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**The Relationship Between Social Media Engagement and Brand
Performance: A Study Among Millennials and Gen Z in the Retail
Sector in Saudi Arabia and Egypt**

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Abstract

This research explains the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Gen Z consumers that is conducted in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The research's goal is to show how both generations interact within social media platforms, how they act and respond differently, how marketers can effectively target both generations without neglecting their needs. A method of quota sampling was used to collect survey that was distributed among Millennials and Gen Z individuals in both countries. The research examines platform preferences, types of content that drive engagement, and perceived gaps in creative campaigns targeting these segments. Findings are expected to show marketing strategies that can increase engagement and brand performance among generations. The study helps marketing literature by showing generational differences in digital behavior, and offers practical recommendations for creative campaigns that keeps brand loyalty among age groups.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين التفاعل في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي وأداء العلامة التجارية بين المستهلكين من جيل الألفية وجيل زد في كل من المملكة العربية السعودية ومصر. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تفاعل كلا الجيلين مع منصات التواصل الاجتماعي، واختلاف سلوكهم، وكيف يمكن للمسوقين استهدافهم بفعالية دون إغفال احتياجات كل فئة. وقد تم استخدام أسلوب العينة الحصصية لجمع البيانات من خلال استبيانات وُزعت على أفراد من جيل الألفية وجيل زد في كلا البلدين. تبحث الدراسة في تفضيلات المنصات، وأنواع المحتوى التي تحفز التفاعل، والفجوات المُدركة في الحملات الإبداعية التي تستهدف هذه الفئات. ومن المتوقع أن تسفر النتائج عن استراتيجيات تسويقية فعّالة تُسهم في رفع مستوى التفاعل وتحسين أداء العلامات التجارية عبر الأجيال. وتُعد هذه الدراسة مساهمة في الأدبيات التسويقية من خلال تسليط الضوء على الفروقات السلوكية الرقمية بين الأجيال، كما تقدم توصيات عملية بشأن الحملات الإبداعية التي تعزز ولاء العلامة التجارية بين الفئات العمرية المختلفة.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	[Page 8]
1.1 Introduction	[Page 8]
1.2 Problem of the Study	[Page 9]
1.3 Objectives of the Study	[Page 10]
1.4 Research Questions	[Page 11]
1.5 Research Hypotheses	[Page 11]
1.6 Theoretical Model	[Page 12]
Chapter Two: Literature Review	[Page 13]
2.1 Introduction	[Page 14]
2.2 Brand Performance (Dependent Variable)	[Page 14]
2.3 Social Media Engagement (Independent Variable)	[Page 15–16]
2.4 Summary of Past Studies	[Page 16–18]
2.5 Discussion and Research Contribution	[Page 19–20]
2.6 Theoretical Framework	[Page 20–22]
2.6.1 Social Exchange Theory	
2.6.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory	
2.6.3 Relationship Marketing Theory	
2.6.4 Generation as a Moderating Variable	

2.6.5 Conceptual Model

Chapter Three: Research Methodology	[Page 23]
3.1 Introduction	[Page 24]
3.2 Research Design	[Page 24]
3.3 Population of the Study	[Page 24]
3.4 Sample Characteristics	[Page 24]
3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Method	[Page 25]
3.6 Data Collection and Procedure	[Page 25]
3.7 Study Variables	[Page 25]
3.8 Research Hypotheses	[Page 26]
3.9 Method of Analysis	[Page 26]
3.10 Questionnaire Instrument	[Page 26]
Summary	[Page 27]
Chapter Four: Practical Study	[Page 28]
4.1 Data Analysis	[Page 29–33]
4.3 Hypotheses Discussion	[Page 34–35]
4.4 Research Recommendations	[Page 35–36]
References	[Page 37–38]
Appendix	[Page 39–41]

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

In today's digital era, social media has become one of the most influential tools for building brand identity, communicating with consumers, and driving business growth. Marketing has changed over decades. Today most, if not all agencies focus on digital marketing to sell any type of product. With the increase of social media platform use, most marketing campaigns are conducted through these platforms since they target specific audiences. Most of successful campaigns are due to good engagement whether through social media or through trying to live the lives of the consumer. As digital marketing emerged. This research highlights how Gen Z and Millennials act in market and use digital platforms and how their usage affects marketers in their brand performance. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, represent individuals born between 1981 and 1996. According to Dimock (2019), "Millennials... are characterized by their familiarity with digital technology and social media, shaping their behaviors and expectations." Generation Z, on the other hand, includes those born from the mid-1990s to early 2010s and are considered true digital natives who have grown up surrounded by the internet and mobile technology (Williams & Page, 2011). Although both generations are strongly engaged in social media and are fully aware of technology, their perception of customer needs are different, and it is very crucial for marketers to be aware of how both generations act differently in order to be able to improve their brand performance. This study explores the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Gen Z consumers in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The research aims to uncover behavioral differences, platform preferences, and engagement drivers to inform more inclusive and effective marketing strategies. Most of the existing researches focus on one generation, or lacks comparative insight between both. By using findings from previous research and applying them to a cross cultural context particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt this research aims to offer a more balanced understanding of generational engagement. It also addresses gaps in the literature related marketing strategies and the effectiveness of creative campaigns among different generational needs.

1.2 Problem of the Study:

Recently, social media became the most important tool in modern marketing. It helped brands communicate and engage with their customers, build emotional connections, and improve brand performance. Once digital platforms innovate and grow widely, consumer behavior and expectation grow too, especially among younger generations who spend most of their daily lives online. According to Statista (2023), global social media users exceeded 4.9 billion in 2023, with Millennials and Generation Z representing a significant share of this user base. Their presence on platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) has shaped how brands develop content, deliver messaging, and evaluate performance.

