). In Ethiopia, local broadcasters like SRTV, SHAKAAL TV, and Jigjiga FM are the agenda-setters for the neighboring communities, just because they have the trust of the local audiences and are accessible in various languages. Nevertheless, the success of broadcast media in this position depends not only on the number of events but also on the presentation of the content, whether the reports are disclosed through the rights-based and empowering approach or through charity-oriented narratives.

The potential of broadcast media corresponds directly with the current study objective, i.e., to examine the role of the Ethiopian media, mainly these regional broadcast outlets, in the promotion of inclusive education and their challenges. Due to their coverage and influence, these outlets have the power to set the public agenda, frame perceptions of disability, and mobilize action at both household and policy levels.

2.3 Media and Public Understanding

Two communication theories provide us with the means to better understand the role of broadcast media in this process: the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Framing Theory.

Firstly, Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) asserts that the issue that the media highlights most will, to a large extent, be seen by the public as the most important one. Therefore, continuous media attention to inclusive education will be able to raise the matter out of the twilight of marginal concerns and make it a central societal priority in a country like Ethiopia.

Secondly, Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993) considers the elements of the media presentation, such as structure, tone, and focus, as factors that determine the audience's perception. Thus, if broadcast programs depict learners with disabilities as empowered members of society who have rights and are capable, then they implicitly break the stigma. On the other hand, the frames that focus on dependence and pity may create an environment that leads to the

repetition of negative stereotypes.

In the case of Ethiopia's Somali Regional State, where culturally-based disbeliefs about disability exist, and there is a lack of information, the roles of framing and agenda-setting of regional broadcast media are vital to a greater extent. The stations, by simply producing content that would push the issue of inclusive education up the public agenda and portray it in an empowering way, could make a big difference in changing the attitudes of both society and policymaking.

Despite the fact that Ethiopia's policy environment is a model for inclusive education, the broadcast media have a major influence on the way the public understands, appreciates, and practices this commitment. The following method describes the approach employed to study how SRTV, SHAKAAL TV, and Jigjiga FM use inclusive education in their programming and reporting.

While current studies across Africa and Ethiopia attest that media, particularly broadcast media, can have a significant influence on public understanding and policy priorities regarding inclusive education, there is an identifiable gap in empirical evidence from the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia. This lesser-known area is characterized by unique socio-cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural elements that determine media practices. Knowing how local broadcast media professionals deal with inclusive education, how they see, give importance, and put the matter forward can be a great source of policy, instruction, and promotion. This research work closes that gap.

2.4 Data and Methods

This study examined how media professionals in Ethiopia engage with issues related to inclusive education using a qualitative research paradigm. A qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews was employed to capture in-depth professional perspectives. Thirty (30) media professionals drawn from three broadcast media institutions in Jigjiga-Somali Regional Television (SRTV), Jigjiga FM Radio, and SHAKAAL TV were purposively selected based on their involvement in education-related programming. The sample included journalists, editors, producers, presenters, and technical staff with varying levels of professional experience. Gender balance was considered during participant selection to enhance inclusivity and the credibility of the data; however, the study did not aim to analyze gender-based differences, as the research focus was on institutional practices and professional norms rather than individual demographic characteristics.

The major role of this research was to answer the set of questions presented in the introduction. The study aimed to know:

- (1) How broadcast media professionals would comprehend the concept of inclusive education.
- (2) The media types and the manner in which the issue was presented.
- (3) The difficulties faced by the media when reporting on inclusive education.

The interview questions were constructed around the four main themes, linking the research questions directly to the data collection and also the analysis. Interviews were held face-to-face, each with a duration of 45–60 minutes, and the audio recording was done with the participants' consent. The five themes around which the interview protocol was organized were: (1) professional cognitive towards inclusive education; (2) representation of disability in media content; (3) editorial and ethical practices; (4) institutional capacity and training needs; (5) strategies for improving inclusive education coverage.

Some of the ethical issues that were taken into account were the rights of the participants to give their informed consent, the guarantee of anonymity, and the freedom to participate voluntarily. The trustworthiness of data was supported by member checking (participants verifying the correctness of the summaries of their responses) and cross-checking between different media outlets.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework, which enables the identification of recurring patterns as well as divergent perspectives across participants. The analysis prioritized institutional practices, professional norms, and media representations related to inclusive education.

Although participants included both male and female media professionals, gender was not treated as a primary analytical category. Instead, the analysis focused on thematic patterns across participants rather than comparative gender-based interpretations, in line with the study's research objectives.

3.1 Results

The results are shown through five thematic headings, which were the main points that the thematic analysis recognized: (1) Understanding of Inclusive Education; (2) Current Media Practices and Programming; (3) Challenges in Coverage; (4) Perceived Role of Media in Shaping Attitudes; and (5) Suggestions for Improvement. To give a better idea of the opinions shared and to show the points where there is both agreement and disagreement, direct quotes from participants have been incorporated. In addition, whenever it makes sense, the findings have been connected to the concepts of agenda-setting and framing, which are the theoretical grounds of this study.

Understanding of Inclusive Education among Broadcast Media Professionals

The term “inclusive education” was described by the participants from all three media outlets, SRTV, SHAKAAL TV, and Jigjiga FM, as a comprehensive concept. Most of them perceived it as the adoption of the educational system, besides disability, but also to the other forms of marginalization, such as poverty, gender inequity, and linguistic disadvantage.

“Inclusive education is the combination of different kinds of students, such as those with special needs, economically disadvantaged, and underprivileged, with others, so that they can completely exercise their basic rights in the same way as others.” (Interviewee 3, SRTV). While the majority of participants were very supportive of the concept, a few of them gave it their conditional acceptance and argued that a certain group of learners with severe needs might need a targeted intervention that can be done only side by side with mainstream integration.

“I agree with the idea, but for some children with very specific needs, separate support might be more suitable.” (Interviewee 6, SHAKAAL TV). The variation in how media professionals conceptualize inclusive education reflects a pattern identified in previous studies, where inclusion is broadly endorsed but unevenly understood in practice (Ainscow 2020; Slee 2019). From an agenda-setting perspective, this fragmented understanding may be linked to the limited and inconsistent visibility of inclusive education within mainstream media discourse, which constrains the development of shared professional norms. The findings suggest that without sustained editorial attention and institutional guidance, inclusive education remains a loosely defined concept rather than a clearly operationalized media priority.

Current Media Practices and Programming

Occasionally, all three media outlets somewhat mention inclusive education or related disability issues. However, none of them runs a program dedicated to the topic. Generally, the content of these issues is included in the broadcasts, such as social affairs, edutainment, or NGO-sponsored segments.

“Our educational or teaching-learning programs are almost non-existent. Sometimes we come up with stories that are related to the common educational needs of disabled people... We also do disabled people’s interviews, for instance, a disabled person who doesn’t use a wheelchair and goes to school, etc. After the interview, we broadcast a message to the government and NGOs” (Interviewee 6, SRTV).

In some instances, the material is converged with general news broadcasts as a Jigjiga FM reporter indicated:

“There is no specific program for inclusive education, but we often include such stories in our news coverage.” (Interviewee 9, Jigjiga FM).

The dependence on externally funded content highlights a structural limitation in editorial autonomy, a challenge commonly observed in media systems operating under financial and institutional constraints (Waisbord 2019). From a framing perspective, such dependence often results in charity-oriented narratives that emphasize vulnerability rather than rights, inadvertently reinforcing paternalistic representations of disability. The absence of internally initiated and sustained programming suggests that inclusive education has not yet achieved agenda salience within regional broadcast media.

Challenges in Media Coverage

Participants marked out three main kinds of difficulties: (a) Cultural and attitudinal barriers. Families of children with disabilities usually refuse media coverage because of stigma or fear of being laughed at. (b) Institutional and editorial constraints. The lack of policy guidance, limited funding, and low prioritization may lead to irregular coverage. (c) Professional capacity gaps; the Journalists’ survey showed that they lacked training in disability journalism and had little knowledge of the principles of inclusive education.

“We did not accomplish the making of such programs due to a number of reasons: the government was not ready to listen to the voice of society, lack of editorial policy, scarcity of resources, and lack of skills among

journalists" (Interviewee 4, SRTV). "Sometimes families believe that we benefit from their stories and expect something in return. This is why it is hard to give consent" (Interviewee 2, SHAKAAL TV). The obstacles not only limit how much coverage is done but also affect the way stories are presented, which is, to a great extent, the main reason why they depict, rather than challenge, stereotypes.

These intersecting cultural, institutional, and professional barriers indicate that limitations in inclusive education coverage are not merely individual but structurally embedded within media organizations. Similar restrictions have been documented in disability journalism research, which emphasizes that lack of training, editorial policy, and institutional support often leads to avoidance or superficial treatment of sensitive social issues (Johanssen and Garrisi 2020). From a framing standpoint, these challenges restrict journalists' capacity to disrupt dominant stereotypes, thereby reproducing exclusionary narratives.

Perceived Role of Media in Shaping Attitudes

Despite the problems, the participants did see that the media can change the general opinion about the integration of the disabled in the community.

"In the event of a school opening, we always produce 'come back to school' programs, which are addressed to all families. We not only encourage the sending of the children's disabled families, but despite a very low level of consciousness, we do that as well" (Interviewee 8, SHAKAAL TV)

Some journalists have mentioned that media visibility, in some cases, has led to visible changes, that is, instances in which, after a media report on a certain situation, a wheelchair is donated to a young person, or a poor child receives the money necessary for their education. But these occurrences are still far and few between. Their individuality from the point of view of agenda-setting determines that they do not collectively influence the agenda either of policy or of the public.

The positive representation from the framing point of view would be possibly negated due to these being only a few, and the absence of continuous empowering narratives. While participants identified isolated instances of positive social response following media exposure, the limited frequency of such coverage reduces its cumulative agenda-setting effect. Agenda setting suggests that irregular reporting is insufficient to elevate issues into sustained public or policy concern (McCombs 2018). Consequently, although individual

stories may generate short-term reactions, the absence of consistent and rights-based framing constrains the media's capacity to influence long-term attitudes toward inclusive education.

Suggestions for Improvement from Practitioners

The participants suggested a variety of measures that could likely improve the media engagement with inclusive education:

1. **Dedicated programming:** Creating regular segments with a focus on the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities.
2. **Training:** Offering specific workshops for journalists on the areas of disability reporting, the use of inclusive language, and human rights concepts.
3. **Partnerships:** Teaming up with education officials, the disabled community advocacy groups, and NGOs to get reliable information and interesting stories.
4. **Community engagement:** Implementing awareness programs.

"We need the training, the guidelines, and more collaboration with organizations that are working on disability. Without that, our coverage will still be limited and not consistent" (Interviewee 5, Jigjiga FM).

The recommendations proposed by media professionals align closely with international research emphasizing the role of targeted training, editorial commitment, and cross-sector collaboration in improving media coverage of disability and inclusion (Blackett et al. 2021). These insights highlight the necessity of shifting from episodic reporting toward sustained, rights-based media engagement, which agenda-setting and framing theories identify as critical for long-term social change.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined how Ethiopian broadcast media professionals understand and practice inclusive education, with particular attention to agenda-setting and framing processes. The findings extend existing research on media and inclusion by demonstrating that, while inclusive education is broadly supported in principle, it remains inconsistently defined and marginal within routine media practice. This pattern aligns with international studies showing that inclusion-related

issues often struggle to achieve sustained visibility in mainstream media, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Ainscow, 2020; Slee, 2019; Johanssen & Garrisi, 2020).

From an agenda-setting perspective, the limited and irregular coverage of inclusive education suggests that the issue has not attained sufficient salience within Ethiopian broadcast media. This theory emphasizes that sustained and prominent coverage is necessary for issues to become socially and politically prioritized (McCombs, 2018). The findings indicate that inclusive education is often addressed reactively, typically in response to external funding or advocacy, rather than proactively through editorial planning. This contributes to fragmented public awareness and limits the potential for media to influence long-term educational discourse and policy engagement.

Framing theory further illuminates how inclusive education is represented within broadcast media narratives. The findings suggest a predominance of charity-oriented and episodic frames, which emphasize vulnerability rather than rights or systematic responsibility. This framing approach mirrors patterns identified in prior studies on disability representation, where media coverage often reinforces paternalistic narratives instead of challenging structural exclusion (Blackett et al. 2021; Adugna et al., 2024). Such framing may inadvertently sustain stigma and limit public understanding of inclusive education as a right-based and institutional obligation.

In addition, this study also contributes context-specific insights into the Ethiopian and Somali Regional State media environment, where linguistic diversity, cultural norms, and resource limitations shape editorial practices. In regions where broadcast media serve as the primary source of information, particularly for marginalized populations, inconsistent framing of inclusive education has amplified implications. These findings highlight the need for institutional media policies and professional training that are sensitive to

regional realities while aligned with inclusive education principles.

The findings carry important implications for media institutions, policymakers, and development partners. Strengthening the media's role in promoting inclusive education requires moving beyond ad hoc coverage toward sustained, rights-based programming supported by editorial commitment and professional capacity building. Consistent with prior research, targeted training on disability-sensitive reporting and institutionalisation of inclusive education into media agendas are critical for enhancing both coverage quality and societal impact (Waisbord, 2019).

While the study includes a gender-balanced sample, it did not aim to explore gender-specific differences in media practice, which may be a valuable focus for future research. In addition, the study provides valuable quality insights; however, it is limited by its focus on a specific regional media context and a relatively small sample of broadcast professionals. Future research could extend this analysis through comparative studies across regions or by incorporating audience perspectives to assess the reception and impact of inclusive education media coverage.

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Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by Elyas Abdi ISMAIL, Prof. Selma Koç Akgül, Seid Abdi Ismail, and Abdikadir Mohamed Abdile. The first draft of the manuscript was written by ISMAIL, and all other authors commented on the versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Staging the Museum: Script Intersections and Heritage Communication in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Museums are often understood as places where cultures are displayed and interpreted. Yet few institutions bring questions of history, power, memory, and affect into such close proximity as museums do. This article examines the British Museum as a site where these interactions become particularly visible. Drawing on a corpus of 186 Chinese-language Xiaohongshu posts, reflexive field observations from four museum visits, and selected institutional and policy materials, the study explores how museum artifacts are interpreted through multiple narrative frames. The analysis introduces the concept of script intersections to describe moments when different interpretive frames converge around a single artifact, display, or digital image. Rather than producing a single interpretation, these scripts often coexist and compete, shaping how questions of legitimacy, responsibility, and belonging are negotiated. Methodologically, the findings are presented through academic theatre. A three-act script stages composite voices representing artifacts, curators, visitors, policymakers, donors, and digital publics. By foregrounding script intersections and the role of digital publics, the article contributes to a more relational understanding of how heritage meanings are produced and contested.

Keywords: *intercultural communication; museums; script intersections; digital publics; heritage communication; Xiaohongshu*

1. INTRODUCTION

Why the museum? In intercultural communication research, museums are often discussed as places people visit rather than as communicative environments in their own right. Yet few institutions concentrate on questions of history, power, memory, and affect as intensely as museums do. Within a single gallery space, visitors encounter objects whose meanings have been shaped by colonial histories, institutional authority, public interpretation, and personal memory. The British Museum, with its global visibility and complex legal context, offers a particularly revealing example. It functions as a site where meanings are produced through interactions among visitors, curators, donors, policymakers, and the material presence of objects themselves (Bennett, 2013; Macdonald, 2010; Hicks, 2020).

This article approaches such encounters through the idea of a planetary relational field. Here, planetisation refers to a shift in intercultural communication analysis that moves beyond interactions between human groups

to consider broader relational networks involving objects, digital platforms, institutional governance, and ecological histories. Rather than focusing only on dialogue between cultural communities, a planetary perspective draws attention to the ways communication unfolds through entanglements between human actors and material infrastructures. Work in environmental humanities and post-humanist scholarship has increasingly emphasized how objects, materials, and ecological processes participate in shaping human meaning-making (Chakrabarty, 2021; Haraway, 2020; Heise, 2008; Nixon, 2011). From this perspective, a museum artifact is not only a cultural symbol but also a material object embedded in histories of extraction, labor, circulation, and digital representation.

To examine how these meanings emerge in practice, the article introduces the concept of script intersections. In this study, scripts refer to recurring interpretive frames through which museum artifacts are understood and evaluated. These may include scientific preservation,

ancestral dignity, restitution justice, ecological responsibility, philanthropic legitimacy, and consumer spectacle. Such frames rarely appear in isolation. More often, they intersect within particular encounters, for example, when a visitor simultaneously admires conservation expertise while questioning colonial acquisition histories. Script intersections, therefore, describe moments when several interpretive frames converge around a single artifact, exhibition display, or digital image, producing tensions that shape how legitimacy and responsibility are negotiated in museum spaces.

The legal context of the British Museum also plays an important role in structuring these debates. The British Museum Act 1963 restricts the museum's ability to permanently remove most objects from its collection, limiting deaccessioning to a small number of exceptional circumstances. At the same time, the Human Tissue Act 2004 and guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport establish procedures governing the ethical treatment and possible repatriation of human remains. These legal frameworks influence what institutional actors can publicly say or do in response to restitution debates. In this sense, policy operates not merely as background context but as part of the communicative environment that shapes how institutional authority is articulated.

Digital mediation adds another layer to these dynamics. On platforms such as Xiaohongshu, users photograph, caption, and reinterpret museum objects through short videos, travel notes, and commentary posts. For this study, a purposive dataset of 186 Chinese-language Xiaohongshu posts referencing the British Museum was compiled between 2023 and 2025. Posts were identified through keyword searches including 大英博物馆 (British Museum), 国宝 (national treasure), 回家 (return home), 归还 (restitution or return), 殖民 (colonialism), 修复 (restoration), and 保护 (preservation). The sample captures a range of formats and narrative styles, including travel notes, explanatory posts, and reflections on restitution debates. Comment threads and repost chains were also examined in order to trace how particular interpretive tropes circulated across the platform. These materials show how digital publics actively reinterpret museum artifacts through recurring narratives such as national treasure, cultural homecoming, and conservation as care. To analyze these intersecting discourses, the study adopts academic theatre as a creative analytic method. Rather than presenting findings solely through conventional thematic analysis, the article stages composite characters representing objects, institutional actors, and digital publics. This performative format allows multiple interpretive positions to appear simultaneously without

forcing their tensions into a single analytical voice. The theatrical script, therefore, functions as an analytic device rather than a literary embellishment, making it possible to retain the polyphony that characterizes museum encounters.

Empirically, the analysis combines digital discourse with reflexive field observation. Field visits to the British Museum were conducted during four visits between 2023 and 2025, during which spatial arrangements, visitor behavior, exhibition texts, and gallery atmospheres were documented through field notes. Reading these observations alongside digital materials makes it possible to trace how interpretive scripts circulate between institutional spaces and online platforms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural communication scholarship has traditionally focused on interaction between people with different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Research in the field has therefore tended to emphasize dialogue, adaptation, and identity negotiation in interpersonal or institutional encounters (Gudykunst, 2005; Kim, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2017). Within this perspective, museums have often appeared mainly as sites of cultural representation or education rather than as communicative environments in their own right. Yet museums concentrate many of the very issues that concern intercultural communication: asymmetrical histories, contested legitimacy, affective responses, material infrastructures, and the coexistence of competing interpretive frameworks (Bennett, 2013; Macdonald, 2010; Hicks, 2020).

