

The Impact of Digital Content Marketing Strategies on Egyptian Gen Z's Consumer Behavior Towards Startup Up Projects

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of three digital content marketing strategies: storytelling, user-generated content, and influencer marketing, on Egyptian Generation Z consumer behavior in the context of startup projects, by analyzing their brand recall, trust, purchase intention, and engagement level. Guided by Dual Process Theory (DPT) and Media Richness Theory (MRT), the research inspects how intuitive versus analytical content formats shape Gen Z decision-making. It employs a mixed-method approach, where the survey collects data from Egyptian Gen Z consumers, and the in-depth interviews gather creator insights from startup founders in Egypt. The survey results show that emotionally appealing content enhances brand engagement and Recall, while intuitive-processing formats (formats with high cues), such as short videos and visuals, drive spontaneous behavior. It also shows that analytical processing content formats (formats with low cues), such as reviews and detailed posts, drive purchase decisions. The findings also highlight the significant differences between the three strategies examined, where storytelling creates a strong emotional brand-consumer connection, which enhances brand recall, while user-generated content fosters authenticity and community trust, and influencer marketing increases brand exposure but with mixed effects on trust. This contributes to literature on digital marketing in general and digital content marketing in specific, and consumer behavior by understanding a strong purchasing power demographic like Egyptian Gen Z, offering actionable insights to startup owners in Egypt into how to choose their content strategies and how to enhance content in ways to optimize brand trust, awareness, Recall, and purchase intention.

Keywords: Digital Content Marketing; Dual Process Theory; Egypt; Gen Z; Influencer Marketing; Media Richness Theory; MSMEs; Startups; Storytelling Marketing; User-Generated Content.

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technologies and the Internet has had a profound impact on our day-to-day lives and tasks, from communication to the way companies fulfill their needs and interact with their shareholders and their consumers. This constant development also influenced consumers' behavior and impacted their purchasing decisions and attitudes.

Social media allowed individuals, brands, and consumers to express their opinions and ideas and share information without time or place limitations, providing a way to preserve robust customer relations.

As this dependency grows, it is important for businesses to optimize their work to this changing dynamic by leveraging digital platforms, especially social media, to build a strong relationship with their consumers (El Salmy & Eman, 2025).

Digital marketing, especially social media marketing (SMM), allows brands to target potential consumers, as well as enhance consumer engagement and experience (Purnomo, 2023). This effect has been notable since the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, which motivated businesses to do a digital transformation to reach their consumers (Gabhane *et al.*, 2023). SMM and

e-commerce reshaped the online shopping experience, especially through the adoption of digital content marketing (DCM) strategies and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM).

DCM is a comprehensive approach that fosters engaging and attracting consumers online, where valuable and relevant content is created and distributed online to attract potential consumers as well as retain current ones (Kahla & Kortam, 2024). The main strategies for DCM include user-generated content (UGC), where consumers promote the brand through reviews and posts, influencer marketing, where opinion leaders build trust with brand consumers and affect their purchasing decision, and storytelling marketing, where brands use an emotional narrative to create a connection with consumers (He *et al.*, 2021). Using these strategies help build brand equity, especially consumer-based brand equity (CBBE), focusing on brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, brand trust, and brand experience (Parris & Guzmán, 2023), which influencer consumer behavior as DCM facilitates more informed, interactive, and emotionally engaging decision-making processes (du Plessis, 2022) that triggers consumer psychology and influences their behavior and purchasing decisions (Qazzafi, 2020).

When it comes to Generation Zoomers (Gen Z) consumers, it is important for businesses to understand that their behaviors are triggered differently, especially as they are the “always connected generation”. Gen Z is those who are born between 1997 and 2012, and are known to be digital natives who prefer transparent and authentic brands, with high levels of emotional expression and online engagement. Egyptian Gen Z is no different, showing high activity on online platforms including TikTok and Instagram, and is influenced by DCM strategies, particularly storytelling, UGC, and influencer marketing (Mussa, 2023).

In Egypt, startups play a foundational role in economic development, which is enhanced by digital transformation and governmental support. They have to utilize DCM as it is both cost-effective and effective in building brand equity and communication with Gen Z consumers (Ghaly, 2023). Egyptian Gen Z consumers' behavior towards startups is shaped by their DCM strategies, especially on social media platforms, affecting brand perception, brand trust, and brand experience, therefore deeply affecting their consumer behavior and consumer decision-making process (Khayal & El-Menawy, 2024).

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

DCM is considered the optimal strategy for businesses

all around the world, especially in Egypt; thus, it is important for startups, especially those targeting Gen Z consumers, to strongly adopt DCM strategies in their overall marketing strategies to enhance their brand equity and, therefore, retain current consumers and attract potential ones.

Gen Z consumers in general are more complex to understand for marketers, as they prefer transparency and authenticity, as well as an emotional connection. Egyptian Gen Z consumers in particular showed interest in social media and reliance on it when it comes to their purchasing decisions, particularly TikTok and Instagram (Mussa, 2023). Since UGC is considered credible, influencer marketing reflects the sense of connection, and storytelling works on the emotional side of the consumer-brand relationship (He, *et al.*, 2021), it is important to study their impact on Egyptian Gen Z's consumer behavior to (1) help improve the Egyptian economy through startups, (2) support Egyptian startups and decrease the number of the unemployed, (3) support the boycott movement, and (4) enhance the Egyptian marketing landscape.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Startup businesses are one of the most important and popular types of businesses in Egypt in the past decade, notably as the government creates initiatives to support them (Zaazou & Salman Abdou, 2020). Thus, it is extremely important to study ways to increase its potential and market share, and since Generation Z (Gen Z) is one of the biggest buying powers of all generations, it is important to study them deeply.

DCM contributes to brand image and brand trust, which strengthens brand loyalty and overall brand equity – especially consumer-based brand equity, which works best for Gen Z. Types of DCM strategies include: (1) Influencer marketing, which creates buzz and online word-of-mouth (WOM), giving 11 times higher return on investment (ROI) than normal digital marketing. (2) UGC: which is the content created by the users themselves, driving trust through co-creation. (3) Storytelling marketing: which evokes emotional connection through consumer involvement (He *et al.*, 2021).