Marketers today encountered a serious issue today despite this major digital shift. Their main challenge is to develop social media techniques that can effectively engage both Millennials and Generation Z simultaneously. Research has shown that while both generations are digitally active, their behaviors, expectations, and platform preferences are different. Millennials, generally born between 1981 and 1996, tend to value authenticity, purpose-driven content, and customer service responsiveness (Fromm & Read, 2018). In contrast, Generation Z, born approximately between 1997 and 2012, is more focused on entertainment, visual communication, and brand values related to social justice and inclusivity (Williams & Page, 2011; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). These differences create a branding and engagement problem for example; campaigns that are created for one group may fail to affect the other group.

In addition to what have been mentioned, there is a major problem where most campaigns are heavily focused on Gen Z, using their preferred styles, trends, platforms, and values, especially on fast-paced platforms like TikTok, which may unintentionally neglect the preferences and loyalty of millennials whom are higher purchasers and more established brand relationships. This imbalance may lead to wasted marketing investment. Additionally, the current research explores generational behaviors in isolation, with minimal focus on cross generational analysis. As a result, brands face challenges in increasing social media engagement, maintaining brand loyalty, and achieving best brand performance.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Introduction:

The reason of this research is to understand the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Generation Z in two different cultures: Saudi Arabia and Egypt. As younger generations use digital platforms more brands encounter challenges in attracting their attention and they find it really difficult in inserting their strategies. This study aims to understand how both generations interact in content, how their preferences affect brand loyalty, and what marketers can do to appeal both generations.

Research has shown that “the more consumers engage with a brand on social media, the more likely they are to show higher levels of brand trust and loyalty” (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan–Thomas, 2015, p. 33). However, differences among generations create barrier to all approaches. According to Fromm and Read (2018), “Millennials are drawn to brands with a strong sense of purpose and authenticity, while Generation Z seeks entertainment, relevance, and a sense of belonging through digital experiences.”

By focusing on the digital habits of these two generations, the research hopes to provide insights that support marketers in creating more effective, generation–aware campaigns.

Main Objective:

To explore the impact of social media engagement on brand performance and how this relationship differs between Millennials and Gen Z consumers.

Sub–Objectives:

1. To identify the most commonly used social media platforms among Millennials and Generation Z.
2. To examine how each generation engages with brand content and what influences their behavior.
3. To explore the types of content that generate higher levels of interaction across both generations.
4. To assess whether generational differences shape the link between engagement and brand performance.
5. To suggest practical strategies that help marketers engage both generations without neglecting their unique needs.

1.4 Research Questions

Introduction:

The aim of this section is to present the central questions this study attempts to answer. These research questions are obtained from the study's objectives and aim to look into the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Generation Z in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Main research question:

What is the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Generation Z consumers in Saudi Arabia and Egypt?

Sub-Questions:

1. How is Millennials and Gen Z different in the usage of social media platforms and engagement behavior?
2. What types of content that has the highest engagement for each generation?
3. How does social media engagement affect brand loyalty and point of view for both generations?
4. What challenges do marketers face when designing campaigns that target both generations at the same time?
5. How can brands enhance engagement without neglecting any other generation?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Main hypothesis:

There is a worthy of attention relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Generation Z consumers.

Sub-Hypotheses:

1. Millennials and Generation Z use social media platform differently.
2. Social media engagement positively influences brand performance among Millennials.
3. Social media engagement positively influences brand performance among Generation Z.
4. Marketing campaigns that are created to meet generational expectations and preferences lead to the increase of brand loyalty and engagement.

1.6 Theoretical Model

This study is built upon Consumer Engagement Theory, which shows how the role of active communications between brands and consumers in digital environments. According to Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan–Thomas (2015), consumer engagement involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, all of which contribute to stronger relationships and brand loyalty. According to social media, engaging context mean likes, shares, comments, and engaging in brand actions and all of these actions are essential for brand performance.

The suggested model assumes that social media engagement affects brand performance in a positive way, and this can be detected from the increase of loyalty, trust, and purchase intention. However, both generations connect to engagements differently as both act differently only and value different things.

Millennials, typically born between 1981 and 1996, value authenticity, informative content, and responsiveness from brands (Fromm & Read, 2018). In contrast, Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, prefers fast, entertaining, and visually–driven content, and they often resonate with socially conscious messaging (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Turner, 2015).

Therefore, the model suggests that while engagement is generally crucial, the strategies of engagements may differ upon which generation is targeted. By including generation as a moderating variable, this model allows for more distinct analysis that can lead to effective campaign strategies.

The conceptual framework is visually represented below includes:

- Independent variable: Social Media Engagement
- Dependent variable: Brand Performance
- Moderating variable: Generation (Millennials vs Gen Z)

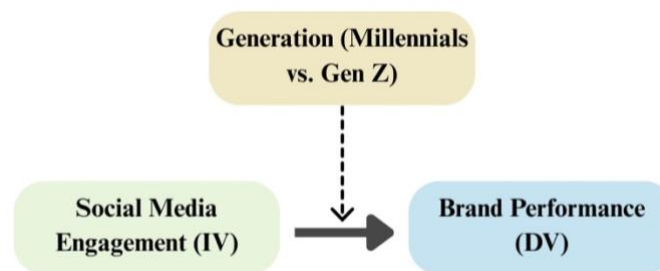


Figure 1: Theoretical Model Showing the Moderating Effect of Generation on the Relationship Between Social Media Engagement and Brand Performance.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:

The literature review aims to provide a full understanding of the knowledge about the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance. It focuses on generational differences between Millennials and Generation Z. Today digital platforms became one of the most marketing strategies to most marketers, therefore understanding how generations interact will help them enhance their brand performance that is why it became an essential area of academic interest.