Over the past three decades, a more relational and process-oriented perspective has gradually reshaped intercultural communication research. Rather than treating cultures as bounded entities that encounter one another and then exchange or clash, scholars increasingly understand interculturality as an ongoing practice shaped by power relations, historical conditions, and mobility (Dervin, 2016; Holmes, 2017). This shift also resonates with work in anthropology and material culture that examines the social life of objects and the ways meanings circulate across different regimes of value (Appadurai, 2012; Miller et al., 2005). From this perspective, museum encounters can be understood as moments where visitors, artifacts, institutional narratives, and broader social imaginaries intersect. A single artifact may simultaneously appear as an archaeological specimen, a looted object, a diasporic symbol, a tourist attraction, or a material trace of planetary histories, depending on the interpretive frames activated in a particular encounter.

Alongside this relational turn, scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the roles of materiality and affect. Approaches that focus primarily on verbal dialogue struggle to explain why museum objects often provoke strong emotional responses such as pride, anger, nostalgia, or unease. The affective turn reconceptualizes emotions as circulating forces that move between bodies, objects, and spaces, attaching themselves to particular signs and shaping perception and interpretation (Ahmed, 2013). In museum contexts, the communicative force of an artifact therefore arises not only from textual interpretation but also from its material presence, its display conditions, and the historical narratives that surround it (Nakayama & Halualani, 2010; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). Work in environmental humanities further extends this perspective by emphasizing the entanglements between humans and nonhuman worlds and the ecological responsibilities that increasingly shape cultural debates (Heise, 2008; Nixon, 2011; Haraway, 2020; Chakrabarty, 2021).

Museums are also sites where colonial histories and institutional authority remain active conditions of communication. Research in critical heritage and museum studies has shown how collecting practices and exhibition narratives are historically entangled with imperial expansion and the extraction of cultural materials (Bennett, 2013; Byrne et al., 2011; Macdonald, 2010; Hicks, 2020). Intercultural encounters in museums are therefore structured by asymmetries of power that complicate narratives of dialogue or cultural exchange. In Chinese-language public discourse, for example, the British Museum is often framed as a site where memories of colonial extraction remain unresolved. References to the Opium Wars or the looting of the Old Summer Palace frequently appear in digital discussions of museum artifacts. In the present study, such discursive framings were identified primarily through the analysis of Xiaohongshu posts and related online commentary concerning the British Museum.

Digital mediation adds another layer to these dynamics. Platform publics increasingly participate in circulating and reinterpreting heritage narratives. Research on Chinese social media suggests that platform-specific communication formats encourage users to combine personal narrative, cultural commentary, and visual documentation when discussing museums and heritage sites. On Xiaohongshu, recurring tropes such as 'national treasures wanting to return home' often coexist with expressions of admiration for conservation practices and museum expertise. These digital practices illustrate how museum discourse is co-produced across institutional and platform contexts, forming participatory

archives that can reinforce, reinterpret, or contest official narratives.

The British legal framework adds a further dimension to these debates. The British Museum Act 1963 places significant restrictions on the museum's ability to permanently remove objects from its collection, allowing deaccessioning only under limited circumstances. Additional guidance from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, together with the Human Tissue Act 2004, establishes procedures governing the treatment and potential repatriation of human remains. These legal constraints influence how museums respond to restitution claims and how questions of responsibility and authority are communicated in public discourse.

Against this background, the present study develops two analytical concepts that help explain how meanings are negotiated in museum encounters. The first is planetisation. This concept refers to a shift in intercultural communication analysis that moves beyond interactions between human actors to include wider relational networks involving objects, digital platforms, institutional structures, and ecological histories. From this perspective, museum communication is not limited to dialogue between cultural groups but emerges through entanglements between human actors, material infrastructures, and broader planetary conditions.

The second concept is script intersections. In this study, scripts refer to relatively stable interpretive frames through which museum artifacts, displays, or institutional decisions are understood. Examples include scientific preservation, restitution justice, ecological responsibility, philanthropic legitimacy, and consumer spectacle. These interpretive frames rarely appear independently. Instead, they often converge within particular encounters, where multiple narratives shape how objects are interpreted and evaluated. Script intersections, therefore, describe moments when several interpretive frames operate simultaneously, producing tensions that influence how legitimacy, responsibility, and belonging are negotiated in museum spaces.

Taken together, these concepts reposition the museum not simply as a repository of cultural objects but as a communicative arena where historical memory, institutional authority, digital participation, and material presence intersect. By examining how these dimensions interact in museum encounters, the present study seeks to extend intercultural communication research toward a more relational and materially grounded understanding of cultural interaction.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses academic theatre as a creative analytic approach to explore how intercultural meanings emerge in museum spaces. The article is organized as a three-act script in which artifacts, human remains, curators, visitors, donors, officials, and digital publics appear as characters. These characters are not intended to represent specific individuals. Rather, they function as composite voices that bring together recurring interpretive positions identified across the data. In other words, the theatrical form is used as a way of presenting analysis rather than as a literary device. A trace matrix linking the characters to clusters of data sources is provided in the appendix to make this process transparent.

The analysis draws on four types of material. First, a small institutional corpus related to the British Museum was compiled. This included six documents, such as exhibition labels, gallery guides, sections of the museum website, institutional statements, and public explanations concerning restitution, conservation, and the display of human remains. These texts were selected because they articulate how the museum presents its authority, stewardship responsibilities, and approach to contested objects. Second, relevant legal and policy documents were examined in order to understand the governance framework surrounding these debates. These included the British Museum Act 1963, the Human Tissue Act 2004, and guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the care and possible repatriation of human remains. Rather than treating these texts as background context, the study approaches them as part of the communicative environment that shapes what institutions can publicly say or do in response to restitution claims.

Third, the study analyzed a purposive corpus of Chinese-language Xiaohongshu posts referencing the British Museum. In total, 186 publicly accessible posts published between 2023 and 2025 were collected. Posts were identified through repeated keyword searches, including 大英博物馆 (British Museum), 国宝 (national treasure), 回家 (return home), 归还 (restitution or return), 殖民 (colonialism), 修复 (restoration), and 保护 (preservation). The aim was not to produce a statistically representative dataset but to capture a range of ways in which museum objects are discussed on the platform. The sample, therefore, includes different formats such as photo-text travel notes, short video posts, educational commentary, humorous remixes, and reflections on restitution debates. Comment threads and repost chains were examined when they contributed to the circulation of particular

interpretive narratives. Posts that contained only travel advertisements or minimal reference to the museum were excluded. Fourth, reflexive field observations were conducted during four visits to the British Museum between 2023 and 2025. During these visits, field notes were taken on exhibition design, label language, visitor movement, photographing practices, overheard remarks, and the overall atmosphere of particular galleries. The intention was not to conduct a formal ethnography but to document how visitors encountered objects in situ and how different interpretive cues appeared within the physical exhibition space.

Data analysis followed an abductive coding process, moving back and forth between empirical materials and conceptual interpretation. Initial open coding focused on identifying recurring ways in which objects were interpreted or evaluated across the different datasets. These included references to preservation, justice, dignity, national belonging, ecological cost, institutional trust, and tourist spectacle. In a second stage, these recurring patterns were grouped into broader interpretive scripts. In this study, a script refers to a relatively stable interpretive frame through which museum artifacts, displays, or institutional decisions are understood. Examples include scientific preservation, ancestral dignity, restitution justice, ecological responsibility, philanthropic legitimacy, institutional governance, and consumer spectacle. The analysis then examined moments when more than one script appeared in the same post, observation, or institutional text. These instances were treated as script intersections. Where several scripts appeared together, one was identified as the primary script shaping the overall interpretation, while others were noted as secondary frames that complicated or modified it.

Transforming coded material into theatrical form involved an additional analytic step. First, clusters of coded segments representing similar interpretive positions were grouped together to form composite characters such as the Curator, the Visitor, the Government Official, or the Public Sphere. Second, lines of dialogue were drafted through paraphrased condensation of these patterns rather than through verbatim quotation. Individual lines, therefore, synthesize recurring arguments, emotions, or rhetorical logics that appeared across multiple sources. Third, stage directions were informed by field notes in order to retain spatial and sensory aspects of the museum environment. Finally, scenes were organized so that different scripts could appear alongside one another, allowing tensions between interpretive positions to remain visible rather than being resolved into a single analytical voice. The use of theatrical representation draws on traditions of performance ethnography

and ethnodrama, which treat staged dialogue as a legitimate form of qualitative analysis when it remains grounded in empirical material. In this study, the aim is not to recreate actual conversations but to present the interpretive patterns that recur across institutional discourse, digital platforms, and visitor encounters.

Because the study relies partly on social media material, several ethical considerations were taken into account. Only publicly accessible Xiaohongshu posts were included, and the analysis focuses on narrative patterns rather than on individual users. No attempt was made to identify or contact content creators. The characters that appear in the theatrical script, therefore, represent collective discursive tendencies rather than identifiable persons. Several limitations should also be acknowledged. Platform visibility is shaped by recommendation algorithms, meaning that the Xiaohongshu corpus cannot be treated as a comprehensive record of public discourse. In addition, reflexive field observations inevitably reflect the researcher's own positionality and selective attention. For this reason, observations were interpreted alongside institutional and digital materials rather than treated as independent evidence. Finally, the condensation of diverse perspectives into composite characters necessarily simplifies some geopolitical and historical differences between actors involved in restitution debates. To strengthen the credibility of the analysis, the study triangulates across institutional discourse, policy frameworks, digital platform materials, and field observations. Coding decisions were documented through analytic memos and iterative revisions to the coding frame. The appendices summarise how characters were constructed and how different platform narratives were categorized, allowing readers to trace the relationship between the data and the theatrical representation presented in the findings.

4. FINDINGS: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

The findings are presented through academic theatre. Museums are not simply places where objects are displayed; they are environments in which different actors, institutions, and histories come into contact. In such settings, meanings rarely appear as single, stable interpretations. Instead, they emerge through overlapping interpretive scripts that frame how objects are seen, valued, and discussed. Conventional analytic prose can sometimes smooth over these tensions by presenting interpretations in a linear argument. The theatrical format used here offers another possibility. By staging different voices side by side, it becomes

possible to show how multiple interpretive positions coexist within museum encounters. The aim is not to dramatize the material for its own sake, but to preserve the coexistence of perspectives that appeared across the empirical materials.

The characters in the script are composite analytic voices rather than fictional individuals. They condense recurring interpretive positions identified across institutional texts, legal and policy documents, digital platform posts, and field observations. Dialogue lines reflect patterns that appeared repeatedly in these materials, while stage directions draw on observational notes taken during visits to the museum. Presenting the analysis in this form allows the study to keep different interpretive scripts visible at the same time. Rather than resolving these tensions into a single analytical voice, the play format makes it possible to show how questions of legitimacy, responsibility, and historical meaning continue to be negotiated in museum spaces.

The three acts that follow illustrate different layers of script intersections within the museum environment. Act I focuses on artifacts and visitor encounters, where objects become sites of competing interpretations. Act II stages institutional, political, and ecological claims that shape debates about ownership and restitution. Act III turns to possible futures, exploring how these scripts continue to circulate and evolve through digital publics and ongoing debates about responsibility and belonging.

4.1 Act I: Objects speak

A dim gallery. A bronze ritual vessel stands in a central display case. A linen-wrapped mummy lies in a nearby case. A visitor enters holding a leaflet and a phone.

Bronze Vessel

I was cast more than three thousand years ago. Copper and tin shaped in fire, handled by people whose names are no longer known. Today I stand here as an object of heritage. Some visitors see craftsmanship. Others see something taken long ago. In the gallery label, I am evidence of civilization. In other conversations, I appear as something that should return home.

Mummy

Do not call me 'it'. I was once a person. I had a name, a family, a place in the world. Here I am arranged as an object of study and display. Visitors look with curiosity, sometimes with discomfort. Preservation and disturbance sit close together. Some see scientific

knowledge. Others speak about dignity and the treatment of the dead. When you look at me, which of these meanings do you hear?

Visitor

I came to see the museum, to understand what it holds. The label explains the history of the object. My phone shows another set of stories. On social media, people say these objects should go home. Others admire how carefully they are preserved. I take a photograph almost automatically. When I share it, which story travels with the image?

The visitor types a caption. Above the gallery, a projection briefly shows phrases that circulate on Xiaohongshu before fading again.

Narrator

What appears here is not a single interpretation but a set of overlapping scripts. Objects do not carry one stable meaning. Instead, meaning emerges through encounters between objects, visitors, institutional narratives, and circulating public discussions. The same vessel can be seen as archaeological evidence, cultural heritage, colonial acquisition, or national treasure, depending on the interpretive frame through which it is viewed.

Across the Xiaohongshu dataset analyzed in this study, certain expressions appeared repeatedly. Phrases such as 国宝想回家 (national treasures want to return home) and 走出大英博物馆笑不出来 (leaving the British Museum without a smile) circulated widely in posts discussing the museum. These expressions do not simply describe objects; they frame how visitors interpret them before and after entering the gallery.

In this sense, museum encounters rarely unfold as a straightforward dialogue between cultures. Instead, they involve multiple interpretive scripts that coexist, overlap, and sometimes contradict one another. Each script offers a partial way of understanding the object, but none fully resolves the tensions that surround it.

Curtain.

4.2 Act II: Voices clash

The gallery space widens. Downlights isolate several figures: a Curator standing beside an exhibition panel, a Government Official at a lectern, a Donor near a wall listing major gifts, and an Environmental Advocate holding a small placard. The Bronze Vessel,

the Mummy, and the Visitor remain. A faint murmur of overlapping speech fills the room.

Curator

We work with objects that carry long and complicated histories. Our responsibility is to care for them and to make them accessible to the public. Conservation, research, and education guide our decisions. The past cannot be undone, but museums can preserve what remains and make it available for future generations.

Government Official

But preservation is not the only question. Many of these artifacts left their places of origin under unequal conditions. They carry histories of colonial extraction. For the communities from which they came, these objects are not simply heritage items. They are part of cultural memory and national dignity. Restitution is therefore not a symbolic gesture. It is a question of historical justice.

Donor

Museums also rely on forms of support that allow them to function. Philanthropy funds conservation, research, and public access. Many museums would struggle to maintain collections without this support. A donation does not rewrite history, but it does make it possible to care for objects and to keep museums open to the public.

Environmental Advocate

And yet another history sits behind these objects. Bronze requires mining and smelting. Taxidermy reflects histories of extraction from ecosystems. Materials, labor, and landscapes all lie behind what we see in the gallery. If museums display objects without acknowledging these ecological histories, they risk telling only part of the story.

Collector, 1840s

In our time, we traveled under imperial authority. Expeditions, trade routes, and diplomatic agreements made it possible to collect objects from across the world. We believed we were rescuing knowledge and preserving artifacts that might otherwise have been lost. We cataloged, shipped, and displayed them as contributions to learning and civilization.

Narrator

The Government Official in this scene does not

represent a single country. Instead, the role condenses arguments that appear across different restitution debates, including claims made by countries such as Nigeria, Greece, and China. Similarly, the Collector voice reflects justifications commonly found in nineteenth-century collecting discourse rather than the position of a specific historical individual.

What emerges here is a clear example of script intersection. Claims about restitution justice, institutional stewardship, philanthropic support, ecological responsibility, and historical justification appear at the same time. None of these scripts disappears when another enters the conversation. Instead, they overlap and compete, shaping how legitimacy and responsibility are discussed in museum contexts.

Law also forms part of this communicative environment. The British Museum Act 1963 restricts the museum's ability to permanently remove most objects from its collection, while the Human Tissue Act 2004 provides specific legal frameworks governing the treatment and potential repatriation of human remains. These legal structures do not settle the debates, but they influence how institutions respond to them.

At the same time, practices continue to evolve. In recent years, several institutions have returned Benin objects, including the University of Aberdeen, Jesus College, Cambridge, and the Horniman Museum. Digital initiatives such as Digital Benin have also made the dispersal of these objects visible across institutions worldwide. In this sense, museum legitimacy is not fixed. It is negotiated continuously across legal frameworks, institutional policies, and public debate.

Mummy

Am I an object or a person? How many different meanings can a body carry?

Visitor

I hear all of these voices. Justice, preservation, generosity, responsibility. Each one makes sense in its own way. But none of them seems to end the argument.

Curtain.

4.3 Act III: Negotiating futures

The gallery space shifts. The display cases remain, but a round table now stands in the center. The lighting softens. Above the room, silent headlines cycle slowly: Calls for restitution. New philanthropic gift. Decolonizing displays. Climate emergency. Platform publics react.

Curator

We cannot undo the past, but museums can change how it is presented. Exhibitions can acknowledge extraction, displacement, and repair alongside narratives of civilization. The question is whether institutions can hold accountability and wonder in the same space.

Government Official

Return restores dignity. Where immediate return is not possible, the history of these objects must still be told honestly. Shared stewardship may be possible in some cases, but only if it is based on equity rather than continued possession.

Donor

Support from philanthropy can also play a role in these futures. Donations already sustain conservation, research, and public access. Perhaps they could also support new forms of collaboration or return. Generosity does not erase history, but it may help create different possibilities.

Environmental Advocate

Another voice belongs to the planet itself. Every object here is also material: copper, clay, linen, bone. Behind each artifact are landscapes, labor, and ecological histories. If visitors see these connections, admiration may turn into responsibility.

Public Sphere, 2020s

Much of this conversation now happens online. On our phones, the museum appears in fragments: short videos, captions, stitched images. Some posts say that national treasures should go home. Others admire conservation work, the polish of lacquer, the repair of cracks, and the skill of restoration. Old engravings appear beside new photographs. Jokes circulate, including the line that visitors from China leave the British Museum without smiling. In this digital space, people respond, argue, remember, and reinterpret what they see.

Narrator

The Public Sphere character represents recurring narrative patterns observed across the Xiaohongshu dataset analyzed in this study. Rather than reflecting a single user, it condenses broader tendencies in how museum objects are discussed, circulated, and reframed on the platform.

These online discussions do not replace institutional narratives, but they sit alongside them and sometimes

challenge them. Platform features such as reposting, captioning, and comment threads allow particular interpretations to travel quickly and gain visibility. In this way, digital publics participate in shaping how museum objects are understood.

Negotiation in this environment rarely produces consensus. Instead, different interpretive scripts continue to coexist. Claims about restitution, conservation, ecological responsibility, and institutional legitimacy intersect without fully resolving one another. In this sense, the museum appears less as a repository of stable meanings and more as a forum in which questions of belonging, responsibility, and historical interpretation remain open.

The theatrical form used in this study makes these overlapping positions visible. By placing different voices within the same scene, the analysis preserves the coexistence of perspectives that emerged across the empirical materials.

Bronze Vessel

People see many things in me. Craft, history, loss, heritage. The meaning of the object changes with the story that surrounds it.

Mummy

Care can preserve a body, but it also raises questions about dignity. To display a person is always to decide how they should be remembered.

Visitor

Perhaps I am not only observing. What I photograph, share, or question becomes part of the story as well.

Curtain.

5. DISCUSSION

This study has examined the British Museum as a communicative environment in which human and nonhuman actors, colonial histories, institutional governance, and digital circulations intersect. The theatrical scenes presented in the findings suggest that what is often described as cultural difference in museum encounters may be better understood as the interaction of overlapping interpretive scripts. These scripts redistribute authority, affect, and belonging across different actors and institutions. Rather than leading to a single interpretive resolution, they tend to coexist and compete. In this sense, the theatrical format functions not only as a way of presenting findings but also as part

of the analytical argument: intercultural communication in heritage spaces emerges through entanglements among people, objects, institutions, digital platforms, and wider historical conditions that shape how meaning becomes visible and legitimate (Chakrabarty, 2021; Haraway, 2020).

