

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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