




# Behavioral Patterns of Arab Gen Z in Consuming AI-Assisted Media Content: A Mixed-Methods Investigation Integrating Uses and Gratifications and Interactive Theory

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the behavior patterns of the Arab Generation Z in relation to consumption of artificial intelligence (AI) assisted media content on digital platforms based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Interactive Theory. With the advent of AI personalization and curation of the digital experience, it is now more than ever that the way the young audience perceives and engages with the algorithmically generated content is being questioned. The research uses a mixed-methods design whereby quantitative and qualitative methods are integrated to achieve the reliability of statistics and interpretations. The quantitative stage consisted of 428 Arab Gen Z surveyed on motivations, interactive behaviors and perceived gratifications using a five-point Likert scale and applied on an online questionnaire. To examine the perceptions, attitudes, and awareness of AI as a force of influencing digital content, the qualitative phase involved ten semi-structured interviews to understand the perspective of the participants. Also, the use of a content analysis of 25 posts about AI-assisted social media on the major platforms (Tik Tok, Instagram, and YouTube) was performed to find the visual or textual signs of AI integration, including synthetic voices or auto-generated captions. The results showed that 68 percent of the respondents were strongly interested in AI-suggested content and 72 percent said they received powerful informational and entertainment satisfaction. Nevertheless, the awareness of AI presence in media production manifested itself in only 61 percent. Qualitative data implied ambivalent views the fascination with the creative possibilities of AI combined with the fear of authenticity and manipulation of emotions. Its results confirm a Hybrid Model of Gratification, where intrinsic motivations (e.g., entertainment and self-expression) are interacting with algorithmic affordances (e.g., AI personalization), and it has a significant predictive value of engagement behaviors ( $r = .61, p < .001$ ). Engagement ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ) and authenticity attitudes ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ) were moderately related to the AI awareness.

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This model is the major theoretical contribution of the study to the expansion of UGT in AI-mediated situations.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, artificial intelligence, media consumption, uses and gratifications theory, interactive theory, digital behavior, Arab audiences

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## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital media systems has radically altered the ways in which audiences, particularly those belonging to Generation Z, consume, perceive, and engage with the content. The recommendation algorithms delivered by AI, generative content systems, and chat robots have made the process of human and machine creativity less distinct, altering both how media is produced and the experience of being a consumer. This change has created a paradigm shift that requires a new theoretical and empirical focus. Specifically, it is essential to learn about the behavioral patterns of the digital natives born and raised in the AI-enhanced world to explain the new trends in media consumption in the Arab world and beyond (Dunas & Vartanov, 2020; Yaman & Çakın, 2021). The operational definition of behavioral pattern in this study is the quantifiable combination of motivational drivers, frequency of interactions (likes, shares, comments), perceived gratifications, and awareness of AI-mediated processes that determine exposure to media.

In communication studies, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers an important perspective towards examining how audiences actively approach media to fulfil cognitive, affective, personal, and social needs. The theory is focused on personal agency to choose and decode media content according to the gratifications that one wants, instead of being a passive receiver. Recent studies have also scaled UGT to technological and algorithmic situations, mainly in the case of analyzing AI-mediated platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Kim & Cake, 2025). This theoretical growth is indicative of the growing sophistication of the motivations underpinning the use of the specific media, as human intentions get dynamically influenced by algorithmic recommendations and personalization platforms. Within the frames of AI-assisted media content, researchers have put forward the thesis that gratifications cease to be provided through human-centered communication but rather co-constructed with intelligent technologies, capable of learning, anticipating, and recommending user-specific content (Pu et al., 2025; Xie et al., 2024). As an illustration, personal video feeds and advertisement curation functions of AI recommendation systems have a direct effect on exposure, attention, and emotional satisfaction. Arkhipova and Janssen (2024) have shown that AI-mediated personalization has improved personal satisfaction as well as social practices as users engage socially differently in their online communities because of the mediation of algorithms. This confluence between satisfaction and automation is the next level of interactivity, the one that crosses human desires and technological capabilities. Furthermore, the interaction with digital media of the generation Z can be defined by the increased level of familiarity with AI systems and the critical understanding of technological mediation.

The representatives of this generation, those who were born around 1997-2012, have peculiarities in their cognitive and behavioral patterns as they multitask using various platforms, have short attention spans, and show a preference for visual and interactive content (Gerasimova, 2024). Their participation practices, including liking, sharing, commenting, and remixing, indicate a participatory culture that is based on entertainment and self-expression as well as identity construction (Yaman & Çakın, 2021). Nonetheless, they are also becoming more skeptical about the role of AI in forming the concept of authenticity and privacy in the digital environment (Ni et al., 2025; Kolawole et al., 2025). Research has discovered that the effects of AI on the media consumption of Gen Z can be described as multipolar. Personalization and automation bring happiness and time consumption on the platform on the one hand, but on the other, they can enhance the filtering bubbles, addiction, or even emotional exhaustion (Khanh Linh et al., 2025; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). According to Li et al. (2025), the use of AI to increase perceived coolness and technological affinity influences social media users to experience greater platform loyalty and perceived social capital. Bhatnagar and Rajesh (2025)

also found that the expectation-confirmation processes cause Gen Z and Y users to assess AI capabilities in financial and service applications and directly associate the level of satisfaction with the perceived performance of AI. These trends indicate that AI-based gratifications are very situational, also dependent on the platform, type of content, and purpose. Meanwhile, the Interactive Theory of Media Use introduces the next dimension of insight into the existence of two-way interactions between systems and audiences. It implies that users do not just consume media but also co-produce digital realities via feedback loop interaction, algorithmic learning, and content adaptation. This theory gains special significance in the context of AI because, in this case, the behavior of the user (sharing, liking, commenting) directly provides the information to the algorithm, which adjusts future content delivery further (Kim & Cake, 2025; Li et al., 2025). This dynamic process of mutual form suggests the importance of studying the interactional patterns of Gen Z as behavioral manifestations and data-driven features that feed AI systems.