Classical frameworks in intercultural communication have often conceptualized encounters as exchanges between culturally bounded interlocutors. Models such as cross-cultural adaptation, anxiety and uncertainty management, and face negotiation theory typically assume relatively stable participants who negotiate meaning through communicative competence (Kim, 2000; Gudykunst, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2017). The museum scenes analyzed here complicate this assumption. Visitors do not simply interpret objects through cultural codes alone. Instead, they encounter a range of interpretive warrants, including scientific preservation, ancestral dignity, restitution justice, ecological responsibility, philanthropic legitimacy, and tourist spectacle. These interpretive frames are activated not only through interpersonal interaction but also through objects themselves, exhibition design, institutional policies, and digital narratives circulating beyond the museum walls.

Seen from this perspective, intercultural communication in museum contexts unfolds within a dense relational environment where meaning emerges through interactions between material and symbolic infrastructures. A visitor may admire conservation work while simultaneously questioning colonial acquisition histories. A photograph taken in the gallery may quickly circulate online, where different narratives reshape how the object is interpreted. Meaning therefore develops across networks of people, artifacts, images, policies, and platforms rather than within a single moment of encounter. A planetisation perspective draws attention to these wider relational dynamics, shifting analysis away from purely interpersonal adjustment toward the material, institutional, and ecological entanglements that shape communication in heritage spaces (Heise, 2008; Nixon, 2011; Chakrabarty, 2021).

Affect also plays an important role in these dynamics. Emotions such as pride, grievance, admiration, and discomfort circulate across objects, narratives, and digital platforms, shaping how visitors interpret museum displays. Ahmed's concept of affective economies helps explain how emotions attach themselves to particular historical narratives and symbolic objects, guiding perception even before conscious interpretation occurs (Ahmed, 2013). In museum environments, affective responses often arise from the convergence of institutional framing, personal memory,

and circulating media narratives. Digital discourse on Chinese platforms, for example, frequently combines admiration for conservation practices with emotional claims about cultural loss or historical injustice. These affective frames accompany visitors into the gallery and influence how museum encounters are experienced and shared.

The theatrical scenes also reveal how institutional governance structures shape intercultural interpretation. Exhibition labels that foreground conservation, provenance, and educational value while offering limited discussion of colonial acquisition histories illustrate how institutional scripts of stewardship become materially embedded in gallery spaces. Legal frameworks such as the British Museum Act 1963 and policies governing the treatment of human remains place constraints on how museums respond to restitution debates. These regulations shape institutional discourse by defining what actions are legally possible and how narratives of preservation, stewardship, or restitution may be articulated. As a result, legal and policy regimes operate not simply as background conditions but as communicative infrastructures that frame institutional legitimacy and structure public debate.

Digital platforms further complicate this communicative environment. On Xiaohongshu, museum artifacts circulate through images, captions, and commentary that transform institutional displays into participatory narratives. Users combine historical commentary, emotional reflection, humor, and visual storytelling to reinterpret heritage objects. Tropes such as 'national treasures wanting to go home' often appear alongside admiration for conservation craftsmanship, creating hybrid narratives that both challenge and reinforce institutional authority. In this sense, digital publics participate actively in shaping how museum objects are understood. Their contributions extend intercultural communication beyond the physical gallery into networked spaces where heritage narratives are continually reinterpreted.

The theatrical methodology adopted in this study helps make these intersecting dynamics visible. By staging composite voices representing institutional actors, historical perspectives, visitors, and digital publics, the analysis preserves the simultaneity of competing claims that characterize museum encounters. Rather than reducing complexity to a single analytical voice, the theatrical format highlights how multiple interpretive scripts coexist and interact. This approach resonates with traditions of performance ethnography and ethnodrama that seek to capture the polyphonic character of social discourse (Conquergood, 2002; Denzin, 2003; Saldaña, 2005; Madison, 2011). In the

context of museum communication, such methods make it possible to represent tensions between conservation, restitution, national identity, ecological responsibility, and public interpretation without prematurely resolving them.

These observations suggest that intercultural competence in heritage environments may involve more than the ability to interpret cultural difference. Instead, it may require the capacity to recognize and navigate layered histories, institutional constraints, material entanglements, and affective narratives that shape interpretive possibilities. Visitors encountering contested artifacts are therefore not simply comparing cultures but participating in ongoing negotiations about legitimacy, responsibility, and historical memory. Intercultural communication in such contexts becomes an ethical practice of acknowledging asymmetries and historical accountability while remaining open to multiple perspectives.

The study also offers several practical implications for museum professionals and educators. First, museum interpretation may benefit from acknowledging the coexistence of multiple interpretive scripts rather than presenting singular narratives of heritage. Exhibitions that address contested histories explicitly may encourage more reflective forms of visitor engagement. Second, restitution debates can be understood not only as legal or diplomatic processes but also as communicative negotiations shaped by affect, public discourse, and institutional legitimacy. Third, museum-based intercultural education may need to move beyond models of cultural comparison toward approaches that foreground historical power relations, material histories, and ecological responsibility.

Importantly, the arguments developed here do not suggest that the British Museum represents all intercultural encounters globally. Rather, the case illustrates how contemporary heritage institutions increasingly operate within relational networks shaped by colonial histories, environmental awareness, and digitally mediated publics. The concept of planetary interculturality should therefore be understood as an analytic horizon rather than a universal model. It invites further research into how communication emerges through interactions among humans, objects, institutions, technologies, and planetary histories.

Taken together, the findings reposition the museum not merely as a repository of artifacts but as a communicative forum in which legitimacy, belonging, and responsibility are continually negotiated. Intercultural communication in such spaces is less about achieving consensus than about recognizing the coexistence of competing claims and histories. By foregrounding script intersections

and planetary entanglements, this study contributes to extending intercultural communication scholarship beyond interpersonal dialogue toward a broader understanding of how meaning is produced within complex material and institutional environments.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has explored the museum as a communicative environment in which objects, visitors, institutions, policies, and digital publics interact to shape contested meanings. Through the concept of script intersections, the analysis has shown how different interpretive warrants – including scientific preservation, ancestral dignity, restitution justice, ecological responsibility, philanthropic legitimacy, and consumer spectacle – can appear together within museum encounters. Rather than leading to stable interpretations, these scripts often overlap and compete, shaping how legitimacy, responsibility, and belonging are negotiated in heritage spaces. Such intersections became visible, for example, in debates around the mummy's personhood, donor narratives of global access, digital tropes of 'national treasure' homecoming, and institutional explanations concerning restitution and human remains.

Presenting the findings through academic theatre also illustrates how creative analytic approaches can capture the simultaneity of these competing claims. The theatrical format allows multiple voices to appear alongside one another without forcing their tensions into a single interpretive frame. In this sense, theatricalization functions not merely as a narrative style but as a methodological device that makes it possible to hold empirical material, affective responses, and analytical interpretation together.

The study therefore contributes in three main ways. First, it proposes planetisation as a conceptual horizon that expands intercultural communication beyond interactions between human actors to include the entanglements of objects, institutions, digital platforms, and planetary histories. Second, it develops the notion of script intersections as an analytic framework for examining how competing interpretive

narratives organize attention, circulate affect, and shape legitimacy in heritage encounters. Third, it demonstrates how academic theatre can operate as a qualitative research method capable of representing complex communicative environments while retaining multiple perspectives.

These observations also suggest implications for museum practice and intercultural education. Museums increasingly operate in contexts shaped by restitution debates, digital publics, and heightened awareness of historical and ecological responsibility. Acknowledging the coexistence of multiple interpretive scripts may help institutions design exhibitions and public narratives that address historical complexity rather than presenting singular accounts of heritage. Similarly, intercultural education in museum contexts may benefit from approaches that foreground historical asymmetries, material entanglements, and ethical accountability alongside cultural appreciation. At the same time, the analysis emerges from a particular institutional and cultural context. The British Museum provides a highly visible example of how planetary histories, colonial legacies, and digital discourse intersect, but similar dynamics may unfold differently across other museums and cultural settings. Future research could therefore apply this framework to other heritage institutions, digital platforms, and cross-cultural contexts in order to examine how script intersections and planetary perspectives shape museum communication in diverse environments.

Framing the museum in this way encourages a shift in intercultural communication research. Rather than focusing primarily on interpersonal dialogue, attention turns toward the wider relational networks through which meaning is produced. Museums can thus be understood not only as repositories of objects but as arenas where historical memory, institutional authority, public discourse, and planetary awareness converge. Intercultural communication, in this broader sense, becomes concerned with how these entangled presences interact and how cultural institutions might curate not only wonder but also responsibility in a time of ecological strain and historical reckoning (Chakrabarty, 2021; Haraway, 2020).

Appendix A

Characters and data sources

Character	Representative scripts	Primary data sources
Bronze Vessel	scientific preservation; cultural heritage; colonial acquisition; ecological extraction	exhibition labels and catalogues; heritage studies on Chinese bronzes; media debates on restitution; field notes
Mummy	ancestral dignity; scientific curiosity; tourist spectacle; personhood	British Museum labels; DCMS guidance on human remains; Manchester Museum public consultation on Asru; field notes
Visitor	tourist consumption; ethical unease; intercultural learning	reflexive field notes; overheard comments; media reviews
Curator	stewardship; conservation; institutional legitimacy	institutional policies and statements; collections management policy; Code of Ethics (British Museum, 2018; Museums Association, 2016)
Government Official	restitution justice; sovereignty; colonial history	parliamentary debates and policy papers; Human Tissue Act; recent return cases (Horniman; University of Aberdeen; Jesus College)
Donor	philanthropic legitimacy; global access	media reports on major donations; institutional press releases
Environmental Advocate	ecological responsibility; planetary ethics	NGO campaigns; environmental humanities; museum decolonization resources
Collector, 1840s	universal museum; rescue archaeology; imperial science	scholarship on imperial collecting and debates around the Parthenon Marbles (St. Clair, 1998; Hamilakis, 2007)
Public Sphere, 2020s	platform publics; vernacular curation; 'national treasures want to go home' trope	Xiaohongshu posts and creator notes; studies of Chinese platform cultures and authenticity

Appendix B

Platform corpus and analytic categories (Xiaohongshu, 2023-2025)

Category	Typical post formats	Illustrative tropes (paraphrased)	Primary scripts activated	Notes on circulation
Homecoming/ 'national treasure.'	photo-text notes; short videos with captions	'国宝想回家'; '走出大英博物馆, 笑不出来'	restitution justice; ancestral dignity; consumer spectacle	high repostability via stitched videos; comment threads cluster around grievance and pride
Conservation-as-care	before/after repair shots; label close-ups	'修复好细致'; '保护也是一种回家'	scientific preservation; conditional repair; philanthropic legitimacy	often tags conservators; draws 'craft awe'; sometimes tempers restitution calls
Comparative display	side-by-side exhibits; cross-museum compilations	'世界看见中国'; '同场不同命'	restitution justice; consumer spectacle; scientific preservation	posts in this category juxtapose artifacts across museums or national collections within a single visual frame. They often carry secondary tendencies of diasporic pride or cosmopolitan comparison, but the dominant interpretive work usually turns on visibility, comparison, and claims about ownership, value, or preservation.

Legal/policy explainer	text-over-video; info-graphic notes	‘法律不允许归还吗’；‘人类遗骸不同规定’	policy governance; institutional legitimacy	links to official docs; frames law as ‘speaking actor.’
Satire/meme remix	humor, lip-sync, stitched reactions	‘馆藏开口说话’；‘青铜器内心独白’	consumer spectacle; restitution justice	high engagement, typically showing approximately 800–3,000 likes and 100–400 comments within the sampled corpus, with frequent reposting through stitched video reactions.
Visitor self-narration	first-person vlog; itinerary	‘第一次来BM’；‘复杂心情’	tourist consumption; ethical unease	blends travel content with moral stances; gateway into other genres

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Impact of YouTube Videos on Social and Psychological Problems Among Young Egyptians

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of YouTube videos on the social and psychological well-being of young Egyptians, focusing on how patterns of exposure, content preferences, and user motivations contribute to emerging behavioral and emotional challenges. YouTube has grown into a dominant digital platform among Egyptian youth, becoming a primary source of entertainment, learning, communication, and identity formation. Guided by Social Learning Theory and Uses & Gratifications Theory, this research explores how young people consume, interpret, and react to YouTube content across different regions of Egypt. The study employs a qualitative methodology consisting of twelve focus group discussions and five in-depth interviews with youth from Alexandria, Cairo, and Upper Egypt. Findings reveal that YouTube plays a dual role: while it provides access to information, skills, and social connection, it also exposes young users to harmful content, misinformation, violent imagery, and psychological pressure. Content preferences and motivations vary significantly by gender and region, reflecting different cultural and socio-economic contexts. The study concludes with recommendations for responsible content creation, increased digital awareness, and improved media regulation to ensure safer online experiences for young Egyptians.

Keywords: YouTube, young Egyptians, social problems, psychological well-being, social media effects, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Social Learning Theory, qualitative research.

1. INTRODUCTION

YouTube has become one of the most influential digital platforms in shaping contemporary youth culture in Egypt. Over the past decade, the platform has transformed how young people access information, consume entertainment, and communicate with one another. Its interactive nature, extensive content library, and algorithmic personalization have made it an essential part of daily life for millions of Egyptian youth. The platform's accessibility and immersive visual format enable users to engage with vast audiovisual content ranging from educational tutorials and documentaries to vlogs, gaming commentary, music, and entertainment shows.

The widespread adoption of YouTube among Egyptian youth has coincided with broader societal changes, including increased internet penetration, expanding

digital infrastructures, and rising dependency on online platforms for self-expression and social belonging, in urban centers such as Alexandria and Cairo. Regardless of region, young Egyptians increasingly rely on YouTube for both entertainment and emotional relief, using it as a coping tool during periods of stress, boredom, or social isolation.

However, the rapid expansion of YouTube use has raised concerns regarding its psychological and social consequences. Exposure to violent videos, misleading content, sensational narratives, and unrealistic lifestyle portrayals can affect youth perceptions, values, and mental health. The platform's algorithm tends to promote highly emotional or attention-grabbing content (Covington et al., 2016). Consequently, it contributes to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, or skewed worldviews. Furthermore, the lack of content regulation and the overwhelming presence of unverified information

amplify these risks, especially among younger viewers who may not possess advanced media literacy skills.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although YouTube is widely consumed by Egyptian youth, limited research has been conducted to explore its social and psychological impacts within the Egyptian cultural context. Existing studies in the region predominantly focus on general social media effects, political communication, digital activism, or patterns of online engagement. Few studies examine YouTube from a psychological aspect despite its distinct audiovisual form and algorithm-driven consumption patterns. As a result, there is insufficient understanding of how YouTube shapes emotional well-being, social behaviors, and mental states among Egyptian youth.

The demographic and cultural diversity of Egyptian youth may reflect several research issues related to patterns of YouTube use. Differences in geographical location—such as between Alexandria, Cairo, and Upper Egypt—are likely to be associated with variations in access to entertainment and educational opportunities, socio-economic status, and cultural norms. These variations influence their content choices, consumption habits, motivations, and emotional responses. Without qualitative investigation, the psychological burden or social influence of such content remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by analyzing YouTube's impact through direct youth accounts collected from focus groups and interviews.

1.2 Research Significance

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to academic understanding of digital media effects within the Egyptian context, highlighting how YouTube consumption correlates with social behaviors, emotional states, and daily interactions. Second, it provides insight into the psychological risks associated with exposure to violent, sensational, or misleading content. Third, it showcases regional and gender-based variations in usage, offering nuanced perspectives on how YouTube embeds itself within different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Fourth, the study enhances theoretical applications by integrating Social Learning Theory and Uses & Gratifications Theory into an analysis of contemporary YouTube engagement. Finally, the findings carry practical implications for parents, educators, policymakers, and content creators seeking to promote healthier digital practices among Egyptian youth.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the content genres most frequently consumed by young Egyptians.
2. To analyze motivations and gratifications driving their YouTube usage.
3. To examine the social and psychological impacts of YouTube content exposure.
4. To investigate regional and gender-based differences in consumption patterns, and provide recommendations for safer, more productive engagement with YouTube content

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Background

Understanding the impact of YouTube on young Egyptians requires a strong theoretical foundation that explains both how individuals imitate media behaviors and why they choose specific types of content. Two primary theories frame this study: **Social Learning Theory** and **Uses & Gratifications Theory (UGT)**.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) argues that individuals learn by observing models in their environment and imitating their behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions. On YouTube, content creators act as powerful models whose behaviors are continuously displayed, reinforced, and normalized through repeated exposure. Visual demonstrations, storytelling, and emotional cues make YouTube an influential space for behavioral learning. As Bandura (2001) notes, digital environments amplify observational learning because content is persistent, replayable, and algorithmically promoted. This makes youth particularly vulnerable to adopting both positive and negative behaviors displayed in videos—such as lifestyle habits, emotional expression, conflict responses, or risky challenges.

Uses & Gratifications Theory emphasizes the audience's active role in selecting media to satisfy psychological and social needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). Young Egyptians use YouTube to fulfill needs related to entertainment, identity formation, knowledge acquisition, social interaction, stress relief, and personal development. UGT suggests that media effects are shaped by user motivations, making it

relevant for understanding why youth in different regions gravitate toward distinct video genres. As Whiting and Williams (2013) found, social media gratifications include information seeking, emotional escape, convenience, and social engagement—all of which align with contemporary YouTube use among youth. Together, these theories explain the mechanisms of influence: **Social Learning Theory explains how content shapes behavior**, while **UGT explains why youth choose that content in the first place**.

2.2 Previous Studies

2.2.1 Global Studies on YouTube and Youth Well-Being

International research has widely explored YouTube's role in shaping youth behavior, emotional states, and cognitive development. Burgess and Green (2009) highlight YouTube as a participatory culture where young users engage not only as viewers but as active interpreters and creators of content. Marciano et al. (2022) demonstrate that YouTube consumption increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, intensifying its role in emotional regulation and daily habits. Their findings show that youth use YouTube for both relaxation and coping with psychological stress.

Studies have also highlighted YouTube's potential risks. O'Reilly et al. (2018) found that exposure to harmful or sensational content can elevate anxiety, shape negative social comparisons, and reinforce unhealthy coping mechanisms among adolescents. Similarly, Rasmussen (2020) argues that algorithm-driven recommendations often guide young users toward emotionally charged or extreme content, increasing psychological vulnerability. Research on violent media suggests that repeated exposure can heighten emotional desensitization and negative affect (Anderson & Bushman, 2017), indicating the importance of understanding how harmful videos influence youth.

Despite these concerns, other studies emphasize positive uses of YouTube. Snelson (2015) notes that YouTube is a valuable tool for informal learning, creativity, and skill acquisition. Boniel-Nissim (2021) demonstrates that educational and supportive content can reduce loneliness, enhance emotional resilience, and foster online community belonging among young people. These mixed results highlight YouTube's dual nature as both a beneficial and potentially harmful platform.

2.2.2 Studies in the Arab Region

In the Arab context, research on YouTube remains limited compared to studies on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Alhabash and Ma (2017) note that youth in the Middle East increasingly use video-based platforms for entertainment, identity building, and exposure to global cultures. However, detailed investigations into psychological effects are still emerging.

Studies from the Gulf region emphasize YouTube's role in shaping lifestyle aspirations and digital identity. Al-Jenaibi (2018) found that young users in the UAE use YouTube for self-expression, language learning, and emotional escape, with content creators gaining strong parasocial influence over followers. In Saudi Arabia, Alghamdi (2020) revealed that youth rely heavily on YouTube for entertainment and information, but also experience stress from exposure to controversial or culturally sensitive content.