This chapter begins by reviewing the concept of brand performance as the dependent variable, followed by an examination of social media engagement as the independent variable. It then shows similar past studies, and will focus on how researchers analyzed the relationship between engagement and brand performance. A discussion of generational behavior in digital contexts is also included, highlighting how preferences, values, and technological habits differ across age groups (Turner, 2015; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Finally, the chapter illustrates the theoretical framework guiding the research that is upon consumer engagement theory. The aim of this framework is to position this academic study while finding the gaps and trying to fill them.

2.2 Dependent Variable: Brand Performance

Brand performance refers to how well a brand reaches its goals in terms of consumer point of view, loyalty, and financial outcomes. Long term business success is mainly based on a strong and efficient brand performance. According to O’Cass and Ngo (2009), “Brand performance is a measure of a brand’s results against the goals initially set... It can be said that brand performance is a concept expressing the effect of the brand, which is used to reach concrete targets such as sales volume and profitability”

According to digital marketing, specifically through social media, brand performance is influenced by how brands engage with their audience. Engaging content, timely responses, user-generated campaigns, and emotional connections all contribute to shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward a brand (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). The most important tool for performance improvement is how social media is able to show off brand messages and encourage real time communication.

Being engaged emotionally and cognitively with a brand online, increases brand loyalty and the recommendation to others. Therefore, social media communication is the crucial strategic tool for enhancing brand performance throughout different consumer generations.

2.3 Independent Variable: Social Media Engagement

When it comes to modern marketing strategies, social media engagement is a crucial element especially in digital branding. It encompasses a wide range of user interactions on social media platforms that show consumer interest, emotional connection, and active participation with the content. Engagements include likes, comments, share, mentions, saves, direct messages, and reviews.

Social media engagement is not a singular behavior but a multidimensional construct. Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) define social media engagement as “a three-dimensional construct composed of affective, cognitive and behavioral dimensions.”

This framework expands the concept of interactions by highlighting that any engagement involves deeper emotional response and thought processing and participation. For example, a user is inspired by a campaign and then deeply thinking about the brand, then finally engaging through any type such as purchasing, liking, commenting or any type of interaction. How deep the engagement can affect the consumers point of view and can also affect their loyalty.

According to Brodie et al. (2013), consumer engagement in online communities’ fosters trust and emotional bonds with brands, thereby enhancing brand equity. This means that engagement is not just a measure of popularity but an indicator of relationship quality between the consumer and the brand. When consumers are deeply engaged, they are more likely to become brand advocates, engage in repeat purchases, and even defend the brand in online spaces — all of which contribute to better brand performance.

Engagement has grown with the increasing use of mobile based platforms that create short form contents. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok are designed to maximize visual interaction especially among younger users. Gen Z shows interest and prefers content that is authentic, fast paced, and visually stimulating. According to Smith (2020), Gen Z engagement is driven by short video formats, influencers, meme culture, and interactivity — features that allow them to participate and create, rather than just consume. On the contrary, Millennials, respond and prefers more informative content, storytelling, and posts that show the brand’s purpose or customer experience and most prefer Facebook and Instagram.

This difference in interaction styles affect marketing strategies. A campaign that attracts performs well with Gen Z on TikTok might fail to attract Millennial on Facebook. As Pentina, Zhang, and Basmanova (2013) note, marketers must align platform choice and content style with user expectations and behaviors in order to generate meaningful engagement across

generational lines. Understanding these differences is really crucial for brands in order to build loyalty and create meaningful interaction across generations as both groups differ not just in age but also in values, communication, and digital fluency.

Moreover, Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) emphasized the role of engagement as a vehicle for co-creating brand value. In their study, engaged consumers were not only more likely to participate in brand discussions, but also more open to offering feedback and ideas that shaped future product offerings. According to this study, social media interaction functions as an output of accomplished brand communication and an input into brand growth.

Engagement is measured using both quantitative and qualitative metrics. Quantitative metric includes reach, like, rates, and vide view in other words how a user engaged directly with the post. On the contrary, qualitative metric like comment, and meaningful interactions of the brand.

Social media interaction is the independent variable in this research since it is the main role shaping the customer brand relationship. The current study conducts an investigation on how engagement affects brand performance among Millennial and Gen Z customers in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, two culturally different yet digitally active markets. Although previous studies have showed engagement in Western contexts or focused on single generations, this study aims to show variable engagement patterns among different generations and different cultures.

Besides, it will show how marketers can create campaigns that can align with both groups without neglecting effectiveness.

This research will explore what platforms people use, what content they like and what emotional factors affected. This will help brands know how to use social media interaction not just for visibility but as a strategy tool to enhance brand performance.

2.4 Summary of Past Studies

Being able to understand the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance became a main topic in today's marketing research. Plenty studies have examined how different generations engage with brands online, what platforms they prefer, and what content they directly interact with which affect their purchasing decision. Below is a detailed summary of similar past studies that support this research.

- **“TikTok Versus Other Platforms: Engagement at Scale” — Shen (2023)**

In one of the most comprehensive content-based studies, Zheng Shen (2023) analyzed over 9,000 brand posts across TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. The study found that TikTok

significantly outperformed other platforms in user engagement, with average metrics of 1.1 million likes and over 12,000 comments per post. In comparison, Instagram posts had 744,939 likes and 6,981 comments, while Twitter (X) trailed behind. These differences were statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming TikTok's unique ability to drive active participation, especially among Gen Z users. This highlights the importance of platform selection in designing brand engagement strategies.