The academic contribution includes filling the significant gap in the literature examining DCM's effect on Gen Z, especially in Egypt. Also, consumer behavior theories are barely used to test digital marketing models, especially by integrating them with DCM strategies, including UGC, influencer marketing, and storytelling.

The practical contribution includes helping Egyptian

startups and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by identifying the DCM strategy with the biggest impact, especially for Egyptian Gen Z. It also contributes to giving insights on how DCM impacts brand equity, focusing on brand awareness, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand image.

Moreover, on the societal and economic level, it encourages entrepreneurial communication and helps startups grow in the competitive digital market landscape. It also supports the digital transformation goals in Egypt, which the government focuses on, through supporting digital readiness and deeply studying DCM strategies of local businesses.

1.3 Research Objectives

- a) To investigate the impact of DCM strategies on consumer behavior among Egyptian Generation Z consumers in the context of startup businesses.
- b) To examine the differential impact of various digital content formats on Egyptian Gen Z consumer decision-making through the lens of dual cognitive processing towards startups.
- c) To determine how media richness influences Egyptian Gen Z consumer engagement and trust in user-generated and brand-generated content within startup marketing campaigns.
- d) To identify which types of digital content are most effective in enhancing brand recall and purchase intention for startup brands among Gen Z.

2. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.1 Digital Content Marketing and Social Media

DCM is all about creating and disseminating valuable and relatable content to attract a well-defined target audience, to create customer-brand relationships, and loyalty. It can either be branded content that creates a conversation between brands and consumers or user-generated and influencer content, and they all work to help brand building to overcome the competitive challenges happening nowadays (Lou & Xie, 2021).

A study by Salonen, *et al.* explains how important is the timeliness of the content as it works to drive engagement, and it shows that when customers are exposed to brand-generated content it makes them feel relevant and familiar which increases engagement on the content

generated, which concludes that the customers prefer to see the brand in different stages (Salonen, *et al.*, 2024). Also, interactivity, connectedness, synchronicity, and responsiveness have a great impact on consumer engagement by enhancing its levels. This aligns with a study by Jafarova and Tolon, which reveals that content marketing on social media increases brand loyalty and purchase intention, and the informative, entertainment, and interaction features of content affect behavioral, cognitive, and emotional commitment positively; those results are collected through an online survey on 465 people (Jafarova, 2022).

According to He *et al.*, the brand-owned social media content marketing, specifically storytelling, drives customer engagement through brand personality and attitudes, while content relevancy does not moderate the relationship between content marketing and customers' brand personality perception (He *et al.*, 2021). Shahbaznezhad *et al.* (2021) also added the importance of the format and platform into consideration, especially with passive and active user engagement behavior, with the mediation of emotional, rational, and transactional content. Their results show that format and platform do affect consumer engagement, but it is strongly moderated by the context of the content itself (Shahbaznezhad, *et al.*, 2021), as well as content as it can enhance trust as a study by Harrigan, *et al.* explained (Harrigan, *et al.*, 2021).

In Bubphapant and Brandão 's study on content marketing research (2024), they prove that DCM always evolves continuously, especially with the emergence of technologies and online platforms, which give new opportunities to enhance strategies and practices (Bubphapant & Brandão, 2024).

2.2 Digital Content Marketing and Startup Projects

DCM is one of the most important tools for any business strategy, especially new businesses (Jami Pour & Karimi, 2024), as it allows them to build brand awareness and win business from larger competitors. Moreover, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) must adopt DCM strategies to adapt to the competitive market and to grow sustainably (Bonus *et al.*, 2022).

A study by Aryani and Tuti studies the effect of DCM, especially on social media, on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), showing that there is a direct influence between them (Aryani & Tuti, 2023). Another study by Challa and Anute explains how brands use social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, to drive engagement with the target audience (Challa & Anute,

2021), as creating relevant and consistent content with value, especially videos, positively affects brand image.

As for influencer content marketing, a study by Bonus, *et al.* declares it is currently a market trend, as influencers have a loyal fan base who support them through endorsements, but results find that their online presence, expertise, and content attractiveness are important to customers as well (Bonus, *et al.*, 2022; Hudders, *et al.*, 2021), which supports Sunarso and Mustafa's study that the role of visual content for MSMEs is extremely important (Sunarso & Mustafa, 2023). Barta *et al.* also add in their study about influencer marketing on TikTok that the originality, quality, humor, and quantity of followers on an influencer's profile affect their influence, as they are perceived as opinion leaders, where the opinion leadership and originality play the most important role in their success and influence (Barta *et al.*, 2023).

2.3 Digital Content Marketing and Egyptian Gen Z Consumer Behavior

Generation Z is those born between 1997 and 2012 (Ghaly, 2023), and is considered one of the most important generations in the present time and the upcoming years (Hammad, 2024), it is one of the most important target markets for brands as they are digital savvy and have a huge purchasing power, especially as they are fond of new technological trends, including: interactivity and virtual reality (Hammad, 2024). This makes them a distinctive age group when it comes to interaction with new-age technologies and consumer psychology (Ameen *et al.*, 2023).

A study by El-Shihy and Awaad shows that brand-generated content and UGC both influence Gen Z purchase intentions, but brand-generated content has a larger impact as it is professionally made and has emotional appeal (El-Shihy & Awaad, 2025), and another study by Shetu shows that UGC and influencer marketing have a huge impact on Gen Z online purchasing behavior (Shetu, 2023).

TikTok influencers in particular were examined in a study by Mussa, findings show that Egyptian Gen Z TikTok users can be predicted by the TikTok influencers they are exposed to (Mussa, 2023), followed by a study by Elgendy, *et al.* showing that the similarity, likeability, and familiarity of influencer also affect the influencer impact on Egyptian Gen Z consumers (Elgendy, *et al.*, 2024). Schouten, *et al.* explain in their study about influencer endorsement vs celebrity endorsement that customers identify more with influencers as they see them as more relevant and trustworthy (Schouten, *et al.*, 2021), while 85% of the results in a study by Erwin,

et al. show that influencers have a huge influence on their decision-making process, with Instagram being accountable for 75% of the total.