2.2.3 Egyptian Studies

In Egypt, most research focuses on general social media usage rather than YouTube specifically. Amin and Allam (2022) examine the broader digital media landscape in Egypt, noting that youth spend significant time on video-based platforms, but psychological consequences remain under-investigated. Salem and Eissa (2021) argue that Egyptian youth frequently rely on YouTube for educational content and escapism, yet little is known about how different genres impact mental well-being.

Limited Egyptian studies highlight emerging concerns about harmful digital content. Refaat (2020) found that exposure to violent or misleading videos contributes to anxiety and social withdrawal among adolescents. Another study by Hamed (2019) indicates that Egyptian youth develop strong emotional attachments to YouTubers, influencing their lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, and self-perception. However, these studies are descriptive and lack qualitative depth.

Overall, the existing literature in Egypt shows three major gaps:

1. **Lack of platform-specific psychological analysis**, especially focused on YouTube.
2. **Limited qualitative insights** capturing emotional experiences and real-life reflections.
3. **There is a scarcity of studies comparing regional differences** in media consumption.

2.3 Key Concepts Related to YouTube Consumption

Understanding how YouTube affects young Egyptians requires identifying key concepts consistently emphasized in previous literature. These concepts illuminate the psychological, social, and behavioral mechanisms through which YouTube content shapes youth attitudes and experiences.

2.3.1 Content Diversity and Genre Influence

YouTube's power lies in its enormous diversity of available content. From entertainment and comedy to education, religious lectures, documentaries, gaming, personal vlogs, and political commentary, the platform caters to nearly every interest (Snelson, 2015). Research shows that each genre carries distinct psychological and social implications. For instance, entertainment videos often provide relaxation and escapism (Whiting & Williams, 2013), while educational content enhances competence, motivation, and personal development (Boniel-Nissim, 2021). Conversely, exposure to violent, sensational, or fear-inducing content has been linked to emotional desensitization, increased stress, and harmful behavioral imitation (Anderson & Bushman, 2017). The wide range of genres allows users to shape their media environments according to personal needs—making YouTube a platform where individual motivations directly impact psychological outcomes.

2.3.2 Algorithmic Personalization and Reinforcement

Algorithmic recommendation is one of YouTube's most influential features. According to Rasmussen (2020), YouTube's algorithm tends to amplify emotionally intense, attention-grabbing, or sensational content because such videos generate longer watch times. This algorithmic reinforcement can expose young users to increasingly extreme or emotionally charged material, even if they initially begin with neutral content. The algorithm creates "content loops," where recommended videos are like previously watched ones, reinforcing interests, attitudes, and emotional states (Covington et al., 2016). For Egyptian youth—especially those using YouTube as their main source of entertainment—the algorithm can shape their worldview, emotional responses, and expectations of reality without their awareness.

2.3.3 Parasocial Relationships and Influencer Impact

Parasocial interactions occur when audiences develop one-sided emotional bonds with media personalities.

YouTubers often present themselves authentically, sharing personal stories that foster intimacy and trust. Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of parasocial relationships has been expanded by modern digital studies, showing that young viewers perceive creators as friends or mentors (Lee & Watkins, 2016). This emotional closeness increases susceptibility to behavioral imitation, lifestyle adoption, and opinion formation. In the Egyptian context, emerging local YouTubers have gained significant influence, shaping youth preferences in fashion, relationships, religious views, and social behavior (Hamed, 2019). Such relationships can offer emotional support but may also create unrealistic comparisons or dependence on online validation.

2.3.4 Exposure to Harmful or Misleading Content

A recurring theme in the literature is the psychological risk associated with exposure to harmful content. Violent videos, fake news, conspiracy narratives, extremist rhetoric, and sexually inappropriate materials are prevalent across YouTube (O'Reilly et al., 2018). The risks increase in countries where digital literacy is limited or where parental supervision is minimal.

For Egyptian youth, several studies mention concerns over inaccurate religious content, pseudo-scientific claims, and graphic violence related to global events (Refaat, 2020). Such exposure is linked to heightened anxiety, fear, aggression, social withdrawal, and distorted perceptions of reality. This underscores the need for stronger regulation and digital guidance among youth audiences.

2.3.5 Online Community, Identity, and Social Belonging

Many studies note that YouTube provides a sense of belonging, especially for viewers who feel socially isolated offline. Online communities formed around specific interests—gaming, food, fitness, and personal development—can offer support, shared experiences, and emotional validation (Boniel-Nissim, 2021).

UNG (2016) found that YouTube plays a significant role in identity work among youth, providing models for self-presentation, career aspirations, and lifestyle choices.

In Egypt, where traditional community structures may feel restrictive for some youth, YouTube offers an alternative space for exploration and self-expression.

2.3.6 Youth Agency and Selective Exposure

UGT highlights that audiences do not consume media

passively. Young people actively select content that aligns with their values, emotions, and cognitive needs (Katz et al., 1973). Studies emphasize that content preferences reflect broader psychological tendencies. For instance, youth experiencing stress may seek escapist entertainment, while ambitious youth may prefer educational or motivational videos (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

This agency is crucial for interpreting YouTube's impact: psychological effects often depend on the type of content chosen and the motivations driving consumption.

2.4 Identified Gaps in the Literature

2.4.1 Lack of Platform-Specific Research in Egypt

Some Egyptian studies address social media broadly **without isolating YouTube** as a unique audiovisual platform. Despite its dominance among youth, YouTube's psychological and social implications remain underexplored compared to Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Amin & Allam, 2022).

2.4.2 Insufficient Focus on Psychological Consequences

While many international studies highlight the emotional risks associated with YouTube, Egyptian research has rarely addressed stress, anxiety, desensitization, or emotional fatigue caused by harmful content (Refaat, 2020). This gap leaves youth vulnerable to underrecognized mental health challenges.

2.4.3 Limited Qualitative Insight

Most existing studies use surveys or descriptive analysis, missing deeper qualitative insights into how youth interpret and emotionally respond to videos. Firsthand narratives—especially from diverse regions—are largely absent in the literature.

2.4.4 Neglect of Regional Differences

Egypt's cultural diversity means youth in Alexandria, Cairo, and Upper Egypt experience different social pressures, entertainment access, and media norms. Yet, few studies compare regional variations in YouTube behavior or psychological impact.

2.4.5 Minimal Integration of SLT and UGT in Local Research

Although these theories are widely used internationally, they have not been adequately applied to understand Egyptian YouTube behavior. Most local research lacks

a coherent theoretical framework, leaving gaps in interpretation.

2.4.6 Growing Exposure to Harmful Content

With increased accessibility and minimal regulation, young Egyptians face rising exposure to violent, misleading, or inappropriate videos. However, academic research has not kept pace with this digital reality.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a **qualitative research design** to explore how YouTube content influences the social and psychological experiences of young Egyptians. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of personal perceptions, emotional reactions, viewing habits, and subtle behavioral changes that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods. As Creswell (2014) argues, qualitative inquiry is best suited for examining human experiences within their natural context, especially when exploring motivations, interpretations, and subjective meanings.

Given that YouTube consumption is closely tied to emotions, identity, and everyday behavior, qualitative methods were essential for capturing the richness and complexity of youth perspectives across different Egyptian regions.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

A **purposive sampling** strategy was used to recruit participants who actively use YouTube and represent diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The sample included young Egyptians aged **18 to 35** from three major geographical regions:

- **Lower Egypt (Alexandria)**
- **Central Egypt (Cairo)**
- **Upper Egypt (South Valley)**

Including all three regions enabled the study to capture cross-cultural variations in media consumption and psychological impact. The sample was also balanced by **gender**, ensuring that both male and female perspectives were represented equally. Gender was a significant variable because consumption patterns, motivations, and emotional responses differ markedly between young men and women, as highlighted in prior research.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using two qualitative tools:

3.3.1 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

A total of **twelve focus group discussions** were conducted, with each group consisting of **7–10 participants**. FGDs were chosen because they facilitate dynamic conversations that reveal collective experiences, group norms, and shared cultural interpretations. Group interaction helps uncover themes that may not emerge in individual interviews.

Each FGD lasted **60–90 minutes** and followed a semi-structured guide with open-ended questions covering:

- Daily YouTube usage habits
- Preferred video genres
- Emotional and psychological responses to content
- Perceptions of violent, misleading, or sensational videos
- Motivations for following specific channels
- Perceived social impact of YouTube
- Regional differences in viewing behavior

Separate FGDs were conducted for males and females to ensure comfort, openness, and culturally sensitive expression. This separation encouraged participants to discuss personal or emotional topics more freely, such as stress, isolation, or content that evokes fear or anxiety.

3.3.2 In-Depth Interviews

In addition to FGDs, **five in-depth interviews** were conducted with heavy YouTube users and young content creators. These interviews provided deeper insights into:

- Individual motivations for consuming certain types of videos
- Emotional connections formed with content creators
- Experiences with harmful or disturbing content
- Interpretations of the YouTube algorithm
- Personal reflections on YouTube's influence on identity and social interactions

Each interview lasted **45–60 minutes** and followed a flexible format, allowing participants to narrate experiences in detail. Interviews were particularly effective for uncovering sensitive psychological themes, such as stress, social isolation, or emotional

dependency on online content.

3.4 Instrument Development

The researcher designed two semi-structured guides—one for FGDs and one for interviews. These guides were built upon themes derived from **Social Learning Theory** and **Uses & Gratifications Theory**. Questions were designed to explore:

- Behavioral imitation
- Identity formation
- Gratifications sought (entertainment, escape, information, emotional support)
- Reactions to harmful or misleading content
- Perceived benefits and risks of YouTube

Probing questions were included to encourage participants to reflect more deeply and provide detailed examples. The structure remained flexible to allow organic discussion and the emergence of unanticipated themes.

3.5 Data Recording and Transcription

All FGDs and interviews were **audio-recorded** with participant consent. Field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues, emotional expressions, and group dynamics. After the sessions, recordings were **transcribed verbatim** to ensure accuracy. Transcriptions were reviewed and cleaned to remove filler words while preserving the authenticity of participant expressions. Data were anonymized; pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. **Familiarization:** Reading transcripts multiple times to become immersed in the data.
2. **Initial Coding:** Generating open codes reflecting repeated ideas, emotions, behaviors, and perceptions.
3. **Theme Development:** Clustering related codes into broader themes such as “psychological stress,” “content escapism,” “identity influence,” and “harmful exposure.”

4. **Theme Refinement:** Reviewing themes to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness.
5. **Theme Definition:** Writing detailed descriptions for each theme, supported by direct quotes.
6. **Reporting:** Organizing themes into a coherent narrative aligned with research objectives.

This analytical method allowed the study to identify differences between regions, genders, and consumption habits. It also helped uncover how motivations, emotions, and behavioral interpretations intersect with digital media use.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study followed standard ethical research practices. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. Sensitive topics—especially those related to psychological reactions—were approached with care. Ethical approval was secured through the relevant institutional review process.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Overview of YouTube Usage Patterns

(Findings from Focus Group Discussions)

Findings from the focus group discussions indicate that YouTube constitutes a central part of everyday digital life for the majority of participants across the three sampled regions. Most participants reported daily usage ranging between 1 and 4 hours, with heavier consumption during weekends, late-night hours, and periods of boredom or psychological stress.

Approximately two-thirds of participants described YouTube as their primary source of entertainment, while others emphasized its role as a learning platform or a practical tool for skill acquisition. Several participants referred to YouTube as their “main learning source” or a “gateway to new skills,” highlighting its integration into daily routines.

Regional differences were evident. Participants from Upper Egypt reported more intensive reliance on YouTube, mainly due to limited local entertainment and educational opportunities. Gender-based differences also emerged: male participants tended to engage

with longer, information-dense videos, whereas female participants favored shorter, emotionally engaging content.

4.2 Commonly Consumed Content Genres

(Findings from Focus Group Discussions)

4.2.1 Female Participants

(Alexandria, Cairo, Upper Egypt)

Female participants demonstrated a clear preference for visually appealing and emotionally relatable content. Across all regions, the most frequently mentioned genres included:

- Entertainment and lifestyle vlogs
- Cooking and food-related channels
- Makeup, fashion, and beauty tutorials
- Religious and spiritual content
- Motivational and self-development videos
- Relationship advice and psychological talk shows

More than half of the female participants indicated that YouTube provided emotional comfort and psychological relief. Several participants described feeling “emotionally connected” to influencers, reporting that such content helped them cope with stress and feelings of isolation.

4.2.2 Male Participants

(All Regions)

Male participants reported more cognitively oriented and skill-based consumption patterns. Frequently cited genres included:

- Technology reviews and software tutorials
- Programming and coding content
- Economic and political analysis
- Historical documentaries and global affairs
- Cinematography and filmmaking tutorials
- Gaming, sports highlights, and motorsports

Most male participants emphasized YouTube’s educational value, with several describing it as their “main learning resource” outside formal education. Longer videos with analytical depth were generally preferred.

4.3 Motivations Behind YouTube Consumption

(Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups)

Participants’ motivations aligned closely with Uses and Gratifications Theory, with four dominant themes emerging.

4.3.1 Entertainment and Emotional Relief

Both male and female participants described YouTube as a coping mechanism. Female participants highlighted relaxation after academic or family stress, while male participants emphasized escapism and mental distraction. Common descriptions included “stress relief,” “escape,” and “mental break.”

4.3.2 Learning and Skill Development

Participants across genders identified YouTube as an accessible and cost-free educational resource. Tutorials, step-by-step demonstrations, and visual explanations were cited as key advantages, particularly in technical, culinary, and self-development domains.

4.3.3 Social Connection and Belonging

Many participants reported following YouTubers they perceived as relatable, resulting in parasocial connections. Comment sections and online communities contributed to a sense of belonging, especially among participants experiencing limited offline social interaction.

4.3.4 Curiosity and Exploration

Curiosity-driven viewing was common, particularly among younger participants. Topics included global trends, psychological topics, travel, and historical narratives, reflecting a desire for cultural exposure and knowledge expansion.

4.4 Emotional and Psychological Responses

(Findings from Individual Interviews)

4.4.1 Positive Outcomes

Interview data revealed several positive psychological effects, including:

- Increased motivation and inspiration
- Emotional comfort and validation
- Improved self-confidence through learning new skills

Educational and motivational content was frequently associated with feelings of empowerment and personal growth.

4.4.2 Negative Outcomes

Despite positive aspects, a notable proportion of interviewees reported adverse emotional effects, such as:

- Anxiety caused by violent or disturbing content
- Fear and emotional tension related to global conflict coverage
- Emotional exhaustion resulting from binge-watching
- Self-comparison and dissatisfaction linked to influencer lifestyles
- Sleep disruption due to late-night viewing

Some participants reported temporary depressive moods following prolonged exposure to emotionally intense content.

4.5 Exposure to Harmful or Misleading Content

(Findings from Interviews)

Participants across all regions reported recurring exposure to:

- Graphic or violent material
- Misinformation and fake news
- Clickbait and exaggerated content
- Unrealistic lifestyle portrayals
- Misleading self-help narratives
- Fraudulent advertisements

Participants from Upper Egypt expressed particular concern about misleading religious content, whereas participants from Alexandria highlighted sensational news and fear-based videos. Several interviewees criticized YouTube’s recommendation system, noting that it often suggested increasingly extreme or emotionally intense videos based on prior viewing behavior.

4.6 Factors Influencing Video Appeal

(Findings from Focus Group Discussions)

Participants identified multiple factors influencing video engagement and shareability:

- High-quality visuals and editing
- Clear and simple presentation
- Authenticity and speaker relatability
- Concise structure
- Practical usefulness
- Emotional resonance or humor

Regional variation was evident: participants from Alexandria emphasized production quality, while those from Upper Egypt prioritized content relevance and practical value.

4.7 Gender and Regional Differences

4.7.1 Gender Differences

- Females: entertainment, lifestyle, emotional, cooking, self-development content
- Males: technical, educational, analytical, historical, and economic content

These patterns reflect differing psychological needs and social roles.

4.7.2 Regional Differences

- Alexandria: preference for entertainment and high-quality visuals
- Cairo: balanced consumption between information and trends
- Upper Egypt: stronger dependence on educational content

Participants from Upper Egypt relied on YouTube as a primary source of alternative learning and global exposure.

4.8 Overall Satisfaction With YouTube

Overall satisfaction with YouTube content was high, particularly regarding educational materials. Participants valued:

- Ease of access to information
- Visual learning opportunities
- Availability of relatable content creators
- Exposure to global knowledge

However, dissatisfaction centered on:

- Misleading or low-quality content
- Excessive advertising
- Weak content regulation
- Limited high-quality Arabic educational material

Despite these concerns, most participants identified YouTube as their preferred digital platform for both learning and leisure

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Overview of Key Findings in Relation to

Theoretical Frameworks

The findings of this study demonstrate that YouTube plays a significant dual role in the lives of young

Egyptians: it serves as a primary platform for entertainment, information, and skill development, while simultaneously contributing to stress, misinformation exposure, and emotional exhaustion. These outcomes align strongly with both **Social Learning Theory** and **Uses & Gratifications Theory (UGT)**.

According to Social Learning Theory, young people learn behaviors through observation and imitation. This was evident in participants' descriptions of how YouTubers influenced their attitudes, daily habits, and even lifestyle choices. The visual, immersive nature of YouTube makes modeled behaviors particularly impactful. Similarly, UGT helps explain why youth choose the content they consume. Participants actively sought videos that fulfilled pressing emotional and cognitive needs—ranging from stress relief and escapism to learning new skills or feeling socially connected. Thus, YouTube's influence is shaped both by **the content youth intentionally choose (UGT)** and **the behaviors they subconsciously adopt (SLT)**.

5.2 Interpretation of Content Preferences

5.2.1 Gender-Based Differences

The distinct content preferences between males and females reflect deeper psychological and cultural dynamics. Female participants gravitated toward emotionally engaging and lifestyle-oriented content, suggesting a need for emotional validation, companionship, and stress relief. This aligns with Whiting and Williams (2013), who noted that female users often prioritize emotional gratification in digital spaces.

Male participants preferred technical, educational, and analytical content, indicating a greater focus on competence building, cognitive engagement, and self-improvement. This pattern resonates with research showing that men are more likely to use digital platforms for information seeking and skill acquisition (Rideout, 2016).

These differences highlight how gender-based social expectations and personal goals shape media consumption patterns.

5.2.2 Regional Differences and Cultural Contexts

The sharp regional variations in YouTube usage reflect differences in cultural norms, available entertainment, and socio-economic conditions. Youth in Alexandria, with its established entertainment culture, watched more lifestyle and visually rich content. Cairo's participants

displayed a hybrid pattern balancing entertainment and information. Youth in Upper Egypt relied heavily on educational and motivational content due to fewer offline opportunities. These findings align with Alghamdi (2020), who argues that regional context significantly shapes digital media behavior in the Middle East. The results emphasize the importance of culturally grounded interpretations of media influence.

5.3 Emotional and Psychological Implications

5.3.1 Positive Psychological Influence

Many participants described YouTube as a source of emotional support, inspiration, and mental relief. Educational videos empowered youth with knowledge and skills, boosting self-confidence. Motivational channels helped some cope with academic stress or personal difficulties.

In several cases, parasocial relationships with YouTubers provided companionship and reduced feelings of loneliness—an effect documented in studies such as Lee & Watkins (2016), which highlight the emotional benefits of online communities. Hence, YouTube can actively contribute to psychological resilience when consumed thoughtfully.