(Source: SAGE Journals, 2023)

- **“How Gen Z and Millennials Shop Through Social Media” — Emplifi (2025)**

A recent industry report by Emplifi (2025) provided insight into consumer behavior trends across generations. Based on survey data from approximately 1,000 U.S. consumers, the report found that more than 50% of both Millennials and Gen Z had made a purchase through social media within the last three months. The findings also indicated that visual content, such as short videos and interactive features, had the strongest influence on purchase intent. The report emphasized that these generations prefer immersive and relatable content over traditional advertising approaches.

(Source: Emplifi, 2025)

- **“The Moderating Role of Generation on Social Media Marketing Activities” — Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (2022)**

This academic study examined the effectiveness of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on brand experience and loyalty, while considering the moderating role of generation. The researchers found that Millennials showed stronger brand-related engagement compared to older cohorts, and that generation significantly moderated the link between SMMA and brand experience. The study supported the idea that marketers should customize engagement strategies according to generational expectations and online behavior.

(Source: ScienceDirect, 2022)

- **“Gymshark and the Power of UGC” — Kadence International (2023)**

Kadence International published a case study on Gymshark, a fitness apparel brand known for its youth-driven social media presence. The study revealed that Gymshark achieved a 214% increase in sales through strategic use of TikTok influencers and user-generated content (UGC). Rather than investing in traditional ads, the brand leaned heavily on its online community, encouraging followers to share their workout videos and reviews. This form of

engagement was found to be more persuasive and authentic, particularly among Gen Z and younger Millennials.

(Source: Kadence, 2023)

- **“Gen Z and Brand Loyalty in the Digital Age” — Meta (Facebook IQ, 2020)**

According to Meta’s insight report, 60% of Gen Z users follow brands to feel more connected, and 41% report increased loyalty when brands build community and engagement. The study emphasizes the emotional expectations Gen Z has from digital interactions: they value brands that reflect their identity, offer shared experiences, and engage with causes they care about. These findings align with the growing need for brands to foster connection-driven, not just product-driven, engagement on social platforms.

(Source: Meta IQ, 2020)

Conclusion of past studies:

These studies show:

1. The effectiveness of engagement varies based on the platform.
2. Purchase behavior is strongly affected and related to digital content experience.
3. Generational differences, Millennials and Gen Z influence how users respond to brand messaging.
4. Creative tools such as UGC (user generated content) and influencer marketing affect most among younger consumers.
5. Emotional content along with community driven content builds long term loyalty.

While these studies explored engagement trends within each generation or platform, few have compared both generations across multiple regions like Saudi Arabia and Egypt. This highlights a research gap, which the current study aims to address by showing cross generational and cultural insights.

2.5 Discussion of Previous Studies and Research Contribution

The previous studies reviewed have provided a solid foundation for understanding how social media engagement affects brand performance, especially among younger generations. It's clear that platforms like TikTok and Instagram play a major role in shaping digital marketing strategies, and that factors like emotional appeal, influencer marketing, and user-generated content have a powerful influence on consumer behavior.

That said, these studies also have important limitations that leave space for further exploration:

1. Lack of Comparative Focus Between Generations:

Many researchers concentrate on either Millennials or Gen Z, but rarely analyze them side by side. This makes it harder to understand how the two groups differ — or align — in the way they engage with brand content online.

2. Geographic Concentration in Western Contexts:

A significant portion of previous research has focused on Western countries like the U.S. or U.K., with little attention to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Cultural and economic factors in countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt could influence online behavior in ways that global studies don't capture.

3. Overfocus on One or Two Platforms:

While TikTok and Instagram dominate current research, other platforms — like Facebook (still used widely by Millennials), Snapchat, and Twitter — receive less attention. This creates an incomplete picture of where and how engagement happens across different age groups.

4. Surface-Level Treatment of Engagement:

Much of the existing research treats engagement as a set of numerical indicators (likes, shares, views), rather than exploring it as a strategic tool for building long-term brand value and customer loyalty.

Contribution of this Study:

This research aims to fill those gaps by offering a more balanced and context-specific understanding of how social media engagement influences brand performance. It will:

1. Directly compare Millennials and Gen Z, helping marketers understand how to address both groups without favoring one at the expense of the other.
2. Focus on non-Western, Arabic-speaking contexts — specifically Saudi Arabia and Egypt — where generational behavior and media consumption might differ due to local norms and culture.

3. Look at a variety of platforms, not just the trendiest ones, to provide more realistic recommendations.
4. Emphasize strategic engagement — not just as a performance metric, but as a tool that strengthens emotional connection and brand loyalty over time.

Conclusion:

In short, this study will offer new insights that go beyond the scope of previous research. It will help brands create more inclusive, cross-generational strategies that are culturally relevant and grounded in real user behavior from the MENA region — something that has not been explored in depth in earlier academic work.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

A well-defined theoretical framework is essential in any research as it offers a structured lens through which the study is conducted and analyzed. This research explores the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Gen Z consumers, making it important to ground the work in established theories that explain why people engage online, what motivates their interactions, and how these engagements impact brand success.

2.6.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a useful foundation for understanding social interactions, including those on social media platforms. Proposed by Homans (1958), SET views social behavior as a series of exchanges where individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. According to Blau (1964), “social exchange involves voluntary actions that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others.” Applied to the context of social media, this theory explains that users engage with brands because they expect some form of benefit, such as gaining valuable information, social approval, or entertainment. This reciprocal exchange fosters ongoing interaction, which is critical for brand engagement, especially among digitally savvy Millennials and Gen Z users who value meaningful online experiences.