Moreover, Egyptian Gen Z primarily consume influencer content on social media, and carry out distinct behavior according to the content they are exposed to, as they identify and develop parasocial relations with them and undergo attitude changes when they become their fans. For Gen Z, parasocial relationships positively impact purchase intention, which makes social media marketing strategies more effective because of the parasocial relationship formation (Masuda *et al.*, 2022).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study aims to investigate the impact of DCM strategies, specifically storytelling, user-generated content, and influencer marketing, on Egyptian Gen Z consumer behavior in the context of startup projects, and to examine the differential impact of said strategies. Two theories are applied, namely, the Dual Process Theory and the Media Richness Theory.

3.1 Dual Process Theory

Dual Process Theory (DPT) is a psychological framework that stems from the theory proposed by Deutsch and Gerard. It has two main information processing systems that shape the evaluation of the receiver's received information. The framework has two different modes of processing, usually referred to as System 1 and System 2 (Li *et al.*, 2025).

System 1 is more unconscious and automatic; it relies on mental shortcuts and emotions or intuition, while System 2 is more conscious and slower; it is analytical and more complex than System 1 (Li *et al.*, 2025). System 1 (Type 1) does not require working memory, but it is rather associative, and includes implicit judgments made by people; however, System 2 (Type 2) requires working memory, and is more reflective than intuitive, and is rule-based (Neemeh, 2021).

The theory's main hypothesis suggests that System 1 involves fast and intuitive judgments and is based on predictive processing, which makes generated predictions its output, acknowledging that predictions are influenced by expectations, which can be easily manipulated by prior information, while System 2 involves deliberate reasoning and relies on symbolic classical cognition.

In summary, Systems 1 and 2 are defined by

dichotomous properties: automatic versus effortful, intuitive versus deliberative (Rumana, 2021).

3.1.1 Relevance to the Study

In the context of my study, DPT helps understand how Gen Z processes and engages with content intuitively using System 1 as they scroll, and more deliberately using System 2. This can help marketers targeting Egyptian Gen Z to tailor content depending on campaign goals to appeal to System 1 by making it more visual, emotional, and short, or to System 2 by making it more detailed and informative. By applying DPT to my study, it is easier to predict when Egyptian Gen Z is more likely to respond emotionally versus rationally to digital content, enhancing the effectiveness of the content present online.

3.2 Media Richness Theory

Media Richness Theory (MRT) is a theory offered by Daft and Lengel in 1986 to describe the relationship between communication media format (e.g., emails, videos, etc) and the efficiency of the message itself. The two main assumptions of the theory are that (1) people want to overcome equivocality and uncertainty, and (2) certain types of media serve this goal better than others. This indicates that the more the visual cues and hints, the richer the message becomes. This describes the hierarchy of media richness using four criteria: (1) instant feedback, (2) use of multiple cues, (3) use of natural language, and (4) personal focus of the medium (Wang Z., 2022).

It is the measure of the medium's ability to transmit information over time to influence understanding, making information delivered through text considered with fewer cues than images or videos. This divides media richness online into three dimensions: (1) information expression richness, (2) information content richness, and (3) information quality richness (Wang, 2022).

This suggests that the richer the information and media, the more the trust, as online consumers rely on clear, transparent, and complete product information because they cannot touch it (de Amorim *et al.*, 2022).

3.2.1 Relevance to the Study

Media Richness Theory explains how high cue formats enhance connection with brands, which impacts content choice and consumer impact. This can help startup brands choose their formats and the most suitable DCM strategy to build a relationship with Gen Z consumers. Moreover, it gives clear measurements of platform effectiveness and an evaluation of social

media platforms in transmitting content to Gen Z, linking media richness to brand equity outcomes and reinforcing message clarity and persuasion.

3.3 Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a positive relationship between emotionally appealing digital content and brand recall and consumer engagement.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between the nature of digital content and purchase intention.

H3: There is a positive relationship between formats with high cues and brand recall.

H4: There is a positive relationship between formats with high cues used in digital content marketing strategies and their effectiveness in enhancing engagement and purchase intention.

H5: There is a significant difference between storytelling marketing, user-generated content, and influencer marketing in their impact on Egyptian Gen Z consumers' behavior.

H6: Consumers' preferences for social media content of startup brands affect their willingness to recommend the brand to their friends.

H7: There is a statistically significant relationship between consumers' overall experience with online startup shopping and satisfaction level with these brands.

3.4 Research Questions

- a) How do DCM strategies influence brand recall and purchase intention among Egyptian Gen Z consumers in the context of startups?
- b) How do different DCM strategies differ in triggering intuitive vs. analytical cognitive processing?
- c) Which media formats are perceived as more engaging and credible?
- d) What types of digital content are most effective in building brand awareness and trust?
- e) How do different storytelling tones affect emotional connection and engagement with startup brands?
- f) What types of brand stories make Gen Z more interested in startup brands?

- g) How do Gen Z consumers usually respond to storytelling content from startups?
- h) Which formats of user-generated content are perceived as the most trustworthy by Gen Z?
- i) How does user-generated content shape Gen Z's perception of a startup brand?
- j) How often do Gen Z consumers engage with user-generated content on startup pages?
- k) What factors make Gen Z trust or distrust influencers' recommendations about startup brands?
- l) How much do Gen Z consumers trust influencer content when it includes disclaimers or when influencers promote multiple competing brands?
- m) How do different types of influencer content influence Gen Z's purchase decisions?

saturation typically occurs within a small number of interviews (Hennink *et al.*, 2017). Recent studies also validate six interviews as sufficient for in-depth expert insight (McLaughlin, J., 2021).

- **Criteria of Selection:** Startups were chosen based on their impact and visibility among Gen Z on Instagram and TikTok, verified through engagement analytics and audience feedback. Participants included founders of prominent Egyptian brands such as Lelu Store, DXLR, Egyptina, Sora the Brand, Core Basics, and Fakhr, each representing a distinct DCM approach.

For the survey, a stratified random sample of 200 Egyptian Gen Z consumers was drawn from the audiences of the six selected brands. This sample size follows methodological guidance that recommends $N \approx 200$ as adequate for stable estimation and sufficient power in multivariate consumer behavior analyses (Hair *et al.*, 2020). Sampling distribution was determined proportionally using confidential brand data on followers, reach, and number of orders. The sample represents active social media users who follow these specific brands, not the entire Gen Z population. Each variable's share was calculated as a percentage of the total across all brands, averaged across the three indicators, and applied proportionally to the 200-participant total to ensure representativeness across startup audiences.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

In order to achieve the study's objectives, a mixed-methods approach was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data.