5.3.2 Negative Psychological Influence

Conversely, exposure to harmful content triggered anxiety, fear, stress, and emotional burnout. Participants reported feeling overwhelmed by violent clips, global conflict updates, conspiracy theories, or manipulative “self-help” content. These effects align with Anderson and Bushman’s (2017) findings on emotional desensitization from repeated exposure to disturbing media.

Additionally, binge-watching patterns intensified emotional fatigue and disrupted sleep cycles. Some participants also experienced negative self-comparisons when viewing influencers with unrealistic lifestyles, echoing the concerns raised by O’Reilly et al. (2018). This duality reinforces the idea that psychological outcomes depend largely on both content type and viewing habits.

5.4 Influence of Algorithmic Recommendations

The findings show that YouTube’s algorithm plays a central role in shaping viewer behavior. Many participants reported being recommended more

extreme or emotionally charged content after watching just a few related videos. This supports Rasmussen’s (2020) argument that YouTube’s algorithm promotes sensationalism to maximize watch time. For Egyptian youth, this algorithmic influence creates emotional loops that can trap viewers into consuming content they did not consciously choose—contributing to anxiety, fear, or obsessive interest in specific topics. The algorithm also strengthens parasocial bonds by repeatedly recommending the same creators, amplifying the influence of those individuals on youth behaviors and attitudes.

5.5 YouTube as a Tool for Identity Formation

Young Egyptians increasingly turn to YouTube for guidance in shaping identity, values, aspirations, and lifestyle choices. Exposure to global trends broadens their worldview, while local YouTubers act as relatable role models. This confirms findings by UNG (2016), who noted that digital platforms significantly influence youth identity construction.

Participants described adopting fashion styles, communication patterns, hobbies, or even political opinions from YouTubers they admired. Upper Egyptian youth, in particular, stated that YouTube offered insights into lifestyles not commonly found in their local communities.

Thus, YouTube functions as a cultural and psychological space where youth negotiate their identities in response to both local and global influences.

5.6 Social Impact and Online Communities

YouTube fosters digital communities that provide emotional support, shared interests, and social interaction. Participants often connected with others through comment sections, live streams, and shared content. These interactions helped them feel less isolated and more connected to like-minded individuals.

However, the social impact is not uniformly positive. Some participants reported online conflicts, exposure to toxic comment cultures, or pressure to conform to community expectations. These experiences mirror findings by Boniel-Nissim (2021), who highlights both supportive and harmful elements of online communities. Nevertheless, most participants described YouTube as a space where they found belonging and validation unavailable in their offline environments.

5.7 YouTube's Role in Shaping Youth Behavior

The study demonstrates that behaviors are shaped through a combination of observation, imitation, and motivational reinforcement—key elements of Social Learning Theory. Participants described adopting:

- Speech patterns
- Fashion styles
- Daily habits
- Cooking techniques
- Study methods
- Fitness routines

This behavioral influence was stronger among youth who felt emotionally attached to creators. Those in Upper Egypt, with limited exposure to diverse local role models, reported stronger imitation tendencies. At the same time, participants exercised selective exposure (a UGT principle), meaning they intentionally avoided content they found stressful or emotionally draining, demonstrating active audience engagement.

5.8 Summary of Discussion

The results confirm that YouTube plays a multifaceted psychological and social role in the lives of young Egyptians. Its influence is shaped by:

- Motivations (UGT)
- Behavioral imitation (SLT)
- Algorithmic reinforcement
- Gender expectations
- Regional cultural norms
- Availability of local entertainment
- Emotional states and coping needs

Understanding these interacting factors is essential for promoting healthier online behaviors and designing effective digital awareness strategies.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations for Content Creators

Findings from this study highlight the critical influence that YouTube creators have on young Egyptians' behavior, values, and emotional well-being. As a result, content creators bear a responsibility to produce content that considers the psychological impact on their audiences.

6.1.1 Promote Balanced, Ethical, and Responsible Content

Creators should prioritize accuracy, clarity, and ethical storytelling, avoiding exaggeration, unnecessary sensationalism, or content that induces fear or stress. Given that many youth imitate the behaviors they observe online, creators must model positive attitudes, healthy lifestyles, and respectful communication. This includes avoiding harmful challenges, violent imagery, or misleading claims, especially those related to health, relationships, or self-development.

6.1.2 Prioritize Educational and Skill-Based Content

The findings show that Egyptian youth value accessible educational material. Content creators can support youth empowerment by offering simplified tutorials, interactive lessons, and practical demonstrations that help viewers build new skills. Such content is especially valuable in Upper Egypt, where offline educational resources are more limited.

6.1.3 Increase Transparency and Authenticity

Participants expressed appreciation for content that feels genuine and emotionally relatable. Creators should communicate honestly about their experiences, avoid presenting unrealistic lifestyles, and clarify when content is sponsored. Authenticity reduces harmful self-comparison among youth and encourages more realistic expectations.

6.1.4 Address Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Creators can help mitigate the negative psychological effects of digital consumption by discussing mental health topics responsibly. Videos addressing stress, academic pressure, self-care, and emotional regulation can provide valuable support to young audiences who may lack proper offline guidance.

6.2 Recommendations for Policymakers and Media Regulators

Given the widespread psychological and social influence of YouTube among youth, policymakers and regulatory bodies must establish stronger frameworks to ensure safer digital environments.

6.2.1 Strengthen Regulation of Harmful and Misleading Content

Government agencies and regulatory authorities should collaborate with YouTube to monitor and limit access to violent, extremist, or misleading content. Clear guidelines should be developed to identify harmful videos, particularly those targeting youth with

false information or inappropriate content. Enhanced moderation systems and age-appropriate content filters can reduce exposure to psychologically harmful material.

6.2.2 Introduce Digital Literacy Programs

A major finding of this research is the lack of awareness among youth regarding harmful content and algorithmic influence. Policymakers should integrate digital literacy into school curricula and community programs, teaching youth how to critically evaluate online content, identify misinformation, and understand algorithmic behavior. This initiative should be tailored to different regions to address their specific needs.

6.2.3 Support National Mental Health Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns promoting mental health, emotional resilience, and responsible digital use should be launched across television, radio, and social media. These campaigns can educate parents and youth about safe online practices and warning signs of digital addiction.

6.2.4 Encourage Collaboration with Educational Institutions

Schools and universities should partner with regulators to host workshops on critical media consumption and online well-being. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their viewing habits and understand the psychological effects of prolonged YouTube use.

6.3 Recommendations for Parents and Guardians

With YouTube becoming an integral part of daily life for young Egyptians, parents must play a more active role in guiding their children's digital habits.

6.3.1 Encourage Open Communication about Online Experiences

Parents should create an environment where youth feel comfortable discussing what they watch online. Rather than imposing restrictive rules, a supportive conversation-based approach allows youth to share concerns about harmful or disturbing content. This openness can help identify emotional distress early on.

6.3.2 Monitor Video Consumption in a Respectful, Non-Intrusive Way

Parents can supervise their children's YouTube use by exploring platform features such as restricted mode,

history review, and screen-time reports. This monitoring must respect the child's autonomy while preventing exposure to harmful content.

6.3.3 Promote Healthy Digital Habits at Home

Families should establish routines that balance online activities with offline responsibilities, social interactions, and physical activities. Clear expectations for screen time—without punitive measures—can help prevent emotional fatigue, sleep disruption, and digital dependency.

6.4 Recommendations for Youth Themselves

The findings emphasize that youth play an active role in shaping their own online experiences. Adopting healthy digital habits can significantly reduce the psychological risks associated with YouTube consumption.

6.4.1 Practice Critical Thinking and Selective Exposure

Youth should be encouraged to question the credibility of online content, identify signs of misinformation, and avoid videos that trigger emotional distress. Understanding the impact of the YouTube algorithm can help them make more conscious viewing decisions.

6.4.2 Set Boundaries for Screen Time

Creating personal limits for daily YouTube use can improve sleep quality, reduce stress, and prevent emotional exhaustion. Youth can benefit from designating "media-free" hours during evenings or study sessions.

6.4.3 Follow Content That Supports Mental and Emotional Growth

Participants reported positive experiences when consuming educational, motivational, and skill-based videos. Youth should be encouraged to curate their viewing habits around content that contributes to personal development rather than emotional strain.

6.4.4 Seek Offline Support When Needed

If youth feel overwhelmed, anxious, or emotionally affected by online content, seeking support from trusted adults, counselors, or mental health professionals can prevent long-term psychological effects.

6.5 Strengthening the Role of Schools and Universities

Educational institutions can play a transformative role in shaping digital behavior among youth. Schools and universities should:

- Include media literacy modules in academic programs
- Train teachers and staff on recognizing psychological signs of digital stress
- Provide counseling services related to online behaviors
- Encourage students to reflect on how YouTube content influences their identity, habits, and emotions

These efforts will help build resilience and promote responsible digital behavior within academic environments.

6.6 Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations emphasize a collective effort involving content creators, policymakers, educators, parents, and youth. YouTube offers enormous potential for learning and personal development, but also poses significant psychological risks when used without awareness. By adopting ethical, educational, and psychologically sensitive practices, stakeholders can create safer and more supportive digital experiences for young Egyptians.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Overview of the Study

This study set out to examine the social and psychological impact of YouTube consumption on young Egyptians, focusing on how content choices, user motivations, emotional responses, and regional differences shape their overall digital experience. Guided by **Social Learning Theory** and **Uses & Gratifications Theory**, the research explored both the *reasons* youth turn to YouTube and the *effects* the platform has on their behaviors, identities, and mental well-being. Through twelve focus group discussions and five in-depth interviews with participants from Alexandria, Cairo, and Upper Egypt, the study gathered rich qualitative insights into how YouTube functions as both a beneficial and harmful force in the lives of Egyptian youth.

The findings revealed a complex relationship between

youth and the platform. On one hand, YouTube provides entertainment, knowledge, emotional comfort, opportunities for self-development, and access to global perspectives. On the other hand, it exposes youth to harmful content, misinformation, unrealistic lifestyles, and stress-inducing videos that can negatively affect their mental and emotional states. Gender and regional differences further shaped viewing patterns, illustrating how social and cultural contexts influence user behavior. The study concluded that YouTube is not merely a passive entertainment platform; it is a powerful shaping force that influences youth identity, societal perceptions, emotional resilience, and daily routines.

7.2 Key Insights and Implications

7.2.1 YouTube as a Dual-Impact Platform

The study highlighted YouTube's dual influence—its ability to offer empowerment and emotional support while also exposing young users to psychological risks. Educational and motivational content contributed to positive outcomes such as confidence building, stress reduction, and skill acquisition. Conversely, harmful videos led to anxiety, emotional fatigue, comparison-based dissatisfaction, and disrupted sleep patterns. This duality underscores the need for thoughtful consumption and stronger digital awareness among youth.

7.2.2 Role of Motivations and Agency

Uses & Gratifications Theory helped explain why youth select certain content:

- Entertainment and escapism
- Emotional comfort
- Learning and skill-building
- Social connection
- Cultural exploration

The study found that users exercise significant agency in selecting content that aligns with their needs. However, this agency is often undermined by YouTube's algorithm, which pushes emotionally intense videos that can alter user behavior or amplify negative emotions.

7.2.3 Behavioral Influence and Imitation

The findings strongly support Social Learning Theory. Many participants reported adopting behaviors, speech patterns, habits, and lifestyle practices modeled by YouTubers. This influence was particularly strong among users who formed parasocial relationships with creators. Youth in Upper Egypt, with fewer local

role models, were especially influenced by online personalities.

7.3 Contribution to Academic Knowledge

This study contributes to media and communication scholarship in several significant ways:

1. **It provides one of the few platform-specific analyses of YouTube in Egypt**, addressing a major gap in regional literature.
2. **It highlights qualitative emotional experiences** that are often overlooked in survey-based studies.
3. **It integrates SLT and UGT in a modern Arab context**, demonstrating how classical theories apply to digital video consumption.
4. **It offers detailed comparisons between regions**, revealing how socio-cultural environments shape digital behaviors.
5. **It presents practical implications** for creators, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals.

These contributions position the study as a valuable reference for future research on digital platforms and youth psychology in the Middle East.

7.4 Practical Implications for Stakeholders

7.4.1 For Families and Educators

The study highlights the importance of guiding youth toward emotionally healthy and productive content. Educators should incorporate digital literacy training into school systems, while families should foster open conversations about online experiences rather than relying solely on restrictions.

7.4.2 For Policymakers and Regulators

Stronger content regulation is needed to protect youth from harmful content. Awareness campaigns and national mental health initiatives should address digital stress and misinformation exposure.

7.4.3 For Content Creators

Creators should prioritize authenticity, accuracy, and psychological sensitivity. They must avoid misleading or sensational content that contributes to fear, anxiety, or harmful behavioral imitation.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

While the study generated valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Sample Size:** The study relied on qualitative methods with a limited number of participants, which restricts generalizability.
2. **Self-Reported Data:** Participant responses may be influenced by memory bias or social desirability.
3. **Regional Scope:** Although three major regions were included, other areas of Egypt may exhibit different patterns of YouTube usage.
4. **Rapid Platform Evolution:** YouTube's content landscape evolves quickly, making long-term conclusions subject to change.

Recognizing these limitations allows for better interpretation of the findings and provides direction for future research.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could explore:

- Quantitative analyses to measure psychological impact at a national scale
- Differences between YouTube and newer platforms like TikTok
- The influence of short-form vs. long-form videos on attention span and mental health
- The role of parental mediation and digital literacy in shaping youth experiences
- Longitudinal studies examining how YouTube affects developmental stages over time

Such investigations would deepen understanding of digital media's evolving impact on youth in Egypt and beyond.

7.7 Final Conclusion

YouTube has become an integral part of the lives of young Egyptians, shaping how they perceive the world, express their identities, learn new skills, and manage their emotions. While the platform holds immense educational and creative potential, its unregulated nature exposes youth to psychological and social risks that require targeted interventions. The study emphasizes the need for a balanced approach to digital

media consumption—one that encourages productive use while mitigating harmful exposure.

A collaborative effort involving youth, parents, educators, content creators, and policymakers is essential to ensure that YouTube contributes positively to the

well-being and development of young Egyptians. By cultivating digital awareness, promoting ethical content creation, and strengthening protective frameworks, Egypt can empower its youth to navigate the digital world safely and confidently.

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The Impact of Health Marketing in Digital Platforms on Egyptian Females' Body Image

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of digital health marketing on Egyptian females' body image, self-esteem, and attitudes toward medicalized weight-loss interventions. As social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook increasingly promote weight-loss medications, cosmetic injections, and surgical procedures, idealized body imagery and persuasive health claims continue to shape contemporary beauty standards and influence women's psychological well-being. A mixed-method approach was used to provide a comprehensive analysis. The quantitative phase consisted of an online survey of 201 Egyptian females aged 14 to 63, measuring their exposure to health-related digital health marketing and its relationship with body image, self-esteem, and behavioral intentions. The qualitative phase included eight in-depth interviews with bariatric and plastic surgeons, psychologists, and health and beauty influencers, which were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns. Findings showed that frequent exposure to digital health marketing is significantly associated with heightened body dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and increased interest in weight-loss procedures. Experts emphasized that misleading advertisements and unregulated influencer marketing content have normalized aesthetic enhancement as a lifestyle trend. Psychologists also highlighted growing social comparison and emotional distress, often requiring interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Overall, the study underscores the need for media literacy, ethical weight-loss advertising regulations, and psychological awareness initiatives to support healthier self-perceptions among Egyptian women. The research contributes to understanding how digital health communication reshapes beauty ideals and influences women's identities in the social media era.

Keywords: Body image, digital health marketing, Egypt, influencer marketing, plastic surgery, self-esteem, social media, weight-loss advertising

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have become dominant environments through which individuals construct and negotiate meanings related to health, beauty, and self-worth. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube rely heavily on visual communication and influencer-driven content, making them particularly powerful in shaping body-related perceptions (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Rodgers et al., 2020). Within this environment, health marketing has increasingly adopted aesthetic narratives, promoting

weight-loss injections, cosmetic surgeries, and body-contouring procedures as accessible lifestyle choices rather than complex medical decisions.

In Egypt, the rapid growth of social media usage has intensified exposure to globalized beauty ideals while intersecting with local cultural norms surrounding femininity, attractiveness, and social value. Research indicates that Arab women experience increasing pressure to conform to narrow appearance standards,

often reinforced through social comparison and validation mechanisms embedded within social media platforms (Musaiger et al., 2013; Radwan et al., 2019). Digital health marketing amplifies these pressures by circulating idealized before-and-after imagery, influencer testimonials, and persuasive health claims that emphasize rapid and effortless transformation.

Although international scholarship has extensively examined the relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction, fewer studies have addressed the specific role of digital health marketing within non-Western contexts, particularly Egypt. This study addresses this gap by examining how exposure to health-related marketing messages on social media influences Egyptian females' body image, self-esteem, and attitudes toward medicalized weight-loss interventions. By integrating psychological theory, health communication research, and regional analysis, the study offers a culturally grounded understanding of digital persuasion in contemporary Egyptian society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media, Body Image, and Psychological Effects

A substantial body of research demonstrates that exposure to appearance-focused social media content is associated with increased body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and disordered eating behaviors (Fardouly et al., 2015; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2022). Systematic reviews confirm that idealized images on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok promote unrealistic beauty standards and intensify upward social comparison, particularly among women and adolescent girls (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Raggatt et al., 2022).

Experimental and longitudinal studies show that even brief exposure to idealized imagery can result in immediate increases in body shame, negative affect, and appearance anxiety (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Hendrickse et al., 2023). These effects are magnified by interactive features such as likes, comments, and follower metrics, which function as social validation cues and reinforce appearance-based self-worth (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

In Middle Eastern contexts, emerging evidence suggests that social media exerts similar psychological effects. Studies among Arab and Egyptian populations indicate that intensive social media engagement predicts higher levels of body dissatisfaction, internalization of beauty ideals, and acceptance of cosmetic enhancement as normative behavior (Melki et al., 2015; El-Deeb

et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate that the psychological mechanisms identified in Western contexts operate similarly within Arab societies.

2.2 Digital Health Marketing and the Medicalization of Beauty

Digital health marketing represents a distinct form of persuasion that combines medical discourse with aesthetic aspiration. Unlike traditional advertising, digital health marketing relies on influencer endorsements, algorithmic targeting, and visually compelling narratives that frame medical interventions as routine self-improvement practices (Montgomery et al., 2012). These practices blur the distinction between health necessity and cosmetic desire.

Empirical research demonstrates that repeated exposure to cosmetic surgery advertisements and weight-loss promotions on social media increases willingness to pursue both invasive and non-invasive procedures (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Mendelson et al., 2021). Influencers play a particularly powerful role, as their perceived authenticity and relatability enhance trust and reduce perceived risk (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Scholars have raised ethical concerns regarding the normalization of medicalized beauty, especially when marketing content minimizes risks, exaggerates outcomes, or targets psychologically vulnerable audiences (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Puhl & Suh, 2015). Such practices contribute to the medicalization of normal body variations and reinforce weight stigma, with potential long-term psychological consequences.

2.3 Regional and Egyptian Studies

Although regional scholarship remains limited, available studies suggest that Arab women increasingly navigate hybrid beauty ideals shaped by Western media and local cultural expectations. Research among Arab youth highlights the role of social media in reinforcing body surveillance, appearance monitoring, and validation-seeking behaviors (Musaiger et al., 2013; Ahmed & Nassar, 2023).