2.6.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Building on motivations for media consumption, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers insight into why individuals actively select certain media to satisfy specific needs. Katz, Blumler,

and Gurevitch (1974) argued that “audiences are not passive consumers but active participants who seek out media that fulfill their desires and goals.” In the context of social media, users are driven by desires for information, social connection, personal identity reinforcement, and entertainment. For Millennials and Gen Z, whose media use is often interactive and social, understanding these gratifications helps explain patterns of content preference and emotional engagement. Brands that tailor their content to these motivations are more likely to capture and sustain attention.

2.6.3 Relationship Marketing Theory

Relationship Marketing Theory emphasizes the shift from transactional exchanges to building long-term relationships with customers. As Grönroos (1994) noted, “the purpose of marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners at a profit.” Social media platforms have transformed how brands can engage with consumers by allowing two-way, real-time communication. This creates opportunities for brands to nurture loyalty and trust through consistent interaction and responsiveness. For Millennials and Gen Z, who often expect authenticity and dialogue from brands, relationship marketing is essential for enhancing brand performance through social media engagement.

2.6.4 Generation as a Moderating Variable

Generational theory highlights that different age cohorts have distinct values, behaviors, and experiences, which affect how they interact with media and brands. Strauss and Howe (1991) describe Millennials as “digital pioneers,” comfortable with technology but valuing collaboration and experiences, while Gen Z are “true digital natives,” having grown up fully immersed in social media and mobile technology. These differences suggest that generation can moderate the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance, as each group may respond differently to brand communications and engagement strategies. Understanding these nuances is critical for brands aiming to tailor their social media efforts effectively.

2.6.5 Conceptual Model

Integrating these theories, this study proposes a conceptual model where social media engagement positively influences brand performance, and generation moderates this relationship. Social Exchange Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory explain why consumers engage and what drives their interaction, while Relationship Marketing Theory links engagement to brand outcomes. Generational differences provide a moderating lens that recognizes varying responses between Millennials and Gen Z. This model provides a comprehensive framework to investigate how and why social media engagement affects brand success across these key demographic groups.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the study on the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Generation Z in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It outlines the research design, population, sampling method, and procedures used to collect and analyze the data. Now that the survey has been completed, this chapter reflects the actual steps taken during the research process.

3.2 Research Design

The study used a quantitative research approach, with an online survey as the main data collection tool. Quantitative research was selected because it allows for objective analysis of numerical data and helps identify patterns and correlations between variables. The survey was designed to measure how users interact with brand content on social media and how they perceive brand performance.

3.3 Population Study

The population targeted in this research included Millennial and Gen Z social media users from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Millennials are defined as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, while Generation Z includes those born between 1997 and 2012. The population focus was chosen due to the high digital activity of both generations and their significance in shaping online brand perception.

3.4 Sample Characteristics

The sample included respondents from various backgrounds and age groups within the Millennial and Gen Z categories. Participants were diverse in gender, education levels, and preferred social media platforms. To reach a wider and balanced audience, the survey was distributed using WhatsApp and Snapchat, and some participants helped expand reach by sharing it through their Snapchat Stories.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Method

The study employed a quota sampling method to ensure representation from both Saudi Arabia and Egypt and from both generational groups. Although the initial target was 200 responses, a total of 59 valid responses were collected by the time of writing. This sample size still allowed for initial analysis and exploration of trends across the groups.

3.6 Data Collection and Procedure

Data was collected using a self-administered online survey created with Google Forms. The survey was distributed through direct messages and social media platforms between friends and peers in both countries. The form was available in both Arabic and English, and the questions were adapted to be culturally relevant and easy to understand. The survey included multiple sections covering:

- Demographic information (age, gender, country)
- Social media usage patterns
- Content preferences
- Brand engagement and loyalty behaviors

3.7 Study Variables

This study includes three main variables:

- Independent Variable: Social Media Engagement — how users interact with brand content (likes, comments, shares, etc.)
- Dependent Variable: Brand Performance — how users view the brand in terms of trust, loyalty, and likelihood to purchase
- Moderating Variable: Generation — the comparison between Millennial and Gen Z behavior

These variables were chosen based on the research questions and the gaps found in past studies.

3.8 Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated using the formal scientific structure:

Main Hypothesis (H0):

There is no statistically significant relationship between social media engagement and brand performance.

Sub-Hypotheses:

H1: There is no statistically significant difference between Millennials and Gen Z in how they engage with brand content on social media.

H2: There is no statistically significant effect of social media engagement on perceived brand performance.

H3: Generation does not significantly moderate the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance.

These hypotheses are tested using correlation and comparative analysis to explore the relationship between social media engagement and brand performance across generations.

3.9 Method of Analysis

The data collected from the 59 participants was exported from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel, where it was cleaned and organized for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and averages were used to summarize the results. This includes analyzing demographic details, social media usage patterns, and participants' responses to brand engagement and content preferences. Charts and tables were also generated in Excel to help visualize the findings clearly. While advanced inferential statistical methods like ANOVA or regression were considered, they were not applied in this stage of the research due to the sample size and the descriptive nature of the study. Future research with a larger sample may benefit from such analysis.

3.10 Questionnaire Instrument

The questionnaire was structured in four main sections:

1. Demographics (age, gender, country of residence)
2. Social media behavior (platforms used, frequency, preferred content)
3. Engagement style (factors influencing interaction with brands)
4. Brand perception and loyalty

The survey was bilingual (Arabic and English) to ensure better accessibility and cultural alignment. A copy of the full survey is provided in Appendix A.