For the quantitative method, a survey was conducted on 200 Egyptian Gen Z consumers who use startup projects and have bought their products or used their services before. As for the qualitative method, in-depth interviews were conducted on six Egyptian successful startup owners who incorporated DCM strategies into their main marketing strategy, two of whom relied on storytelling content, two on user-generated content, and two on influencer marketing.

4.2 Universe and Sampling Procedures

This study adopted a purposive and stratified random sampling approach to examine the influence of Egyptian startup brands on Gen Z consumers.

Startup owners used in this study as the universe of the in-depth interviews are as follows:

- A purposive sample of six Egyptian startup founders was selected, all of whom achieved success primarily through DCM. The sample size aligns with qualitative methodological guidance, indicating that, for homogeneous expert groups and focused research questions, thematic

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Concerning the in-depth interviews, an interview guide was developed and tailored to the three digital content strategies examined in this study: storytelling, user-generated content, and influencer marketing. Each guide consisted of a series of structured questions to align with the research objectives, hypotheses, and theoretical framework of the DPT and MRT. All interviews were recorded with prior consent from participants, and transcribed in full to ensure accuracy and prevent data loss or nuance in their responses. The interview guide had multiple sections to ensure the consistency of interviews with the three different strategies, including: introductory questions for all, strategy origin and decision-making, content choices, audience processing, formats and engagement metrics, impact and long-term value, future outlook, and closing questions for all; however, each strategy included questions specifically tailored for it.

As for the survey, a structured questionnaire was designed to measure Egyptian Gen Z consumers' behavior, specifically perception, Recall, trust, and purchase decisions towards startup brands using the three DCM strategies. The questionnaire included a mix

of closed-ended questions, Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and demographic items to ensure the stratified random sampling. The survey was distributed online between the 8th and 11th of August, 2025, and responses were automatically stored for analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis

For the in-depth interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed responses from the interviewees, the startup owners. Recurring patterns, themes, and insights were conducted and discussed in direct relation to the study's objectives, research questions, and hypotheses, maintaining the connection to the theoretical framework of the research: the DPT and MRT. The analysis was created to identify how different DCM strategies, storytelling, user-generated content, and influencer marketing are applied in practice, and perceived by Egyptian Gen Z consumers, to analyze their effectiveness and challenges.

As for the survey, a quantitative analysis applies both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), to examine the responses of Egyptian Gen Z consumers towards DCM strategies used by startups, structured in three main stages:

5. RESULTS

5.1 Quantitative Results

5.1.1 Characteristics of the Field Study Sample:

Table 1: Characteristics of the field study sample

Gender	F	%
Female	143	71.5
Male	57	28.5
Total	200	100
age	F	%
22-25 years	78	39
19-21 years	75	37.5
26-28 years	27	13.5
16-18 years	14	7
13-15 years	6	3
Total	200	100
Region of Residence	F	%
Giza	118	59
Cairo	65	32.5
Alexandria	7	3.5
Delta Region (e.g., Mansoura, Tanta, Zagazig)	6	3

Canal Cities (e.g., Ismailia, Suez, Port Said)	3	1.5
Upper Egypt (e.g., Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Luxor, Aswan)	1	0.5
Total	200	100
Educational Level	F	%
University graduate (Bachelor's degree)	80	40
Currently enrolled in university	72	36
Postgraduate (Master's or higher)	23	11.5
Currently pursuing a diploma or technical degree	10	5
Currently in secondary school	9	4.5
Still in preparatory school	6	3
Total	200	100
Monthly Spending	F	%
501–1,000 EGP	58	29
1,001–2,000 EGP	54	27
More than 2,000 EGP	52	26
Less than 500 EGP	25	12.5
I don't spend money online	11	5.5
Total	200	100

- The majority of participants in the study sample were female, representing 71.5%, compared to male participants who constituted 28.5% of the total sample of 200 respondents.
- The majority of participants were aged 22-25 years, accounting for 39% of the sample, followed by those aged 19–21 years at 37.5%. The 26–28 years age group represented 13.5% of the sample, while the younger groups (16–18 years and 13–15 years) accounted for 7% and 3%, respectively.
- More than half of the study sample resided in Giza (59%), followed by Cairo (32.5%). Participants from Alexandria represented 3.5%, and those from the Delta region (e.g., Mansoura, Tanta, Zagazig) accounted for 3%. Meanwhile, participants from the Canal Cities (Ismailia, Suez, Port Said) constituted 1.5%, whereas the smallest proportion came from Upper Egypt (e.g., Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Luxor, Aswan), representing only 0.5% of the total sample.
- The results also showed that the largest proportion of the study sample was university graduates holding a bachelor's degree, accounting for 40% of the participants, followed by those who were currently enrolled in university at 36%. In addition, 11.5% of participants reported holding a postgraduate degree (Master's or higher), while 5% had obtained a diploma or technical degree. Participants who were still in secondary school represented 4.5%, whereas the smallest group consisted of those still in preparatory

school, accounting for only 3% of the total sample.

- With regard to monthly spending, the highest proportion of participants (29%) reported spending between 501–1,000 EGP on online purchases. This was followed by participants spending 1,001–2,000 EGP at 27%, and those spending more than 2,000 EGP at 26%. In contrast, 12.5% indicated that their monthly spending was less than 500 EGP, while 5.5% stated that they do not spend any money on online purchases.