In Egypt specifically, recent studies link high social media exposure to symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder, dieting behaviors, and emotional distress (El-Deeb et al., 2024; El-Kholy et al., 2023). However, few studies have explicitly examined digital health marketing, underscoring the importance of the present research in advancing understanding of media-health dynamics in the Egyptian context.

3. METHODS AND THEORY

3.1 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to explore how digital health marketing—particularly advertisements for weight-loss products, injections, and cosmetic surgeries—affects Egyptian females' body image, self-perception, and behavioral intentions. The methodology integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. The quantitative component relied on a structured online survey distributed to 201 Egyptian females across various age categories. The survey measured frequency of exposure to digital health marketing, perceptions of body image, trust in influencer-promoted content, and behavioral intentions toward weight-loss interventions. Descriptive statistics were used to outline demographic patterns and exposure tendencies, while inferential analysis employed Spearman's Rank Correlation to test relationships among variables and Kruskal–Wallis tests to assess group differences based on age and education.

The qualitative phase used in-depth interviews with experts from three fields: medical and cosmetic practitioners, psychologists, and social media influencers specializing in beauty and health. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and explored expert perspectives related to psychological mechanisms, marketing strategies, and societal influences surrounding digital health marketing. A thematic analysis framework was applied to the interviews, enabling the identification of recurring themes that describe how Egyptian women interpret and internalize content promoting weight-loss products and medical aesthetics. Together, the mixed-methods approach ensured that quantitative findings captured statistical patterns, while qualitative findings offered contextual depth and explanation.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1. Online Survey:

The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on participants' exposure to digital health marketing, perceptions of body image, and attitudes toward weight-loss interventions. It included closed-ended, open-ended, and Likert-scale questions divided into four sections:

- Demographic information (age, education, social media usage).

- Exposure to digital health marketing (frequency and type of content seen).
- Body image perception and satisfaction.
- Attitudes and behavioral intentions toward medicalized beauty interventions.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically using Google Forms to reach participants through social media channels and university groups.

3.2.2. Sampling:

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit Egyptian females who actively use social media platforms. Participants were recruited through university networks and online communities to ensure diversity in age, education, and digital exposure. The survey instrument incorporated adapted items from validated body image and media pressure scales.

3.3. In-Depth Interviews

For the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from the three categories mentioned above. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and followed a flexible guide allowing for probing questions and follow-up discussions. Additionally, some interviews were hosted online via Zoom, and others were face-to-face with the interviewees.

Interview questions focused on perceptions of digital health marketing, psychological impacts on women, cultural factors influencing body ideals, and the role of influencers in shaping attitudes.

3.3.1. Ethical Approval and Consent

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, transcribed verbatim, and later translated into English for analysis. The researcher ensured that participants were informed about the purpose and confidentiality of the study before each interview. In addition, all participants were asked for consent regarding the recording of each meeting beforehand for solely academic reasons.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

3.4.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences**

(SPSS), which enabled both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and provide an overview of the key study variables. For inferential analysis, non-parametric statistical tests were employed due to the ordinal nature of the questionnaire items and the non-normal distribution of several variables. **Spearman's rank-order correlation** was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between continuous and ordinal constructs, such as exposure to digital health marketing, body dissatisfaction, trust in influencer content, and behavioral intention. Additionally, **Kruskal-Wallis H** tests were conducted to assess differences in perceptions, psychological responses, and behavioral tendencies across multiple independent groups. Together, these statistical tests allowed for rigorous hypothesis testing and provided empirical evidence regarding the influence of digital health marketing on women's body image and weight-loss-related behaviors.

3.4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method, the researcher transcribed, coded, categorized, and interpreted the data to identify recurring patterns and key themes. This process involved iterative comparison between transcripts to ensure that insights were consistent and theoretically grounded.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), the Social Media Influence Model (SMIM) (Perloff, 2021), and Image Theory (Boulding, 1956) into a unified explanatory framework.

Social Comparison Theory explains how women engage in upward comparisons with idealized digital representations, leading to dissatisfaction and diminished self-esteem. SMIM extends this process by highlighting the role of algorithmic repetition, peer feedback, and influencer authority in intensifying exposure and persuasion. Image Theory elucidates how repeated visual exposure constructs internalized mental images that redefine perceptions of normality and desirability. Together, these theories explain how exposure, psychological processing, and internalization interact to shape body image perceptions and behavioral intentions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis revealed consistent patterns demonstrating the influence of digital health marketing on Egyptian females' perceptions and behaviors. The results showed that participants were highly exposed to digital health advertisements, especially on Instagram and TikTok, with younger respondents (aged 15–25) reporting the highest level of exposure. A significant negative correlation emerged between exposure to digital health content and body image satisfaction, supporting the first and third hypotheses. Increased exposure corresponded with greater dissatisfaction and more negative self-evaluations related to body appearance.

Participants were asked to indicate which social media platforms they use most frequently. Instagram was the most used platform (159, 79.1%), followed by Facebook (139, 69.2%), YouTube (74, 36.8%), TikTok (39, 19.4%), and Snapchat (23, 11.4%). Fewer participants reported using X/Twitter (10, 5.0%), WhatsApp (2, 1.0%), Watch it (1, 0.5%), and Shahid (1, 0.5%) (see Table 4.8).

Table 1: Most Frequently Used Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Instagram	159	79.1%
Facebook	139	69.2%
YouTube	74	36.8%
TikTok	39	19.4%
Snapchat	23	11.4%
X (Twitter)	10	5.0%
WhatsApp	2	1.0%
Watch it	1	0.5%
Shahid	1	0.5%

Instagram (79.1%) and Facebook (69.2%) dominate social media use among Egyptian females in this sample. These platforms are widely known for their visual content, which often drives appearance-based comparison and exposure to beauty-related marketing.

TikTok and Snapchat, although used by fewer participants, remain notable as they host highly curated short-form beauty content. The pattern reflects a visually intensive online environment, directly relevant to hypotheses concerning body dissatisfaction and the internalization of idealized beauty imagery.

Table 2: Age Groups of Participants

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
14–23	31	15.4%
24–33	37	18.4%
34–43	46	22.9%
44–53	62	30.8%
54–63	25	12.4%
Total	201	100%

The age distribution shows that a substantial proportion of respondents were **young adults and women in their early and mid-thirties**, with the 14–23 age group representing 15.4% and the 24–33 age group representing 18.4%, totaling **33.8%** of the sample. This indicates that younger participants form a large and influential segment of the study population, particularly relevant given the strong digital engagement typically

associated with these age groups.

At the same time, another major portion of respondents were women aged **34–43 (22.9%)** and **44–53 (30.8%)**, the latter being the single largest subgroup in the sample. Women in the **34–43 and 44–53** age groups are typically experiencing natural aging processes, which can include skin laxity, weight fluctuations, and other physical changes. This makes them more conscious of their appearance and health, leading them to consider weight-loss methods and cosmetic surgeries as viable options to achieve a more youthful look and improve their overall well-being.

The results also indicated that higher levels of body dissatisfaction were strongly associated with a greater inclination toward medicalized weight-loss interventions, including slimming injections, fast-acting non-surgical treatments, and procedures such as liposuction or sleeve gastrectomy.

Table 3: Correlation Between Body Dissatisfaction and Weight-Loss Behavioral Intentions

Women's Level of Body Dissatisfaction	I have considered buying a weight-loss product because of social media advertisements.	I feel encouraged to try weight loss treatments when I see many positive reviews and comments on social media.	Women choose surgeries and products for faster results than dieting.	Seeing weight loss success stories or influencer posts on social media makes me more likely to try weight-loss products/treatments
Spearman's rho Correlation Coefficient	.633**	.528**	.446**	.432**
Significance	.001	.001	.002	.004

The correlation analysis examined the relationship between body dissatisfaction and women's behavioral intentions toward weight-loss products and treatments promoted on social media. The results showed that body dissatisfaction was strongly associated with the likelihood of considering weight-loss products after viewing social media ads ($r = .633, p < .01$). This strong positive correlation indicates that women with higher body dissatisfaction are significantly more inclined to consider purchasing weight-loss products when exposed to digital advertisements, a finding consistent with the **Social Influence Model**, in which persuasive cues and rapid-results claim increase behavioral intention. A similarly strong association emerged in the relationship between body dissatisfaction and feeling encouraged to try weight-loss treatments when seeing many positive reviews and comments on social media ($r = .528, p < .01$). This suggests that women who are more dissatisfied with their bodies are particularly influenced by user-generated approval cues, making them more likely to try weight-loss treatments after encountering positive evaluations.

Furthermore, trust in influencer marketing demonstrated a significant relationship with behavioral intention. Women who trusted the influencers they followed were more likely to consider, seek, or purchase advertised health and weight-loss products.

Additional analyses indicated that education level moderated the impact of digital health marketing. Women with higher education displayed more critical evaluation skills and were less influenced by exaggerated claims, whereas lower-education groups showed greater susceptibility. Digital literacy also played a protective role: participants with stronger digital evaluation skills were less likely to believe misleading advertisements, aligning with the sixth hypothesis. Finally, psychological tendencies such as social comparison and validation-seeking amplified the behavioral influence of digital health marketing, confirming the seventh hypothesis.

The qualitative findings further contextualized the survey results by providing expert perspectives on how digital health marketing shapes women's self-perception.

Experts described the increasing normalization of medicalized beauty practices—such as fat-dissolving injections, fillers, and rapid weight-loss solutions—due to the repetitive and visually persuasive nature of digital advertisements. Many noted that this normalization is particularly prominent among younger females, who encounter such promotions as part of everyday digital consumption.

Interviewees also emphasized the role of platform algorithms in amplifying exposure. Once a user interacts with slimming or beauty-oriented content, similar material is repeatedly shown, reinforcing the perceived need to pursue certain aesthetic transformations. Psychologists observed that social comparison pressures are especially pronounced on visually driven platforms. Egyptian females frequently compare themselves to idealized, filtered, and often surgically enhanced images online, which increases appearance anxiety, self-criticism, and dieting behaviors. Medical experts and psychologists also pointed to the prevalence

of misleading or unregulated advertisements. They reported frequent concerns about exaggerated before-and-after photos, underdisclosed risks, and influencers giving unlicensed medical advice. Finally, experts highlighted generational differences: younger users tend to be more susceptible to persuasive imagery and peer validation dynamics, while older women tend to interpret digital content more critically.

4.1 Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

This section provides a consolidated overview of the empirical findings related to each of the proposed hypotheses within the inferential analysis. The table below summarizes whether each hypothesis was supported, partially supported, or not supported based on the statistical evidence obtained from the analysis. This synthesis aims to facilitate a clear understanding of the study's key inferential outcomes and their implications within the theoretical framework.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Results Summary	Support Level
H1: Exposure to weight-loss digital marketing negatively affects women's body image perception.	Increased exposure to weight-loss ads and related content correlates with higher body dissatisfaction and harmful eating reactions.	Significant positive correlations between exposure indicators and body dissatisfaction ($r = .402-.608$, $p < .01$). Women with higher perceived social media impact showed more restrictive eating behaviors (Kruskal–Wallis, $p = .018$).	Supported
H2: Women with higher body dissatisfaction are more likely to seek medicalized weight-loss interventions.	Elevated body dissatisfaction predicts greater intentions to consider weight-loss products, treatments, and surgeries.	Strong positive correlations between body dissatisfaction and behavioral intentions ($r = .446-.633$, $p < .01$). Significant differences in perceptions of before-and-after images ($p = .011$).	Supported
H3: Frequency of exposure to social media health advertisements is associated with higher body dissatisfaction.	Greater daily social media use correlates with increased social comparison, appearance dissatisfaction, and influence of idealized images.	Kruskal–Wallis tests showed significant differences in comparison behaviors and self-critical feelings across time-use groups ($p < .001$). Heavier social media users exhibited higher comparison and dissatisfaction.	Supported
H4: Higher trust in influencer marketing predicts stronger behavioral intentions towards weight-loss products.	Trust in social media and influencer content directly correlates with purchase intentions and receptiveness to weight-loss messages.	Significant positive correlations between trust and behavioral intentions ($r = .219-.566$, $p < .01$). Trust variables are strongly linked to encouragement and influence from reviews and success stories.	Supported
H5: Socioeconomic status influences social media-driven weight-loss attitudes and behaviors.	Differences in perceptions and behaviors based on education and marital status.	- Significant differences found primarily among education groups ($p < .05$) in perceptions of social media effects and weight-loss trends. Marital status effects were limited; only celebrity influence showed significant variation ($p = .002$).	Partially Supported
H6: Digital literacy reduces belief in misleading weight-loss advertisements.	Women demonstrating higher awareness and critical evaluation are less likely to trust or endorse unsafe ads.	Women who perceive ads as unsafe support stricter regulation ($p = .039$). No significant differences in overall trust based on perceived and truthfulness ($p > .05$).	Partially Supported
H7: Psychological factors, especially social comparison and validation-seeking, intensify behavioral responses to digital health marketing.	Higher tendencies for social comparison and appearance dissatisfaction amplify behavioral impacts.	Significant difference in appearance dissatisfaction among groups perceiving influencer influence ($p = .045$). Most other variables showed no significant differences ($p > .05$).	Partially Supported

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the regulation, communication, and public understanding of digital health marketing in Egypt. First, relevant media authorities must strengthen **oversight of online advertisements related to weight-loss products, injections, and cosmetic procedures**. Given that the study revealed a high level of exposure to misleading and idealized content, regulatory bodies should establish clearer guidelines to ensure that digital health advertisements are medically accurate, transparent, and based on approved clinical information. These regulations should also extend to influencer marketing, requiring content creators to clearly disclose sponsorships and refrain from promoting unverified or unsafe products.

Furthermore, **social media platforms should be encouraged to cooperate with national health authorities by developing mechanisms to flag, review, or restrict advertisements that promote unrealistic body ideals or medically unregulated interventions**. Increasing the visibility of verified medical information on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook would help counteract the spread of exaggerated claims and reduce the impact of harmful visual content. Clinics and healthcare professionals, in particular, are advised to adopt more responsible communication strategies that prioritize patient safety and avoid the use of heavily edited “before-and-after” images that may reinforce distorted body expectations.

At the societal level, **the findings highlight the need to strengthen digital literacy and body-image awareness, especially among adolescent and**

young adult females who demonstrated heightened susceptibility to social comparison and persuasive marketing cues. Educational institutions and mental-health practitioners should therefore implement awareness programs that help young women evaluate online content critically, understand the psychological mechanisms behind digital persuasion, and develop healthier self-perceptions. This includes workshops, school-based interventions, and community campaigns that promote realistic beauty standards and encourage critical engagement with online health information.

For influencers and digital opinion leaders, **the results underscore the importance of adopting ethical communication practices**. Influencers are encouraged to avoid presenting medicalized beauty interventions as simple lifestyle choices and to refrain from endorsing products without credible medical evidence. Instead, they may contribute positively by sharing accurate information, collaborating with certified healthcare professionals, and supporting messages that promote body acceptance and informed decision-making.

Finally, future research would benefit from **expanding the demographic scope beyond the current sample, particularly by examining rural populations, older age groups, and males, who may experience distinct forms of social media influence**. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to track changes in body image and behavioral intentions over time, especially as digital marketing trends and platform algorithms continue to evolve. Conducting platform-specific analyses may further clarify which forms of content—static posts, short-form videos, influencer testimonials, or before-and-after imagery—have the strongest impact on women’s psychological responses. These extensions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of digital health marketing and its implications for the Egyptian context.

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The Influence of Uncertainty Avoidance on Visual and Rhetorical Strategies in Breast Cancer Awareness Advertising

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of national culture on the design of health communication messages, specifically focusing on how Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension correlates with the characteristics of breast cancer awareness advertisements. The study seeks to determine to what extent uncertainty avoidance influences the visual and rhetorical construction of breast cancer awareness advertisements globally. A quantitative content analysis is conducted on a sample of 208 static advertisements from a wide range of countries. Key variables, including image type (photograph vs. drawing), visual representation of breasts, persuasion type (ethos, pathos, logos), and shock value, are systematically coded. The analysis of the results reveals significant correlations between the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) of an advertisement's country of origin and its design elements. Advertisements from high-UAI countries are significantly more likely to employ tame messaging, symbolic depictions, or a complete absence of breast representation, and logos-based persuasive appeals. Conversely, advertisements from low-UAI countries are associated with higher shock values, more direct and photographic imagery, and emotionally-driven content. The findings indicate that uncertainty avoidance is a predictor of the visual and rhetorical strategies used in breast cancer awareness campaigns, suggesting that in cultures less tolerant of ambiguity, communication strategies are more conservative and emotionally restrained. These results could have implications for the development of culturally sensitive and effective global health campaigns.

Keywords: Fear Appeals; Health Communication; Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions; Public Service Announcement (PSA)

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between culture and communication strategies in advertising and health messaging is a complex and well-studied area. Researchers have investigated how national and individual cultural orientations influence the reception and effectiveness of persuasive messages, particularly those employing fear appeals (e.g., Bartikowski et al. 2019; Sook Moon and Chan 2005). Research on the effectiveness of public service announcements is extensive (see Keller and Lehmann 2008, for a meta-analysis), but to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have incorporated both commercial and non-profit breast cancer awareness campaigns. Understanding cultural variations in these two fields could be crucial for the success of health campaigns.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions have often been used to understand these differences and can help to analyze variations in advertising content and consumer responses across different countries (Hofstede et al. 2010). This study focuses specifically on uncertainty avoidance, the measure of the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and communications. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance prefer clear rules, structured environments, and predictability, impacting their stress management, adherence to rules, and future planning, which, in turn, influence communication effectiveness. On the other hand, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are more comfortable with ambiguity and change. In public communications, this manifests itself in greater receptiveness to abstract concepts and a

willingness to engage with messages that are more open-ended or encourage individual interpretation. Uncertainty avoidance significantly shapes the effectiveness of health communication by influencing the reactions to ambiguous health information (Kuang and Wilson 2017; Vishwanath 2003). Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance may exhibit heightened anxiety and avoidance behaviors when faced with ambiguous health-related information, necessitating clear, structured, and detailed communication strategies. This underscores the importance of culturally appropriate strategies that explicitly address ambiguity to enhance communication effectiveness across diverse cultural contexts.

Research on fear appeals—messages designed to motivate behavior change by highlighting negative consequences to actions, or lack thereof—has explored whether their effectiveness is moderated by the receiver's cultural background. Some studies suggest that advertisers tailor their approaches based on perceived cultural sensitivities, potentially guided by Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance measures (De Meulenaer et al. 2015). However, other studies have presented slightly different findings, highlighting methodological concerns in measuring cultural orientations and proposing that cultural orientation may only partially explain the effectiveness of fear appeals (Jansen and Verstappen 2014; Jansen and Van Der Kroef 2019). Additionally, some research indicates that advertisements may reflect aspirational rather than dominant cultural values—a phenomenon known as the “value paradox” (De Meulenaer et al. 2015; Sook Moon and Chan 2005). This suggests that in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, messaging might not always provide the expected structure, but may instead utilize provocative “shock” imagery to disrupt traditional norms or appeal to modernizing aspirations. This potential disconnect between national cultural dimensions and actual creative execution underscores the necessity of analyzing the specific content of local and international campaigns.