Summary

This chapter presented the actual steps followed in conducting the research. The survey successfully reached respondents from both countries and across the two generations of interest. Although the sample size is limited, the data collected provides meaningful insights into generational engagement patterns and forms a basis for further analysis in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Practical Study

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the practical part of the research by analyzing the data collected through an online survey targeting Millennials and Generation Z in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The main objective is to understand how both generations interact with brands on social media and how this engagement influences brand performance. The analysis covers demographic characteristics, social media usage patterns, types of content that drive engagement, trust factors, and user preferences. Each section will present descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and comparisons between the two age groups, followed by a discussion that links the findings to existing literature. Finally, the chapter concludes with key insights and practical recommendations for marketers aiming to build more effective strategies for both generations.

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Demographic Data

A) Age Group Distribution

The survey included 59 participants across a range of age groups, with the aim of capturing insights from both Millennial and Gen Z consumers. The largest group of respondents were between the ages of 18–24, representing 49.2% of the sample, followed by 27.1% aged 25–28. These two brackets together make up the majority of Gen Z participants. On the Millennial side, 15.3% of participants were between 29–36, and 8.5% were aged 36 and above, indicating a smaller but still relevant portion of Millennial voices in the study. This distribution shows that Gen Z was more responsive to the survey, possibly due to their higher daily engagement on digital platforms like WhatsApp and Snapchat, where the survey was shared. Despite the unequal sample size between the two generations, the responses still offer valuable comparisons across age groups, especially in relation to their behaviors and preferences on social media.

B) Gender Distribution

Among the 59 survey participants, the majority were female, representing approximately 66% of the sample (39 respondents), while 34% (20 respondents) were male. This gender distribution highlights a higher response rate among females, which may reflect greater willingness to participate in surveys or higher social media engagement levels among female users in the selected regions. While the study does not focus on gender as a primary variable, this

demographic detail provides useful context when interpreting engagement behavior across different segments.

C) Country Residence

The participants were almost evenly split between the two target countries. Out of the 59 responses, 52.5% (31 respondents) were from Saudi Arabia, while 47.5% (28 respondents) were from Egypt. This close balance strengthens the comparative aspect of the study, as it ensures representation from both regions. The geographic diversity is especially important given the cultural and market differences between the two countries, which may influence how Millennials and Gen Z interact with brands on social media.

4.2.2 Social Media Usage

A) Platforms Used Most Frequently

Participants could choose multiple platforms. The most commonly used platforms were:

- Instagram – 81%
- Snapchat – 71%
- TikTok – 69%
- YouTube – 58%
- Twitter (X) – 36%
- Facebook – 17%

Gen Z showed a stronger preference for TikTok and Snapchat, whereas Millennials leaned slightly more toward Instagram and YouTube. These results support previous studies (Williams & Page, 2011; Seemiller & Grace, 2016) that emphasize Gen Z's preference for visual, short-form, and trend-driven content, while Millennials often consume longer-form content with more context.

B) Time Spent on Social Media

In terms of daily usage:

- 41% spend 4–6 hours on social media.
- 29% spend 2–4 hours.
- 17% spend 1–2 hours.
- The remaining 13% spend more than 6 hours.

Gen Z participants reported spending more time overall compared to Millennials, confirming trends found in prior literature about Gen Z's high digital immersion. This constant exposure may make them more sensitive to content variety, pace, and emotional resonance—factors important for campaign design.

4.2.3 Engagement Grid

Understanding which types of content resonate with each generation helps brands tailor their strategies more effectively. Based on the survey responses, there are clear differences in how Millennials and Gen Z engage with various content styles.

Among Gen Z respondents, the most engaging content types were:

- **Funny or entertaining content:** 41.5% of Gen Z indicated they “Often” engage with this type of content, and another 19.5% said “Always.” This aligns with findings by Seemiller and Grace (2016), who observed that Gen Z tends to favor light, fast, and emotionally stimulating content.
- **Trends and memes:** This category also saw strong engagement, with many respondents reporting “Sometimes” or “Often” interactions, supporting the idea that Gen Z is highly attuned to fast-evolving digital culture.
- **Informational content:** While still popular, it received slightly lower “Always” responses compared to funny content, with 34.1% saying they “Often” engage with it and 39% choosing “Sometimes.” This reflects their preference for snackable learning formats, as supported by insights from the Digital Marketing Institute (2023).

On the other hand, Millennials demonstrated more balanced engagement patterns:

- They were more likely to engage with **informational or educational** content, a trend noted by Fromm & Read (2018), who highlighted Millennials’ interest in deeper, knowledge-based brand narratives.
- **Social cause-related content** also drew relatively higher engagement among Millennials, supporting earlier studies that show this generation values brands with purpose and social responsibility.

Interestingly, **influencer content** showed moderate to high engagement across both groups. Gen Z responded more actively than Millennials, especially in the “Often” and “Sometimes” categories. This supports the findings by Duffett (2017), which showed that influencer marketing has a greater emotional impact on younger audiences who value peer credibility.

4.2.4 Brand Trust

When it comes to brand trust, responses revealed some generational differences. Among **Gen Z**, the majority rated their trust in brands they follow on social media moderately high, with **41.5% selecting 3 out of 5**, and **17.1% selecting 5 out of 5**, indicating strong trust. In contrast, **Millennials** showed a slightly more polarized response — while **44.4% chose 3**, a notable **33.3% selected 4**, and only **5.6% gave the highest score of 5**.

In terms of influence on buying behavior, **Millennials seem more heavily influenced** by social media. Half of them (**50%**) gave a score of 4, and **33.3% rated it 3**, suggesting that social media plays a strong role in their purchasing decisions. **Gen Z** responses were more spread out — **39% gave a score of 4**, but a combined **26.8%** selected low influence scores (1 or 2), indicating that while social media does influence them, it's not always a decisive factor.