Validity and reliability test: The validity of the questionnaire form in collecting data was tested by conducting two tests of validity and reliability, as follows:

1. **Validity test:** Apparent validity: means the validity of the scale used and its accuracy in measuring the theoretical variable or concept to be measured. To verify the validity of the scale used in the research, the data collection tool (investigation newspapers) was presented to a group of specialists and experts in research methods, media, sociology, marketing, and technology.
2. **Reliability test:** It means reaching a balanced agreement in the results between researchers in the event that they use the same foundations and methods on the same media material, i.e., trying to reduce the percentages of variation to the lowest possible level by controlling the factors that lead to its appearance at each stage of the research. The reliability test was applied in the field study on a sample representing 10% of the original sample after the survey paper was judged. The reliability indicators of the study tool questions were also verified by applying the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which had a value of (0.754), which is a value indicating that the study achieved a good degree of reliability. The results of the reliability coefficient were as shown in the following table:

Table 2: Alpha reliability coefficient values for the questionnaire axes and their total score

Axis	Alpha Coefficient (Reliability Coefficient)
Purchasing Patterns of Startup Brands and Online Shopping	0.742
The Scale of Purchase Intention	0.663
The Scale of Storytelling Marketing Strategy	0.665
The Scale of Influencer Marketing Strategy	0.683

The Scale of User-Generated Content (UGC) Strategy	0.702
The Scale of Consumer Behavior	0.712
Full questionnaire	75.40%

The previous table demonstrates the high reliability values of the alpha coefficient across the study scales, all of which are designed to measure the impact of DCM strategies on Egyptian Gen Z consumer behavior toward startup projects. The results confirm that the scales are characterized by strong internal consistency in measuring their intended objectives. The overall reliability coefficient of the questionnaire, including all its scales, reached 75.4%, indicating a high level of reliability.

Statistical processing of the study:

The statistical analysis program (SPSS) was relied upon to analyze the field study data. The level of significance adopted in the current study in all tests of hypotheses and correlations is represented in accepting the results of statistical tests at a confidence level of 95% or more, i.e., at a significance level of 0.05 or less. The statistical methods used in the study were:

- Descriptive measures, which were represented by simple frequencies and percentages, the arithmetic mean, and the standard deviation, which determines the extent of divergence or convergence of readings from their arithmetic mean, as well as the relative weight calculated from the equation: (arithmetic mean x 100) ÷ the maximum degree of the statement.
- Correlation coefficients, which are represented by the Pearson Correlation Coefficient.
- Fourth: Simple linear regression analysis, which measures the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and its equation: $y=a+bx$

5.1.2 Descriptive Survey Details

5.1.2.1 Purchasing Patterns of Startup Brands and Online Shopping

- **Patterns of Consumer Purchasing Frequency from Startup Brands:**

Table 3: Frequency of Purchasing from Startup Brands

Frequency of Purchases	F	%
Very Often	88	44.7
Often	45	22.8
Sometimes	41	20.8
Rarely	21	10.7
Never	2	1
Total	197	100

The findings reveal that 67.3% of respondents purchase from startup brands either *very often* (44.7%) or *often* (22.8%), confirming strong consumer engagement with emerging businesses. Only 1% reported never purchasing from startups. This demonstrates that startup brands have achieved sustained consumer trust and loyalty.

5.1.2.2 Most Frequently Used Social Media Platforms for Interaction with Startup Brands

- **Most Frequently Used Platforms by Participants:**

Table 4: Most Frequently Used Platforms by Participants

Most Frequently	F	%
Instagram	154	35.9
TikTok	125	29.1
Facebook	67	15.6
YouTube	43	10
Snapchat	31	7.1
X (formerly Twitter)	9	2.1
Pinterest	1	0.2
Total	430	100

The results show that Instagram (35.9%) and TikTok (29.1%) are the dominant social media platforms among respondents, together representing nearly 65% of total usage. Facebook (15.6%) and YouTube (10%) follow, while Snapchat (7.1%), X (2.1%), and Pinterest (0.2%) record limited engagement. This highlights a clear preference for visually engaging and interactive platforms, making Instagram and TikTok the most effective channels for reaching Gen Z audiences. These findings align with Media Richness Theory (MRT), as Instagram and TikTok provide rich, interactive media that enhance message effectiveness among Gen Z.

5.1.2.3 Types of Content that Capture Attention, Build Trust, and Enhance Recall

- **Types of Content that Sustain the longest Consumer Attention**

Table 5: Type of Content that Retains the Longest Attention

Type of Content	F	%
Short-form videos (e.g., Reels, TikTok)	167	48.5
Carousel posts with storytelling	70	20.3
Customer video testimonials	58	16.9
Text-only posts with detailed info	25	7.3
Infographics	23	6.7
Friend recommendation	1	0.3
Total	344	100

The findings reveal that short-form videos (e.g., Reels, TikTok) captured the most attention, selected by 48.5% of respondents, followed by carousel storytelling posts (20.3%) and customer video testimonials (16.9%). Text-only posts (7.3%) and infographics (6.7%) were less engaging, while friend recommendations (0.3%) ranked lowest. These results highlight the dominant appeal of visually rich and interactive formats, particularly short-form videos, in sustaining audience attention toward startup brands.

- **Content Types that Enhance Brand Recall for Startups**

Table 6: Most Effective Content Formats that Help in Remembering a Startup Brand

Content Types	F	%
Videos generated by normal users	79	26.1
Influencer video posts	70	23.1
Storytelling ads	68	22.4
Informative brand posts	54	17.8
I don't remember brands based on content	32	10.6
Total	303	100

The results show that user-generated videos ranked highest (26.1%), followed by influencer video posts (23.1%) and storytelling ads (22.4%), while informative brand posts (17.8%) and non-recall responses (10.6%) ranked lowest. These findings confirm the superior impact of user-generated and influencer content on brand recall, supporting Hudders *et al.*, who found that authentic UGC enhances memorability and trust, and that influencer-created videos strengthen consumer confidence and brand recognition (Hudders *et al.*, 2021). The correlation between content type and engagement was tested for reliability with Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.81$), confirming high internal consistency of the survey scale. Confidence intervals (95%) were calculated for all Pearson correlations to ensure statistical reliability. These results support DPT, highlighting that emotionally engaging and intuitive content (e.g., user-generated videos) improves brand recall through automatic

processing, whereas analytical content has less impact.