The use of fear-arousing messages and “shockvertising” is common in breast cancer awareness campaigns (Dobrenova et al. 2019; Parry et al. 2013). Fear appeals aim to motivate behavioral changes by highlighting significant and personally relevant health threats while providing feasible countermeasures. The theoretical basis of fear appeals is rooted in frameworks such as Protection Motivation Theory (PMT; Rogers 1975, 1983; Floyd et al. 2000) and the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM; Witte 1992; Witte and Allen 2000). These models posited that message processing involves threat appraisal (evaluation of severity and susceptibility) and coping appraisal (evaluation of response efficacy and self-efficacy). According to the

EPPM, when both threat and efficacy perceptions are high, individuals engage in danger control and take protective measures; conversely, when perceived threat is high, but efficacy is low, individuals may default to fear control, characterized by denial or defensive avoidance (Witte 1994). While moderate fear can encourage the systematic processing of health information and enhance attitude change, the practical application often faces issues such as imbalanced messaging (De Hoog et al. 2007; Ruiter et al. 2001). When threat messages outweigh efficacy messages, the communication may inadvertently trigger fear control, thereby undermining the campaign's effectiveness.

This study aims to empirically evaluate the design of existing health-related communication messages, particularly in breast cancer awareness campaigns, by examining their correlation with the uncertainty avoidance dimension, and specifically answer the following question:

RQ: To what extent does the national cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance (UAI) influence the visual and rhetorical construction—specifically image type, breast representation, persuasion type, and shock value—of breast cancer awareness advertisements globally?

By analyzing a sample of 208 static image advertisements from various countries, this research seeks to uncover significant relationships between cultural uncertainty avoidance and key characteristics of these advertisements, such as image type, visual representation of breasts, persuasion type, and shock value. The findings could contribute to a better understanding of how cultural context influences the visual and rhetorical construction of public health messaging, offering insights for more effective and culturally sensitive campaign development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Uncertainty Avoidance and Fear Appeals

Uncertainty avoidance significantly shapes the effectiveness of health communication by influencing individuals' reactions to ambiguous health information. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance exhibit heightened anxiety and avoidance behaviors when confronted with ambiguous health-related information, necessitating clear, structured, and detailed communication strategies (Kuang and Wilson 2017; Vishwanath 2003). Uncertainty avoidance thus requires tailored communication approaches to effectively manage public health responses and decision-making processes.

Many researchers have explored how national and individual cultural orientations affect the reception and effectiveness of persuasive messages, notably focusing on the use of fear appeals (Bartikowski et al. 2019; Jansen and Verstappen 2014; Vincent and Dubinsky 2005). The results from these studies do not show a clear picture of the impact or uncertainty avoidance. Recognizing these cultural variations is essential for the success of international advertising and health campaigns (Bartikowski et al. 2019; Sook Moon and Chan 2005).

A foundational framework often employed to understand these cultural differences is Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede et al. 2010). This theory proposes that national cultures vary along several dimensions, such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. These dimensions have been used to predict and explain variations in advertising content and consumer responses across different countries (Sook Moon and Chan 2005). Uncertainty avoidance, measured on Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), describes the extent to which members of a culture can feel uncomfortable or even threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. High uncertainty avoidance cultures are characterized by a preference for clear rules, structured environments, and predictability, impacting how they manage stress, rules, and future planning, as these can impact the effectiveness of communication (Hofstede et al. 2010).

Research on fear appeals—messages designed to motivate behavior change by highlighting negative consequences—has investigated whether their effectiveness is moderated by the receiver's cultural background. Bartikowski et al. (2019) conduct a content analysis of print advertisements in Canada, China, and France and find significant variations in the frequency and types of fear appeals used, reflecting cultural sensitivities. For example, China predominantly uses social and self-esteem fear appeals, whereas physical fear appeals dominate in France and Canada. This indicates that advertisers tailor approaches based on perceived cultural sensitivities, potentially guided by Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance measures.

Tapping into further research examining cultural influences, Jansen and Verstappen (2014) explore responses to self-targeted versus family-targeted health-related fear appeals among Dutch and Spanish participants; contrary to an earlier assumption that a receiver's nationality or cultural orientation (particularly individualism versus collectivism) would interact with the type of fear appeal message used. Specifically, it was assumed that self-targeted threats would be more

effective in individualistic cultures, while group- or family-targeted threats would resonate more strongly in collectivistic cultures because in collectivist settings a person's behavior reflects on the broader family or community. Their study does not identify significant nationality or cultural orientation interaction effects; however, the study highlights methodological concerns in measuring cultural orientations. Similarly, Jansen and Van Der Kroef (2019) compare participants from the Netherlands, China, and South Africa regarding their responses to similar fear appeals. Although nationality-based interactions concerning perceived severity, susceptibility, and danger control are observed, cultural orientation offers only partial explanatory power. These findings underscore the nuanced relationship between cultural orientation and fear appeal effectiveness, challenging overly simplistic assumptions and highlighting a need for refined measurement approaches.

Beyond the research area of fear appeals, Sook Moon and Chan (2005) compared television commercials in Hong Kong and Korea, considering Hofstede's dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity. Their analysis reveals that, paradoxically, Korean advertisements—despite being from a high uncertainty avoidance culture—often reflect low uncertainty avoidance values. This phenomenon, termed “value paradox,” suggests that advertisements may reflect aspirational rather than dominant cultural values. In health communication, the value paradox becomes a balancing act between authority and autonomy. While a high-UAI culture, such as South Korea, would be expected to respect the expertise of doctors and the safety of clinical data, health campaigns may need to pivot toward low-UAI themes to overcome the rigidity of social expectations.

Vincent and Dubinsky (2005) also explore the impact of fear appeals in a cross-cultural context, specifically comparing reactions to high and low threat advertisements in France and the United States. They find that a high level of threat significantly induces greater fear and purchase intention compared to low threat levels. However, no significant cultural differences between French and U.S. subjects are observed, suggesting complexity in how cultural uncertainty avoidance interacts with fear appeals and underscoring the importance of further cross-cultural exploration in this area.

De Meulenaer et al. (2015) investigate how individual differences in uncertainty avoidance, anxiety, and chance belief influence the processing of health risk messages. Their research reveals that perceived efficacy has a stronger influence on message

acceptance among low-uncertainty-avoidance groups, whereas perceived threat has a stronger impact among high-anxiety individuals. This highlights the importance of individual psychological characteristics alongside cultural dimensions in fear appeal effectiveness.

In conclusion, while there is a general consensus that culture influences communication, the precise mechanisms and the extent of this influence, particularly concerning fear appeals and specific cultural dimensions, remain subjects of ongoing research and debate. Studies such as Bartikowski et al. (2019) and Sook Moon and Chan (2005) highlight variations in advertising practices across cultures, while others, such as Jansen and Van Der Kroef (2019) and Jansen and Verstappen (2014), explore the impact of cultural factors on health message reception. However, the direct applicability of broad cultural dimensions such as those proposed by Hofstede is sometimes challenged by empirical findings, pointing towards the need for more refined models and methodologies in cross-cultural communication research.

2.2 Fear Appeal and Shockvertising

The use of fear-arousing messages and shockvertising in breast cancer awareness campaigns is common but remains contentious. Fear appeals are designed to motivate behavior change by highlighting significant and personally relevant health threats and providing feasible means to counteract them (Ruiter et al. 2001). The theoretical foundation of fear appeals rests on two cognitive appraisals: threat appraisal (severity and susceptibility) and coping appraisal (response efficacy and self-efficacy) (De Hoog et al. 2007; Kline and Mattson 2000). When both threat and efficacy perceptions are high, individuals engage in “danger control”, actively taking protective measures. Conversely, high perceived threat paired with low efficacy can trigger “fear control” involving denial or defensive avoidance (Ruiter et al. 2001). While acknowledging that the literature shows a wide variety of outcomes, Keller and Lehmann (2008) summarise that moderate fear appeals are most effective for increasing behavioral intentions. Their meta-analysis indicates that most studies suggest that while low levels of fear arousal tend to have a negligible impact, high levels can precipitate a counterproductive effect. They note, however, that the influence of fear is often moderated by individual characteristics; high-fear appeals may be persuasive among individuals with a high degree of personal involvement in the issue, whereas low-fear appeals can be more effective for an audience that is less involved (Keller and Block 1996).

Evidence suggests that moderate fear effectively encourages systematic processing of health

information, enhancing engagement and attitude change. Research by Meyerowitz and Chaiken (1987) indicates that loss-framed messaging is more effective in promoting monthly breast self-examination (BSE). Study participants who were exposed to information emphasizing the negative consequences of omitting BSE demonstrated markedly more positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviors related to the practice than those who received gain-framed messages or materials with no persuasive content. In addition, Ruiter (2001) stresses that mild fear arousal related to BSE promotes a more careful consideration of the information. Moreover, narrative-based fear appeals effectively evoke emotional engagement, meaningfully influencing attitudes and intentions by drawing audiences into a compelling personal story—a process known as transportation (Ooms et al. 2017). Mas et al. (2024) find that Latin American participants exhibit a notably stronger emotional response to fear-inducing media compared to European participants. This highlights the considerable impact of cultural context on emotional processing of fear appeals and emphasizes the importance of tailoring fear-based messages to specific cultural sensitivities.

Witte and Allen’s (2000) meta-analysis demonstrates that strong fear appeals generally produce high levels of perceived severity and susceptibility and are significantly more persuasive than low or weak appeals. Using the extended parallel process model (EPPM), they confirmed that strong fear appeals combined with high-efficacy messages yield the greatest behavior change, while strong fear appeals coupled with low-efficacy messages provoke the highest defensive responses, including denial and avoidance. Moreover, their analysis suggests a consistently positive linear relationship between fear appeal strength and persuasive outcomes.

However, the practical application of fear appeals often encounters issues such as imbalanced messaging or generating negative emotions in the wrong target group. Kline and Mattson’s (2000) analysis of BSE pamphlets reveals that threat messages far outweigh efficacy messages, undermining persuasive effectiveness and potentially leading to fear control rather than protective behaviors. Moreover, fear appeals risk unintended negative effects on non-target audiences. Jones and Owen (2006) find that high-threat mammography messages considerably distress younger women, who were not the primary audience, while not motivating the intended older demographic. This highlights the need for more precise audience targeting and careful message calibration.

Extreme fear appeals may evolve into shockvertising,

deliberately violating social norms to capture attention (Dahl et al. 2003). However, the “shock” in shockvertising is inherently tied to a culture’s ethical and social boundaries. In high-UAI contexts, where there is a lower tolerance for the violation of social norms and a higher emphasis on formal rules (Hofstede et al., 2010), shock tactics involving nudity or graphic medical imagery may be perceived not just as provocative, but as ethically transgressive or socially irresponsible. Conversely, in lower-UAI cultures, the “shock” may be viewed as a necessary tool for authenticity or emotional “truth-telling”. These varying ethical thresholds likely mediate how advertisers in different regions navigate the tension between the need to capture attention and the need to maintain social legitimacy, directly influencing the design choices observed in breast cancer campaigns. When it comes to breast cancer awareness, campaigns employing graphic imagery to highlight post-mastectomy realities are clear examples of shockvertising’s effectiveness in achieving attention and message retention. Parry et al. (2013) subscribe to the idea that shock tactics are perceived as more justifiable for not-for-profit (NFP) organizations than for-profit (FP) campaigns. However, such tactics require careful execution. Dobrenova et al. (2019) analyze online breast cancer advertisements, finding varied and sometimes misaligned use of emotional appeals such as fear, humor, erotic, shame-guilt, across detection behaviors, suggesting that advertisers may not consistently apply evidence-based strategies.

These findings collectively underscore the importance of culturally appropriate strategies that explicitly address ambiguity, enhancing communication effectiveness within diverse cultural contexts. Based on the existing literature regarding cultural dimensions and fear appeals, this study tests the following hypotheses:

- H1: Advertisements from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance will utilize more structured and detailed informational content (high efficacy) compared to those from low-uncertainty avoidance cultures.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between a country’s (UAI) and the visual representation of breasts, with high-UAI cultures utilizing more abstract or symbolic representations to avoid social ambiguity.
- H3: Shock value in advertisements will be more prevalent in not-for-profit (NFP) campaigns than in for-profit (FP) campaigns, regardless of cultural orientation.
- H4: In line with the Value Paradox, advertisements

in high-UAI cultures (e.g., South Korea or Japan) may occasionally utilize higher shock levels or low-UAI themes to appeal to aspirational modern values, contradicting traditional UAI predictions.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

The final sample for this content analysis consists of a total of 208 advertisements for breast cancer awareness created between 2010 and 2024. The sources used to gather the advertisements include advertisement repositories (Adsoftheworld, History of Advertising Trust, The Advertising Archives, Campaignsoftheworld, Adsspot), specialized publications (Adage, Adweek, Lürzer’s Archive), and the author’s personal photographic collection of posters and print advertisements seen around Japan, France, and the United Kingdom. Whenever necessary, other sources such as non-profit organization websites and Google image search are used to gather larger resolution images of any repository sources that are not clearly readable. All the items included in the sample are static images, some originating from the print media, others having been created for online use. No videos or animations are included in the sample.

3.2 Procedures

3.2.1 Sample refinement

The total number of breast cancer awareness advertisements found is 310. From this total, 17 are removed because it is not possible to identify the countries of origin of the campaigns. A further three are from countries that are not included in Hofstede’s UAI (Botswana, $n=1$; Rwanda, $n=1$; Zimbabwe, $n=1$).

In the total of usable 290 advertisements, some countries (USA, $n=89$; Japan, $n=40$) or geographical regions (North America, $n=93$; Europe and Russia, $n=71$) are overwhelmingly represented, so the following rules are applied in order to create a balance between geographical regions while keeping a normalized distribution of UAI values across the sample.

- Ensure the sample’s mean and median UAI values are close for the sample to be normally distributed.
- Keep as many entries as possible.
- Ensure that all countries present in the usable sample are represented in the final sample.

- Ensure that the sample is evenly distributed across the geographical regions of the world.
- Ensure that geographical regions are grouped using similar UAI value ranges.
- Any exclusion from a country's sub-sample is done at random.

This leads to the changes listed in Table 1; the final sample obeys all the rules for inclusion and has an average UAI value of 66.64 with a median UAI value of 66.

Table 1: Exclusions and Final Sample Breakdown

Region	Original usable sample	Exclusions	Final sample
North America	93	USA -57	41
South and Central America (including Mexico)	24	None	24
Middle East and Africa	30	None	30
East Asia (Japan and South Korea, High UAI)	41	None	41
South East Asia / Oceania (Low to mid UAI)	31	None	31
Europe & Russia	71	France -5 Germany -2 Greece -4 Italy -3 Portugal -5 Romania -4 UK -7	41
Total	290		208
Final sample breakdown: Australia, n=4; Austria, n=1; Bolivia, n=3; Brazil, n=7; Canada, n=4; Chile, n=1; China, n=5; Colombia, n=2; Czech Republic, n=1; Ecuador, n=1; Egypt, n=3; France, n=4; Germany, n=2; Greece, n=2; Honduras, n=1; India, n=4; Iraq, n=1; Ireland, n=1; Israel, n=2; Italy, n=3; Japan, n=40; Kenya, n=4; Kuwait, n=3; Lebanon, n=3; Malaysia, n=2; Mexico, n=3; Morocco, n=1; Mozambique, n=2; Netherlands, n=3; New Zealand, n=8; Nigeria, n=2; Peru, n=2; Poland, n=3; Portugal, n=4; Puerto Rico, n=1; Romania, n=4; Russia, n=5; Saudi Arabia, n=1; Singapore, n=4; South Africa, n=4; South Korea, n=1; Spain, n=3; Taiwan, n=1; Thailand, n=3; UAE, n=4; UK, n=5; Uruguay, n=1; USA, n=37; Venezuela, n=2.			

awareness advertisements fall into the Public Service Announcement category (PSA). PSAs are typically produced or commissioned by not-for-profit (NFP) organizations such as NPOs and NGOs, or government bodies. These are often then produced and distributed pro bono by media outlets. The rest of the sample (n = 72) belongs to what can be broadly referred to as for-profit (FP) advertising, divided into either cause marketing (CM) or cause-related marketing (CRM). CM (n = 60), sometimes called awareness marketing (Minton and Cabano 2022), encompasses the campaigns that are produced by for-profit companies, with a view of increasing awareness for a cause while at the same time raising the companies' public image and possibly increasing sales as well. CRM (n = 10), on the other hand, is produced with a direct association between a company and a named not-for-profit organization that will directly receive payments or other benefits from the partner company's CRM campaign. It should be noted that while the distinction between CM and CRM does exist, Pracejus et al. (2003) suggest that CRM advertisements' copy is often abstract or vague, creating the potential for ambiguity in the legitimacy of the message. Among the FP companies, the sample can also be divided in terms of how congruent the advertising companies' activities are with the use of the pink ribbon and breast cancer awareness. Some FP companies, such as privately run hospitals or health insurance providers, could be deemed to have a legitimate reason to use medical issues in their marketing. The activities of other companies, including automotive manufacturers, restaurant chains, food and drinks distributors, may appear to be less congruent with breast cancer awareness. In some cases, these companies may even incur risk of being seen as "pinkwashing"—a term for cause marketing where companies exploit the pink ribbon's symbolism for profit while potentially undermining the very cause they claim to support.

Figure 1 shows an example of a cause marketing campaign produced by the UAE-based supermarket chain Big Mart, in which they encourage women to get regular check-ups for breast cancer. Figure 2 is a CRM campaign by Japanese underwear company Wacoal, which states they will donate 10 Japanese Yen to the Japan Cancer Society for every bra fitting done in Wacoal stores for the duration of the campaign. Figure 3 is an example of a PSA from a Brazilian hospital, which highlights the issue that images of female breasts cannot be posted on social media, but the scars from breast cancer removal operations are not censored.

The sample is divided into two broad categories, according to the kind of advertiser behind the campaigns. For the most part (n = 136), breast cancer



Figure 1: UAE's CM 'Breast Cancer Awareness' Campaign from Big Mart (BlackT Media for Big Mart 2023)



Figure 3: PSA from 'I Can Show Breasts on Social Media' (Propeg for Hospital Aristides Maltez 2016)



Figure 2: CRM 'Pink Ribbon Fitting Campaign' from Wacoal (Wacoal Corporation Public Relations and Advertising Department for Wacoal 2014)

3.2.2 Coders

Following Neuendorf's (2009) guidelines, two university students (one male, one female), blind to the research themes, served as coders. The researcher is not involved in the coding. Each coder received over two hours of training on the coding manual. A preliminary pilot test was carried out using 25 breast cancer awareness campaigns, all of which are distinct from the final study sample. Intercoder reliability is evaluated using Cohen's kappa for both the pilot test and the main sample. Upon successful completion of the pilot test, where reliability for every reported variable exceeded .700, the coders proceeded to independently code the main study sample. In the final coding reliability assessment, all variables achieved kappa values exceeding 0.75+. This cut-off was chosen as a compromise between Hayes's (2005, 128) 0.75+ and Krippendorff's (2019, 356) 0.80+, indicating substantial to excellent agreement beyond what would be expected by chance.

3.2.3 Coding Variables

3.2.3.1 Image Type

The type of visual content used in the advertisements is coded using four variables: photographic images, drawings, mixed visual (photograph and drawing used together in the design), and text-only. Photographs are more realistic and carry more visual information than drawings, but also tend to be more specific and can lower the relatability of the image. For instance, a younger viewer may feel as though the campaign

does not target them if it includes a photograph of an older woman. A generic sketch of a woman could more easily reach both younger and older audiences. The same issue extends to body size, breast shape, skin tone, etc. Text-only campaigns can be very powerful, but may require more attention to communicate the message, especially in designs where the amount of copy is substantial.