When asked whether they engage more with brands that align with their personal beliefs, **both generations showed similar patterns**, though **Millennials leaned slightly** more toward strong agreement: **33.3% rated this statement a 5**, compared to **29.3% of Gen Z**. However, Gen Z also had a small group (7.3%) who strongly disagreed (rating 1), which was slightly higher than Millennials (5.6%).

These findings partially align with previous research by Ashley and Tuten (2015) and Barcelos et al. (2018), which emphasized that emotional connection and value alignment drive trust and loyalty, particularly among younger audiences. In this study, while both generations show trust in brands they follow, Millennials appear more affected by brand messaging when it comes to purchasing decisions — suggesting that trust alone may not be enough to influence Gen Z's buying behavior without additional factors like entertainment or social proof.

4.2.5 Preferences

Respondents were asked to select up to two factors that make them feel loyal to a brand. Five main loyalty drivers appeared in the data: Offers and rewards, Fast response, Authentic content, Visuals, and Consistent tone.

Across the whole sample, Offers and rewards, Authentic content, and Fast response were the most frequently chosen drivers of loyalty, suggesting that value, honesty, and responsiveness remain central to sustaining brand relationships on social media.

Millennials (ages 30–44)

- **Offers and rewards** were selected by 72.2% of Millennial respondents — the single strongest loyalty trigger in this group.
- **Fast response / customer responsiveness** followed at 66.7%, indicating that timely replies, service quality, and problem resolution matter greatly.
- **Authentic content** was chosen by 38.9%, reflecting Millennials' appreciation for brands that communicate honestly and consistently over time.
- **Visuals** (27.8%) and **Consistent tone** (22.2%) were less frequently selected, suggesting that message style is secondary to value and service performance.

Gen Z (ages 13–28)

- **Authentic content** led this group at 56.1%, showing that Gen Z responds to brands that feel real, transparent, and aligned with personal or cultural identity.
- **Offers and rewards** came next at 46.3%, confirming that incentives still matter — but authenticity edges them out.
- **Consistent tone** (36.6%) and **Fast response** (34.1%) were also important; Gen Z appears to value brands that speak in a recognizable voice and engage actively.
- **Visuals** were selected by 34.1%, consistent with Gen Z's high engagement on visually driven platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

These results echo themes from your literature review. Fromm & Read (2018) noted that Millennials reward brands that deliver value and service reliability — reflected here in their high selection of offers and fast response. Meanwhile, Seemiller & Grace (2016) and more recent digital marketing commentary suggest that Gen Z is especially sensitive to authenticity and identity signaling, which is strongly supported by your finding that over half of Gen Z respondents chose “Authentic content” as a loyalty driver. The importance of consistency and responsiveness across both groups also ties to relationship marketing concepts discussed in Chapter 2, where ongoing, two-way interaction helps maintain trust.

An open-end question was asked at the end of the survey “**What do you think brands should improve when targeting your generation?**” Based on the open-ended responses to the question, many respondents emphasized the importance of customer service and product quality, highlighting a desire for reliable service experiences and high standards. Words like “authenticity”, “real”, and “being” also appeared frequently, suggesting that both Gen Z and Millennials are looking for brands that feel genuine, transparent, and true to their values. Some

respondents expressed frustration with overly commercial messaging, preferring content that feels more personal, purpose-driven, or aligned with social causes. A few mentioned the need for clear communication and consistent branding, especially when addressing youth in different regions. These insights reinforce earlier findings in this study that emotional connection, relatability, and value alignment are significant drivers of engagement across both generations.

4.3 Hypotheses Discussion and Interpretation

This part of the study revisits the main hypotheses in light of the data collected from 59 participants across Saudi Arabia and Egypt, analyzing their patterns of engagement and brand perception across Millennial and Gen Z consumers.

Main Hypothesis

- **H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between social media engagement and brand performance among Millennials and Gen Z in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.**

Given that the study did not apply formal statistical tests such as Pearson correlation or ANOVA (which would be necessary to fully confirm or reject statistical significance), this hypothesis cannot be definitively accepted or rejected. However, the descriptive data offers important trends that help interpret consumer behavior qualitatively.

Sub-Hypotheses Discussion

- **H₁: Millennials and Gen Z differ in their engagement behavior on social media.**

The data supports this hypothesis on several levels. For instance, Millennials were more likely to engage with informative content, while Gen Z showed a stronger interest in memes, influencers, and short-form content like TikTok. This aligns with past studies, such as Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019), which suggested Gen Z is more drawn to entertaining and visually appealing formats.

- **H₂: Higher social media engagement is associated with greater brand trust and loyalty.**

The data revealed that participants who reported interacting more with brand content (especially those selecting options like “Always” or “Often” for various content types) also tended to rate brand trust and influence on purchase decisions higher (values of 4 or 5 on the Likert scale). This trend is in line with Keller (2009), who argued that consumer engagement can foster trust, and Hollebeek et al. (2014), who described engagement as a driver of brand-related outcomes like loyalty.

- **H₃: Generation (Millennial vs. Gen Z) moderates the impact of social media engagement on brand performance.**

While formal moderation analysis wasn't conducted, observable patterns from the responses suggest that generational preferences influence the way social media engagement translates into loyalty. Gen Z valued fast, visually dynamic, and emotionally authentic brand interactions more than Millennials, who appeared more focused on consistent messaging and useful content. These findings echo prior observations in studies such as Smith (2017).

Conclusion of Hypothesis Discussion

Even though the current research relied on descriptive methods and did not use inferential statistics, the trends indicate support for the sub-hypotheses. Generational differences clearly exist in both engagement and loyalty drivers, and engagement behaviors show a meaningful connection to perceived brand trust. Future research could validate these insights through statistical testing.