5.1.2.4 Consumer Attitudes Toward Startup Brand Content Across Digital Marketing Strategies

Consumer Attitudes Toward Startup Brand Content:

Table 7: Measuring Consumer Attitudes Toward Startup Brand Content

Frequency	F	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
Medium	97	49.7	2.2	0.7
High	66	33.8		
Low	32	16.4		
Total	195	100		

The results indicate that nearly half of respondents (49.7%) rated startups' digital marketing strategies at a medium level, while 33.8% perceived them as high, and 16.4% as low. The mean score ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 0.7$) reflects moderate consistency and an overall trend toward medium performance. These findings suggest that most startups apply adequate but still developing digital marketing strategies, with only a minority achieving optimal effectiveness. This indicates that startups are still in a trial-and-development phase, requiring greater emphasis on transparency, credibility, and UGC to elevate performance and strengthen consumer trust. The mean score ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 0.7$) also confirms moderate reliability of the survey scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$). This finding supports MRT by indicating that rich digital content formats moderately influence consumer attitudes and engagement.

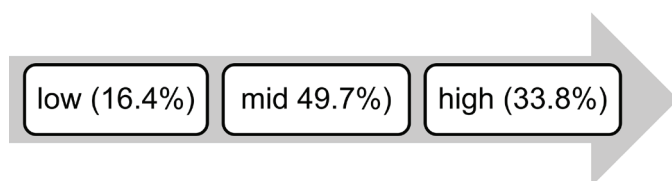


Figure 1: Level of Consumer Attitudes Toward Startup Brand Content

5.1.3 Results of Validation of Field Study Hypotheses:

Hypotheses were mapped to theory as follows: H1 and H2 relate to DPT, while H3 and H4 relate to MRT, and H5, H6, and H7 draw on both.

5.1.3.1 Hypothesis 1

H1: There is a positive relationship between emotionally appealing digital content and brand recall and consumer engagement. To test the

validity of the hypothesis, the researcher employed Pearson's correlation coefficient, and the results were as follows:

Table 8: Correlation between Emotionally Appealing Content and Engagement (H1)

emotionally appealing digital content	brand recall and consumer engagement	
	Pearson Correlation	.398
	Sig.	.000

The statistical analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation between emotionally appealing digital content and both brand recall and consumer engagement, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.398, suggesting that content with strong emotional appeal enhances consumers' ability to remember the brand while also increasing their level of engagement. The confidence interval (95% CI: 0.28–0.50) indicates moderate positive correlation strength between emotional content and engagement. (H1 supported)

5.1.3.2 Hypothesis 2

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between the nature of digital content (intuitive-processing or analytical-processing) and purchase intention. To test the validity of the hypothesis, the researcher employed the Pearson Chi-Square correlation coefficient, and the results were as follows:

Table 9: Chi-Square Results for Nature of Content and Purchase Intention (H2)

purchase intention	nature of digital content	
	Chi-Square	18.471
	Sig.	0.822

The statistical analysis shows that the relationship between the nature of digital content and purchase intention is not statistically significant, suggesting that whether digital content is framed through intuitive processing or analytical processing does not exert a meaningful influence on consumers' purchase intentions within the study sample. The non-significant result (Sig. = 0.822) may reflect Gen Z's analytical checking of information prior to purchase; thus, content processing type alone (intuitive vs analytical) does not strongly determine purchase intention. (H2 not supported)

5.1.3.3 Hypothesis 3

H3: There is a positive relationship between

formats with high cues and brand recall, compared to those with low cues. To examine this hypothesis, the researcher employed Pearson's correlation coefficient, and the results were as follows:

Table 10: Correlation between Cues in Content and Brand Recall (H3)

Audience's ability to recall the brand	Usage rates	
	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	Significance level
	0.456	0.000

The analysis reveals the existence of a statistically significant positive relationship between the use of cues in content and the audience's ability to recall the brand at a significant level of (0.000) when Pearson's correlation coefficient values are at (0.456). This conveys a moderate positive correlation. Pearson's correlation 0.456 (95% CI: 0.35-0.56) represents a moderate positive correlation. This supports MRT by showing that high-cue content improves brand recall. (H3 supported)

5.1.3.4 Hypothesis 4

H4: There is a positive relationship between formats with high cues used in digital content marketing strategies and their effectiveness in enhancing engagement and purchase intention. To examine this hypothesis, the researcher used Pearson's

correlation coefficient, and the results were as follows:

Table 11: Correlation between High-Cue Content and Purchase Intention (H4)

Purchase intention	Usage rates	
	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	Significance level
	0.258	0.000

The analysis indicates the presence of a statistically significant positive relationship between the use of cues in content, interaction effectiveness, and purchase intention at a significance level of 0.000 with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.258. This correlation of 0.258 (95% CI: 0.15-0.36) indicates a weak but significant effect of high-cue content on purchase intention and engagement, consistent with MRT predictions. (H4 supported)

5.1.3.5 Hypothesis 5

H5: There is a significant difference between storytelling marketing, user-generated content, and influencer marketing in their impact on Egyptian Gen Z consumers' behavior. To test this hypothesis, a linear regression analysis was conducted, and the results are presented as follows:

Table 12 Regression: Storytelling, UGC, and Influencer Marketing Impact (H5)

Dependent variable	R	R2	F	sig	Independent variable	B
Storytelling marketing	0.128	0.016	3.222	0.074	Constant	2.032
					behavior of Gen Z consumers	.102
User-generated content	0.233	0.054	11.109	0.001	Constant	2.205
					behavior of Gen Z consumers	0.176
Influencer marketing	0.228	0.052	10.579	0.001	Constant	2.442
					behavior of Gen Z consumers	0.150

Table 10 presents the results of a simple linear regression examining the impact of storytelling marketing, UGC, and influencer marketing on the behavior of Egyptian Gen Z consumers. Storytelling marketing does not exert a statistically significant effect on Gen Z behavior (Sig. = 0.074 > 0.05; $R^2 = 0.016$; $B = 0.102$). Although the relationship is positive, storytelling accounts for only 1.6% of the variance in consumer behavior, suggesting that traditional narrative content alone is not a reliable behavioral predictor.

By contrast, UGC demonstrates a statistically significant effect ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$; $R^2 = 0.054$; $B = 0.176$; $F = 11.109$). The regression equation $Y = 2.205 + 0.176 X$ shows that a one-unit increase in exposure to UGC leads to a 0.176 increase in positive behavioral response, supported by a moderate correlation ($r = 0.233$, $p = 0.001$).