3.2.3.2 Visual Representation of Breasts

Extending the range of image types listed above, the sample is also coded to assess the type of visual representation of breasts. Campaigns are coded using four variables: actual breasts and/or nipples being displayed, visual metaphor of breasts and/or nipples, bust or bosom being central to the design, but fully or partially hidden under clothing or other cover, and breasts being altogether absent from the design.

3.2.3.3 Type of Persuasive Message Used

In order to assess the type of persuasive message used in the campaigns, the rhetorical appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos—are used as bases for this variable. These are foundational concepts in the art of persuasion (Williams et al. 2024). Ethos refers to the credibility and character of the source of information. In public health, this would apply to messages considered to be more persuasive if they come from trusted institutions such as famous NGOs and governmental bodies, or respected figures (such as doctors or scientists). The perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill of the source considerably impact whether the audience accepts the message. In a small number of campaigns ($n = 7$), the ethos appeal originates from the use of celebrities who have a direct connection to breast cancer. For example, American actress Emma Stone, whose mother is a breast cancer survivor, appeared in a campaign by Revlon, and Japanese actress Masumi Miyazaki, a survivor herself, in a PSA by AC Japan. The second form of appeal, pathos, is the appeal to emotion, aiming to evoke feelings in the audience that make them more receptive to the message. Public and private health campaigns often use pathos by eliciting fear (of disease or negative health outcomes), hope (for a healthier future), or empathy (for those affected by a health issue). These emotional connections can be powerful motivators for behavior change. Finally, logos is the appeal to logic and reason. This involves using facts, statistics, evidence-based arguments, and clear reasoning to convince an audience. Public health messages employ logos by presenting data on disease prevalence, risk factors, the effectiveness of early detection, and the scientific basis for health recommendations.

As this particular variable relies upon a clear understanding of the written content of the campaigns, a preliminary translation was done by the researcher using machine translation tools. The results were checked and confirmed or amended by native speakers of all the source languages (Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Thai). 18 campaigns are removed from the sample as no native speaker was available to provide a reliable translation. It is worth noting that while 159 campaigns originated from non-English speaking countries, it is common practice for campaigns to be translated by the advertisers themselves for wider dissemination or for submission to advertisement repositories and specialized publications. As a result, only a small number of these ($n = 62$) required actual translation.

3.2.3.4 Shock Value

The sample is also coded to assess the intensity of the textual and visual message. PSAs and related forms of advertising are often designed to communicate their message more directly, as the advertisers are less concerned about creating negative emotions in their audience. Shock tactics are commonly used in PSA campaigns and are considered to be acceptable. For-profit companies engaged in cause marketing must balance raising awareness with protecting their brand image from negative associations. It is worth noting that there seems to be no consensus in the literature about the effectiveness of using shock tactics in advertising, for both PSAs and for-profit campaigns. Nevertheless, CM and CRM campaigns sometimes use shock tactics as well, but the companies involved often prefer to use softer tactics to avoid possible negative reactions and emotions associated with them (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). When it comes to breast cancer advertising, the possibility of partial or complete breast removal because of surgery, and the prospect of death from the disease are two shocking messages that are present in some of the PSA campaigns analyzed. In addition, images of bare breasts and nipples, even healthy examples, may not be culturally, religiously, or legally acceptable, and such images can also be considered shocking when used in advertising. Visual metaphors are widely used to represent bosoms or breasts and nipples, as well as drawings and diagrams offering varying degrees of realism. The text content of the advertisements, including the use of statistics related to the incidence, epidemiology, or mortality rates of breast cancer, can also range from informational and neutral to outright threatening.

The shock value of the advertisements in the sample is rated on a five-point scale, using the criteria listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Shock Level Coding Criteria

Criteria	Description
1 – Tame	Gentle images of fully dressed women; no visible breasts or emphasis on the bosom area of the body; positive and encouraging impression and messages only. See Figure 1 for an example.
2 – Common	Visual metaphoric representation of healthy breasts or nipples; focus on healthy general body; no specific focus on breasts; overall positive impression and messages.
3 – Average	Clearly understandable drawings of breasts and nipples; emphasis on the covered bosom area of the body or cleavage; slightly negative impression and messages. See Figure 2 for an example.
4 – Challenging	Photographic or photo-realistic images of healthy breasts or nipples, suggestion of possible mastectomy (breast removal); visual metaphoric representation of diseased breasts or nipples; negative impression and messages.
5 – Shocking	Photographic or photo-realistic images of diseased breasts or nipples; photographic or photo-realistic images of the scars resulting from the mastectomy operation; suggestion of possible death; strongly negative impression and messages. See Figure 3 for an example.

It is worth pointing out that the criteria developed for measuring the shock value variable of this sample are designed to be a relative scale rather than an absolute ranking. Depictions or suggestive drawings of nudity are strongly taboo or outright illegal in some cultures. What could be considered “average” in one place may be deemed “shocking” in another. This can be clearly illustrated when considering the following country pairs, which, while having very similar UAI values, have different state or dominant religions and therefore very different views or regulations about the representation of nudity: Pakistan & Austria UAI = 70, Iran & Finland UAI = 59, Indonesia & Canada UAI = 48, Malaysia & United Kingdom UAI = 36~35 (Hofstede et al. 2010).

3.3 Analytical Framework

- ANOVA is used to test how the continuous variable (“Uncertainty Avoidance Index”) varied across the categories of other variables. Tukey’s HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) post-hoc test is then used to identify where any significant differences lie.
- The Chi-squared test is used to find associations between the coding of two categorical variables.

4. RESULTS

The main coding results converted to percentages are presented in Figure 4. Statistical analysis reveals significant correlations between Hofstede’s UAI and the design characteristics of the breast cancer awareness advertisements sampled. The key findings of ANOVA and Chi-squared tests are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

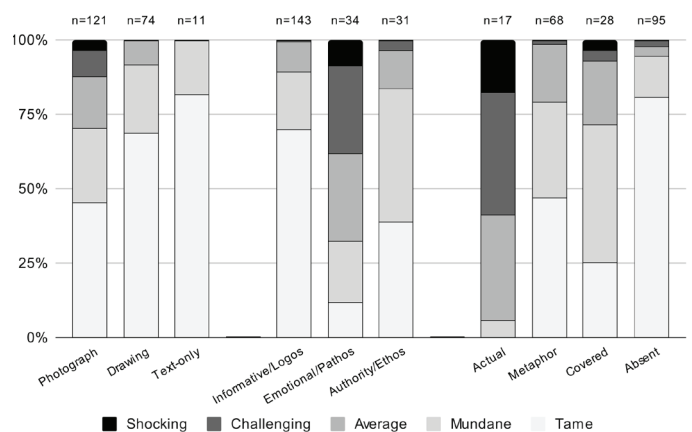


Figure 4: Shock Value by Image Type, Main Persuasion Type, and Breast Representation

Overall, as illustrated in Figure 4, most campaigns are relatively mild. Across nearly all categories, the largest portions fall into “tame” and “mundane,” meaning they are designed to be safe, non-confrontational, and broadly acceptable to audiences. Looking at the visual format, photograph-based campaigns include slightly more “challenging” or “shocking” content compared to drawings or text-only messages, which are almost entirely tame. This suggests that real images may be used when campaigns want a stronger emotional impact. In terms of message type, emotional (pathos-based) campaigns stand out as the most intense. They contain the highest proportions of “challenging” and “shocking” content, indicating that emotional appeals are more likely to use stronger imagery or messaging. In contrast, informative (logos) and authority-based (ethos) campaigns are mostly moderate or mild. Finally, campaigns that present the issue in a more direct or “actual” way tend to be more intense than those using metaphors or more indirect approaches. Metaphorical campaigns are generally safer and less likely to be shocking.

Table 3 ANOVA Test Results

ANOVA p values	Image Type	Breasts Representation	Persuasion Type	Shock Value
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	0.001	0.023	0.012	0.000

Table 4 Chi-squared Test Results

Chi-squared test p values	Image Type	Breast Representation	Persuasion Type	Shock Value
Advertiser	0.526	0.002	0.053	0.000
Image Type		0.037	0.583	0.021
Breast Representation			0.000	0.000
Persuasion Type				0.000

An ANOVA test indicates a statistically significant relationship between the UAI of the country of origin and the primary image type used in the advertisements ($p = 0.001$). A post-hoc analysis revealed that this difference is most pronounced between advertisements using photographic images and those using drawings. The UAI also shows a significant correlation with:

- Breast representation ($p = 0.023$), with a notable difference between advertisements featuring actual breasts and those where breasts were absent.
- Persuasion type ($p = 0.012$).
- Shock value ($p = 0.000$).

Specifically, advertisements from countries with higher UAI scores were associated with “Tame” and “Common” shock values. Conversely, as the shock value increases, the associated UAI score tends to decrease. This confirms that cultures with high uncertainty avoidance may favor more informative and less direct advertising approaches.

The Chi-squared test results reinforce these findings, showing statistically significant relationships between several categorical variables (Table 4). Strong associations are found between the shock value of an advertisement and its image type ($p = 0.021$), breast representation ($p = 0.000$), and persuasion type ($p = 0.000$).

Furthermore, the type of advertiser showed a significant correlation with:

- Breast Representation ($p = 0.002$).
- Shock Value ($p = 0.000$).

The relationship between advertiser and persuasion type is nearly significant ($p = 0.053$) and was considered close enough to the 0.050 threshold to be relevant for discussion. Photographs are found to have a greater emotional impact than drawings or text-only designs, aligning with the significant correlation found between image type and shock value.

4.1 Hypothesis Testing

4.1.1 H1: Uncertainty Avoidance and Informational Content

The analysis supports H1. The ANOVA test revealed a statistically significant relationship between the UAI and the primary persuasion type used in the advertisements ($p=0.012$). Advertisements originating from high-UAI countries were significantly more likely to utilize logos-based persuasive appeals, which rely on facts, statistics, and logical reasoning. This aligns with the preference in high-UAI cultures for clear, structured, and detailed communication strategies to manage the anxiety associated with ambiguous health information.

4.1.2 H2: Uncertainty Avoidance and Visual Representation of Breasts

The analysis supports H2. There is a statistically significant correlation between the UAI of an advertisement's country of origin and the nature of breast representation ($p=0.023$). Advertisements from countries with higher UAI scores predominantly featured symbolic depictions or the complete absence of breasts. In contrast, more direct and photographic imagery was associated with countries scoring lower on the UAI. This suggests that high-UAI cultures utilize abstract visual strategies to avoid the social ambiguity and discomfort associated with explicit health imagery.

4.1.3 H3: Shock Value in NFP vs. FP Campaigns

The analysis supports H3. A Chi-squared test showed a highly significant relationship between the type of advertiser and the shock value of the campaign ($p=0.000$). As predicted, shock tactics were found to be more prevalent and acceptable in PSAs typically commissioned by NFP organizations. Conversely, FP entities—including those engaged in cause marketing—favored “tame” or “softer” tactics to avoid potentially negative associations with their brand.

4.1.4 H4: The Value Paradox in High-UAI Cultures

The analysis largely refutes H4. While H4 predicted that high-UAI cultures might utilize shock imagery to appeal to modernizing, “low-UAI” aspirational values, the results showed a consistently inverse relationship between UAI and shock value ($p=0.000$). As a country's UAI score increased, the associated shock value of its advertisements tended to decrease, favoring “Tame” and “Common” levels of intensity. This indicates that in the specific context of health communication, advertisers are more likely to adhere to dominant, protective cultural norms rather than challenging them with paradoxical aspirational themes.

5. DISCUSSION

The results suggest that some significant correlations exist between uncertainty avoidance and the general design trends of public and private health-related communication.

This further supports the idea that countries with a higher tolerance for uncertainty (lower UAI) might be more receptive to advertisements with higher shock values, while countries with a lower tolerance for uncertainty (higher UAI) seem to be associated with advertisements that have a more moderate approach (Tame or Mundane) to message communication. This somehow contradicts the “value paradox” introduced by Sook Moon and Chan (2005), who subscribe to the idea that advertisements in a high-UAI culture (Korea) sometimes reflect *low-UAI* (aspirational) values. While the “value paradox” may apply to some forms of commercial or product advertising, it appears less relevant in the context of health communication. Matters of health and disease are inherently anxiety-provoking and represent a high-threat context. In such scenarios, individuals in high-UAI cultures prioritize the reduction of ambiguity and the restoration of a sense of control. Consequently, advertisers likely follow dominant, protective cultural norms by providing clear, structured, and “tame” guidance, rather than risking the defensive avoidance triggered by “shocking” aspirational themes. In addition, in high-UAI societies, there is a lower tolerance for the violation of social norms. For-profit entities engaging in CM or CRM advertising may be doubly motivated to create “Tame” campaigns to minimize reputational risk and maintain social legitimacy.

The content analysis reveals statistically significant relationships between the UAI and several key characteristics of breast cancer advertisements and suggests that the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance influences not only the emotional tone of public health messaging but also its visual and rhetorical construction. This stands in contrast to studies that found a more ambiguous connection between cultural orientation and how people responded to fear appeals (Jansen and Van Der Kroef, 2019; Jansen and Verstappen, 2014). The difference in outcome may be due to the nature of the health issue presented in the messages studied (chlamydia vs. breast cancer) and the presence of CM and CRM in the current study’s sample, as opposed to a story-based fear appeal in the chlamydia studies.

Breast representation shows significant variation by UAI levels. Countries scoring higher on the UAI

tend to feature advertisements in which breasts are either absent or represented symbolically, rather than depicted explicitly. Similarly, shock value was inversely related to UAI, as higher uncertainty avoidance cultures predominantly employed tame or mundane messaging, whereas countries with lower UAI scores were more likely to tolerate challenging and shocking content. This trend implies a cultural preference among high-UAI societies for emotional restraint and avoidance of potentially discomforting stimuli in health communications.

Persuasion type is also significantly associated with UAI, indicating that high-UAI cultures may prefer informational or rational appeals over emotional or fear-based strategies. Image Type, as a broader visual category, likewise shows a strong correlation with UAI, suggesting that the overall visual framing of advertisements—whether abstract, symbolic, or realistic—varies systematically with cultural attitudes toward uncertainty.

For example, significant associations are found between the type of advertiser and most of the variables, confirming that not only cultural values but also institutional sources of the advertisements (e.g., governmental vs. NGO vs. corporate advertisers) play a role in shaping the form and tone of the messaging. Furthermore, the significant relationship between Image Type and Shock Value ($p = 0.021$) underscores the interconnectedness of visual style and emotional intensity in the advertisements.

Taken together, these results underscore a broader pattern: high-UAI cultures appear to gravitate toward advertising strategies that reduce ambiguity, emotional intensity, and visual directness. In contrast, low-UAI cultures demonstrate greater openness to risk, ambiguity, and emotional confrontation in media content. In addition, for-profit entities in high-UAI countries may be doubly motivated to create “Tame” campaigns—driven by both the national cultural preference for avoiding uncertainty and their own corporate imperative to minimize reputational risk. For example, countries such as Japan, Portugal, and Greece, which score high on Hofstede’s UAI, may prefer breast cancer advertisements that emphasize symbolism, clarity, and emotional moderation. These might include campaigns focusing on education, support networks, or medical guidance, often avoiding explicit visuals or emotionally charged imagery. This is corroborated by Yfantidou and Skandali’s study (2025) of Greek women’s perceptions of breast cancer advertisements. Greece is a high uncertainty avoidance country (UAI = 112, rank No.1), and the study shows that Greek women are more motivated by positive advertisements with reliable data and credible endorsements, preferring

tame, informational (logos), and trustworthy (ethos) messages.

On the other hand, countries such as Denmark, Great Britain, and New Zealand, which exhibit lower levels of uncertainty avoidance (UAI = 23, 35, 49, respectively), are more likely to produce or respond positively to advertisements employing direct breast imagery, fear appeals, or shocking elements to provoke strong reactions and raise awareness.

The findings can also be interpreted through the lens of Witte and Allen's Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM) (2000), which posits that individuals' responses to fear appeals depend on the balance between perceived threat and perceived efficacy. In high-UAI cultures, the tendency to avoid ambiguity and discomfort may predispose individuals to engage in fear control responses—such as denial or message avoidance—especially when advertisements emphasize threat without accompanying efficacy cues. This may explain the preference for tame imagery and logos-based messages that reduce emotional intensity and ambiguity. Conversely, in low-UAI cultures, where there is greater tolerance for uncertainty and emotional confrontation, individuals may be more likely to engage in danger control responses, especially when high-threat messages are paired with clear efficacy components. Thus, the observed cultural variation in shock value, persuasion type, and visual representation may reflect culturally contingent pathways through the EPPM framework, reinforcing the need for campaign designs that align with both cultural orientations and psychological processing styles.

5.1 Limitations

This study is limited to an empirical evaluation of the way existing health-related communication messages are designed, the fear-inducing and shock levels of their messages, and how this correlates with the uncertainty avoidance characteristics of the countries they originate from. It does not measure how effective such messages are on their target populations.

One country-specific limitation of the sample used in this study is that most of the Japanese breast cancer awareness campaigns are the result of yearly design competitions organized by Pink Ribbon Festival, supported by the Japan Cancer Society. The winners of these competitions are widely circulated on SNS channels, and prints are displayed in hospitals and clinics. The entries in these competitions are not necessarily created by advertising or design professionals, as members of the public can also enter (Japan Cancer Society 2022). In the Japanese sample, only six of the PSA campaigns included were

produced by AC Japan (the Japanese equivalent of the USA's Ad Council) or other established NPOs and NGOs. Correlation analysis performed on the final sample, excluding 27 amateur-created campaigns from Japan, returned highly similar ANOVA values (Image Type, $p=0.0282$; Breasts Representation, $p = 0.0194$; Persuasion Type, $p=0.0139$; Shock Value, $p=0.0008$). Nonetheless, the Pink Ribbon campaigns, regardless of who produced them, accurately represent the reality of the Japanese breast cancer advertising landscape and are, therefore, considered valid for inclusion in the sample. It should be noted that the intrinsically amateur nature of the Pink Ribbon design competition, which is responsible for most of the Japanese entries in the sample, means that the designs and messages in many of the advertisements may not be of a professional standard. These "amateur" designs could, however, be interpreted as a more direct and unfiltered expression of the public's own comfort level and creative instincts regarding the breast cancer communications. For example, the 2022 contest entries were pulled by the organizers, following complaints from members of the public and breast cancer sufferers about the message contained in some of the entries (HuffPost Japan Edition 2022; Japan Cancer Society 2022). This could be seen as a powerful real-world example of a high-UAI culture actively rejecting communication that causes discomfort. At the time of writing, there appear to be no plans to hold a competition in the foreseeable future.

5.2 Recommendations

This study did not code or assess for efficacy. Future research could investigate whether the campaigns from low-UAI countries that were coded as "challenging" or "shocking" appear to provide clear, empowering calls to action, and whether the "tame" or "mundane" logos-driven campaigns in high-UAI countries inherently provide a stronger sense of efficacy by offering clear, structured information and reducing anxiety from the outset. In low-UAI cultures, advertisers may successfully use shock to grab attention, but it is critical that this is balanced with prominent, high-efficacy information to guide audiences toward danger control. In high-UAI cultures, the strategy should be different as the message itself should be designed to minimize ambiguity and anxiety, building trust (ethos) and providing logical, clear guidance (logos) as the primary pathway to motivating behavior, as fear-inducing messages may be rejected outright.

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The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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