4.4 Research Recommendations

- Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations can be made for brands aiming to strengthen their presence among Millennials and Gen Z consumers through social media engagement:
- Tailor content by generation: The data showed that Gen Z responds more to humorous, fast, and visually driven content like memes and influencer collaborations, while Millennials are more likely to engage with informative or value-based content. Brands should consider these differences when planning their campaigns. For example, the same campaign can be presented in a short, trendy video on TikTok for Gen Z, and as an in-depth post or story on Instagram or YouTube for Millennials.
- Focus on authenticity and emotional connection: Across both generations, participants emphasized the importance of trust, relatability, and consistency. Brands that communicate authentically, support social causes, or share behind-the-scenes content are more likely to build long-term loyalty.
- Use more interactive features: Polls, live sessions, Q&As, and user-generated content were identified as effective tools for boosting engagement. These interactive formats make users feel involved and valued, which can deepen their connection to the brand.

- Reward loyalty with value: Several responses mentioned that loyalty programs, exclusive offers, or early access to content/products could increase customer retention. Creating reward-based engagement strategies can help turn casual followers into brand advocates.
- Maintain fast and consistent communication: Respondents appreciated brands that reply quickly to comments and messages. Maintaining a consistent tone and being accessible across platforms builds trust and shows professionalism.
- Monitor feedback and evolve: Open-ended responses revealed valuable suggestions about what each generation expects. Brands should actively listen to feedback from followers and be open to adjusting their content or approach over time.
- Consider cultural relevance: Since this study included respondents from both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, it's important to remember that cultural context matters. What works in one country or region may not work in another. Brands should localize content and adapt to each audience's values and communication styles.
- Brands aiming to engage Gen Z should prioritize humor, memes, and interactive content that plays into trends and visual storytelling. For Millennials, educational content, detailed campaigns, and value-driven narratives will likely perform better. However, both groups showed interest in a variety of content, suggesting that blended campaigns—where format and message are adapted per platform—could yield the highest reach and engagement.

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Appendix

Social Media and Brand Engagement

التفاعل مع / Among Millennials and Gen Z

العلامات التجارية عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بين جيل الألفية وجيل زد

This survey is part of a Master's research project that explores how people from two generations — **Millennials and Generation Z** — engage with brand content on social media in **Saudi Arabia and Egypt**.

The goal is to help marketers understand different preferences and create better campaigns for both generations.

Your answers are anonymous and your time is greatly appreciated.

هذا الاستبيان جزء من مشروع بحثي لرسالة الماجستير، ويهدف إلى دراسة كيف يتفاعل جيل الألفية وجيل زد مع محتوى العلامات التجارية على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في السعودية ومصر.

الهدف هو مساعدة المصممين على فهم تفضيلات كل جيل وتصميم حملات تسويقية أفضل تناسب الجميع.

إجاباتك سرية، ونقدر وقتك ومشاركتك كثيراً.

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Social Media and Brand Engagement

التفاعل مع / Among Millennials and Gen Z

العلامات التجارية عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بين جيل الألفية وجيل زد

* Indicates required question

Demographics

* كم عمرك؟ / What is your age group?

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-28
- ☐ 29-36
- ☐ 40+

What is your gender? / ما هو جنسك؟ *

☐ Female / أنثى

☐ Male / ذكر

Country of residence? / مكان إقامتك؟ *

Choose

Saudi Arabia

Egypt

Never / أبداً

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Google Forms.

Social Media Usage

Which platforms do you use regularly? / ما المنصات التي تستخدمها بانتظام؟ *

☐ Instagram

☐ TikTok

☐ Snapchat

☐ X (Twitter)

☐ Facebook

☐ Youtube

☐ Other

How many hours per day do you spend on social media? / كم ساعة تقضي يومياً؟ *

☐ Less than 1 hour

☐ 1–2 hours

☐ 3–4 hours

☐ 5+ hours

Back

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Engagement (Grid)

How often do you engage with these types of content? / كم مرة تتفاعل مع أنواع المحتوى التالية؟ *

	Never / أبداً	Rarely / نادراً	Sometimes / أحياناً	Often / غالباً	Always / دائماً
Funny / مضحك	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discounts / عروض	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Informative / تعليمي	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Influencers / مؤثرين	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social Causes / قضايا اجتماعية	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trends & Memes / ميمز وشائعات	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Back

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Brand trust

I trust the brands I follow on social media. *

أثق بالعلامات التجارية التي أتابعها على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree / أعارض بشدة ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree / أوافق بشدة

Social media influences my buying decisions. *

وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تؤثر على قرارات الشراء الخاصة بي.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree / أعارض بشدة ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree / أوافق بشدة

I interact more with brands that share my beliefs or care about the things I care about. *

أتفاعل أكثر مع العلامات التجارية التي تشارك معتقداتي أو تهتم بالأشياء

التي أؤمن بها

This includes values like honesty, helping others, protecting the environment, or supporting good causes / يشمل ذلك قيماً مثل الصدق، ومساعدة الآخرين، وحماية البيئة، أو دعم القضايا الإنسانية

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree / أعارض بشدة ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree / أوافق بشدة

Back

Next

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Preferences

What makes you loyal to a brand? / ما الذي يجعلك تشعر بالولاء للعلامة التجارية؟ (Pick 2) *

- ☐ Fast response / رد سريع
- ☐ Consistent tone / أسلوب ثابت
- ☐ Offers and rewards / عروض ومكافآت
- ☐ Visuals / محتوى بصري
- ☐ Authentic content / محتوى أصيل

What do you think brands should improve when targeting your generation? / ما الذي

تعتقد أنه يجب على العلامات التجارية تحسينه؟

Your answer

Back

Submit

Clear form