Similarly, influencer marketing shows a significant positive influence ($p = 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.052$; $B = 0.150$; $F = 10.579$). The regression model $Y = 2.442 + 0.150 X$ indicates that influencer exposure increases favorable behavioral responses, with a moderate correlation ($r = 0.228$, $p = 0.001$).

Overall, UGC and influencer marketing exhibit meaningful, though modest, predictive power over

Gen Z behavior (5.4% and 5.2% variance explained, respectively), while storytelling shows no significant effect. These results highlight that Gen Z consumers respond more strongly to interactive and participatory approaches that emphasize authenticity and peer credibility rather than traditional promotional narratives. The stronger effects of UGC and influencer marketing support DPT, showing that intuitive, relatable content drives Gen Z behavior more than traditional storytelling alone.

This pattern aligns with Smith and Hudders, *et al.*, who found that Gen Z purchasing decisions are shaped by authentic user content and influencer credibility. (Smith, 2021; Hudders *et al.*, 2021) Likewise, Lou & Yuan (2019) and Global Web Index (2020) reported that over 70% of Gen Z rely on influencer recommendations. Conversely, Djafarova & Bowes (2021) observed diminishing effectiveness of storytelling for this demographic, who prefer transparency and co-created experiences.

5.1.3.6 Hypothesis 6

H6: Consumers' preferences for social media content of startup brands affect their willingness to recommend the brand to their friends. To extract the statistical results, linear regression analysis was employed, and its results are as follows:

Table 13 Regression: Social Media Content Preference and Recommendation (H6)

Dependent variable	Coefficient of determination	F	sig	Independent variable	B
Consumers' preferences for social media content of startup brands	0.063	12.955	0.000	Constant	2.998
				Their willingness to recommend this brand to their friends	.268

The analysis indicates a statistically significant effect of consumers' preferences for startup brands' social media content on their willingness to recommend these brands to friends. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.063$) shows that the independent variable-consumer preference for such content accounts for approximately 6.3% of the variance in willingness to recommend. This effect was further supported by the significance level ($P=0.000$, <0.05) and an F value of 12.955. The simple linear regression model is expressed as:

This equation suggests that for each one-unit increase in consumers' preference for startup brands' social media content, their willingness to recommend these brands increases by 0.268. In addition, Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship

between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of 0.251 at a significance level of 0.000. Pearson correlation = 0.251 (95% CI: 0.15-0.35) indicates a moderate positive relationship between content preference and recommendation intention, supporting DPT in emphasizing intuitive social influence effects.

5.1.3.7 Hypothesis 7

H7: There is a statistically significant relationship between consumers' overall experience with online startup shopping and satisfaction level with these brands. To test the validity of the hypothesis, the researcher employed Pearson's correlation coefficient, and the results were as follows:

Table 14 Correlation: Shopping Experience and Satisfaction (H7)

Consumers' overall experience with online startup shopping	their level of satisfaction with these brands	
	Pearson Correlation	0.404
	Sig.	0.000

The statistical analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation between consumers' overall experience with online startup shopping and their satisfaction with these brands. This suggests that improvements in the overall shopping experience are associated with higher levels of consumer satisfaction. Accordingly, the findings support the validity of hypothesis (H4) and underscore the critical role of enhancing the online shopping experience in fostering greater consumer satisfaction with startup brands. Pearson correlation = 0.404 (95% CI: 0.31-0.49), showing a moderate positive relationship between online shopping experience and satisfaction, highlighting the importance of user experience in promoting loyalty.

5.2 Qualitative Findings

5.2.1 Strategy Origin and Decision-Making

All startups operate in the fashion sector targeting Gen Z. Founders mainly use Instagram and TikTok due to high Gen Z activity, noting that TikTok's algorithm supports UGC more effectively. Storytelling founders emphasized Instagram's aesthetics and the importance of strong hooks in short videos, while influencer-based brands highlighted digital marketing's scalability and inclusiveness at low cost.

Storytelling founders chose their strategy to emotionally connect with consumers, humanize the brand, and enhance brand recall and organic reach, emphasizing that "storytelling is the oldest and most effective marketing tool." UGC founders valued authenticity and community trust, explaining that users prefer relatable creators over direct ads. Influencer marketing founders confirmed that Gen Z is highly influenced by authentic influencers, especially during brand launches. In short, storytelling builds relationships, UGC fosters trust, and influencer marketing drives exposure. All strategy decisions reflect DPT principles, with intuitive and emotional engagement prioritized for Gen Z consumers.

5.2.2 Content Choices

Storytelling brands use problem-solution arcs and brand journeys to engage Gen Z through emotional appeal and authenticity. UGC founders curate and repost user content aligned with their brand image, often encouraging participation through gifts or tags.

Influencer marketing founders select collaborators based on demographics, values, and content fit, preferring micro and macro influencers for engagement reliability.

All founders agreed that balancing emotional and informative elements is vital; storytelling focuses on tone and realism, UGC emphasizes visual aesthetics, and influencer marketing values credibility and relatability. UGC and influencer marketing utilize rich media cues, supporting MRT principles by enhancing engagement and memorability.

5.2.3 Audience Processing

Founders observed two Gen Z behavioral modes: intuitive and analytical. Storytelling content drives higher reach, engagement, and emotional connection, transforming passive viewers into loyal customers. UGC builds authenticity and organic reach, significantly increasing sales and trust. Influencer content, such as unboxing, styling, and day-in-life videos, enhances Recall and impulsive purchasing, particularly when influencers are perceived as genuine. The distinction between intuitive and analytical processing observed aligns with DPT, confirming differential content effectiveness based on cognitive engagement.

5.2.4 Format and Engagement Metrics

All founders agreed that short-form videos (Reels, TikToks) are the most engaging and persuasive formats. Engagement is measured through likes, shares, and conversions, with TikTok's algorithm reinforcing visibility. Storytelling relies on hooks, UGC thrives on aesthetic visuals, and influencer marketing leverages video cues for stronger brand experiences. Founders noted that interactive features are less relevant today compared to video richness.

5.2.5 Future Outlook and Long-Term Value

All participants believed their chosen strategies hold long-term value and cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence, though AI can assist with ideation and organization. Storytelling builds trust and differentiation through human connection, UGC remains persuasive for its authenticity and adaptability, and influencer marketing retains value through real human influence. Founders emphasized that success depends on consistency, authenticity, and brand identity rather than product perfectionism.

5.2.6 Closing Insights: Future Commitment and Ethical Considerations

Few ethical or legal issues were encountered,

though some faced content restrictions or copyright flags on Instagram. Most founders independently manage their content calendars and use AI tools for organization or captioning. They advised startups to stay consistent, follow trends, maintain brand identity, and balance creativity with marketing strategy. All agreed that format, especially video, has the greatest impact on Gen Z purchase behavior, with emotional appeal serving as a supportive but secondary factor.

6. DISCUSSION & DATA ANALYSIS

6.1 The Result

The quantitative and qualitative findings reveal key insights into Egyptian Gen Z consumers' attitudes toward startup brand content and their responses to different DCM strategies. These findings confirm theoretical links: DPT explains Gen Z's differential response to emotionally appealing vs analytical content, while MRT explains the effectiveness of visually rich and interactive content formats.

Most participants reported frequent online shopping and regular purchases from startup brands, reflecting rising consumer trust and engagement with emerging businesses. Instagram and TikTok emerged as the dominant platforms, highlighting the central role of short-form visual and interactive content in startup marketing. Short videos (Reels and TikTok clips) were the most effective formats for capturing and maintaining attention, while reviews and authentic customer experiences, rather than influencer endorsements, proved most influential in building trust.

Storytelling effectively sparked emotional engagement, especially when narrating the brand's founding journey; however, its impact was weaker when unaccompanied by authenticity or interactivity. While influencers were useful for brand awareness, their influence on purchase decisions was moderate compared with UGC. Notably, over two-thirds of participants expressed a stronger connection to brands reflecting Egyptian cultural identity and values, confirming the importance of cultural resonance. Finally, most respondents tended to verify information before purchasing, showing a rational and trust-oriented decision-making approach. H2's non-significant result reflects Gen Z's rational verification behavior, where purchase intention depends not only on content processing mode but also on credibility and peer validation.

Overall, the findings emphasize that authenticity, cultural relevance, and visually engaging content drive

Gen Z's trust, engagement, and purchase intention toward startup brands. Startups should thus prioritize transparent communication, strategic use of UGC, and culturally aligned storytelling to strengthen consumer relationships.

The testing of the study's hypothesis revealed mixed outcomes, highlighting the various degrees of influence that different types of DCM have on consumer behavior toward startup brands in Egypt:

6.2 Discussion

The findings confirm that credibility and transparency are the backbone of consumer trust in startup brands, with UGC serving as the main driver of loyalty. This aligns with Leong *et al.* (2021) and Schouten *et al.* (2021), who emphasized the persuasive power of electronic word-of-mouth over brand-driven advertising. Within the Egyptian context, UGC extends beyond credibility to become a participatory tool, enabling consumers to co-create brand meaning rather than passively receive messages (Leong, Loi, & Woon, 2021) (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2021).

Short-form videos (e.g., Reels, TikTok) emerged as the most effective formats for attention and engagement, supporting Montag *et al.* (2021) on the relevance of dynamic visuals. This study adds that effectiveness stems from the blend of entertainment, educational, and testimonial value, suggesting that usefulness and conciseness jointly define impactful content. This finding aligns with DPT, as high-cue formats stimulate System 1, enabling fast, affect-driven engagement and Recall among Gen Z consumers.

Although influencer credibility remains important, this study reveals a limited effect on purchase intention—reflecting influencer fatigue as audiences increasingly recognize the commercialized nature of partnerships. Influencers thus enhance awareness more than conversions, making authentic and selective collaborations essential for startups (Hudders *et al.*, 2021).

Storytelling effectively generates emotional engagement but loses influence when detached from authenticity or interactivity, echoing He *et al.* (2021). Egyptian consumers prefer verifiable, participatory stories that align with brand identity and values.

A significant majority emphasized the need for cultural alignment in marketing messages, consistent with Bubphapant & Brandão (2024) and Mostafa (2020). Startups integrating Egyptian cultural symbols achieve stronger acceptance and engagement. Furthermore,

consumers' tendency to verify information before purchasing supports Dwivedi *et al.* (2021), highlighting that digital content effectiveness extends beyond short-term metrics to sustained guidance across the decision-making journey. (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021).

Overall, this study identifies three interrelated pillars shaping effective digital marketing for Egyptian startups:

1. Credibility through UGC,
2. Visual interactivity via short-form videos, and
3. Cultural alignment with local values.

Together, these dimensions foster trust, brand recall, loyalty, and long-term engagement within Gen Z consumer markets.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter presents and interprets the quantitative and qualitative findings of the field study, offering a comprehensive understanding of how Egyptian Gen Z consumers respond to DCM strategies. Credibility and transparency emerge as the main forces shaping consumer trust in startup brands, reflecting the cultural value this generation places on authenticity. UGCC stands out as a powerful tool for strengthening both trust and loyalty, where validation and shared experiences hold greater persuasive power than direct advertising.

The results also emphasize the effectiveness of short-form visual content and emotionally driven storytelling in capturing attention and fostering brand connection, while influencer marketing showed limited influence on purchase decisions, underscoring the importance of contextual, locally tailored strategies. Moreover, the success of DCM depends not only on reach but also on content quality, cultural alignment, and relevance to audience expectations. Survey reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78\text{--}0.81$) and confidence intervals for correlations support the statistical robustness of the findings. The study confirms DPT and MRT applicability in the Egyptian context: intuitive, authentic, and visually rich content drives engagement, while analytical content alone has limited impact.

This study contributes academically and culturally by applying DPT and MRT within an Egyptian context, highlighting how intuitive and analytical processing

interact differently in the local market. It also shows how digital marketing in Egypt is evolving from imitating global trends to becoming more authentic and community-centered, reflecting local values. Ultimately, Egyptian startups must focus not just on digital visibility but on culturally meaningful strategies that mirror local aspirations and emotional authenticity. Each strategy serves distinct objectives, and using them complementarily can enhance trust, engagement, and sustainable growth for Egyptian businesses.

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