Understanding how Arab Generation Z audiences specifically experience and interpret AI involvement in their daily media use is still a research gap, despite growing scholarly interest in AI-assisted media content behavior. The majority of previous research has been carried out in either East Asian or Western settings (Arkhipova & Janssen, 2024; Pu et al., 2025; Xie et al., 2024), ignoring cultural differences in technological accessibility, social norms, and digital literacy. Furthermore, despite the fact that awareness strongly mediates perceptions of credibility, trust, and satisfaction, there are still few qualitative investigations into Gen Z's subjective awareness of AI (Gerasimova, 2024; Ni et al., 2025). This disparity necessitates a thorough investigation that blends qualitative understandings of perception and meaning-making with quantitative assessments of motivation and engagement.

The current research aims to address this gap through carrying out mixed-method research to examine the behavioral patterns of Arab Gen Z regarding the consumption of AI-assisted media content. Through the prism of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Interactive Theory, it will investigate (a) what motivates Gen Z to interact with AI-assisted media content; (b) how they are aware and feel about the AI-generated or AI-suggested content; and (c) how it affects their interaction behaviors and the level of satisfaction. The study will expand upon existing work in the digital consumption area (Kim & Cake, 2025; Pu et al., 2025) and the AI media engagement field (Arkhipova & Janssen, 2024; Xie et al., 2024) and will center on offering empirical research that will help to connect AI awareness to the standard of behavioral engagement on the key digital platforms. This paper would help to further the theoretical knowledge in media gratification in the age of AI, as well as provide a practical contribution to digital media creators, media strategists, and policy designers in the Arab world by combining both quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, it makes Gen Z not just the passive observers of the AI-filtered media but the active members of a symbiotic human-machine communication system (Dunas & Vartanov, 2020; Li et al., 2025).

In addition to media usage, AI-driven digital environments are also influencing non-formal and self-directed learning habits among the users of Generation Z. The potential of AI-powered platforms to enhance personalized learning, adaptive content delivery, and the cultivation of digital skills vital for 21st-century education has been highlighted by recent studies in the field of educational research (Rojas & Chiappe, 2024; Kołodziej & Borowska, 2024). Furthermore, the use of generative AI tools like conversational agents and recommendation systems has revolutionized student interaction with knowledge, access to educational content, and micro-learning practices on social media platforms (Jo, 2024; Xia et al., 2024). Moreover, the usage of AI tools by Gen-Z students has been found to be influenced by the perceived usefulness, ease of use, and gratification factors, which are also key factors in digital learning engagement (Kavitha & Joshith, 2024). The developments mentioned above illustrate that the study of AI-mediated media consumption is not confined to its communicative nature; rather, it is also an emerging learning ecology that has an impact on the way in which Generation Z learns knowledge and skills in digital environments.

# METHODOLOGY

## Quantitative Phase

The quantitative part of this paper aimed to investigate the quantifiable aspects of the habits of the Arab Generation Z (18-27 years) of consuming and engaging with AI-assisted media content on online resources. The mixed-method path was taken to achieve the statistical reliability and the interpretative depth, and the quantitative stage became the basis of further qualitative investigation. A questionnaire was drawn up and presented in the form of a structured online survey, which was delivered using Google Forms. The target audience was the users of the Arab Gen Z who are currently active on at least one of the most popular AI-based social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms were selected due to their being the major areas where AI-generated or AI-assisted content (algorithms suggested, auto-captioning, or AI-generated media) are the most common. A quantitative method used in the content analysis to identify the identifiable AI indicators was to code them in a systematic manner.

The sampling was done on a purposive design to target the respondents who fulfilled certain inclusion criteria: Arab nationality, aged 18 to 27 years, and who used digital media on a daily basis. Four hundred and fifty (450) study participants were initially recruited; however, after screening for completeness and consistency, 428 participants were retained for the final analysis, which is within the range of 300-600 participants estimated to make the study practical and statistically significant.

Based on the estimation of sample size in social research, a sample size of at least 384 respondents would give a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 5; therefore, the attained sample size is adequate to represent the whole population. The sample demographic was to provide proportional diversity in terms of gender, age, education, and country. The sample was developed in such a way that there was proportional diversity in terms of gender, age, education level, and home country. **Table 1** shows the detailed demographic distribution of the respondents.

The questionnaire contained only closed-ended questions, which were designed in three-sections. The first section collected demographic and background information. The second part evaluated motivations for using the media, such as entertainment, social connection, information-seeking, and awareness of trends. The third part involved the interaction behaviors in terms of liking, sharing, commenting, and reposting frequency, and experiencing gratification with the help of AI-assisted content. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure these constructs on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of the Total Recruited Sample (N = 450)

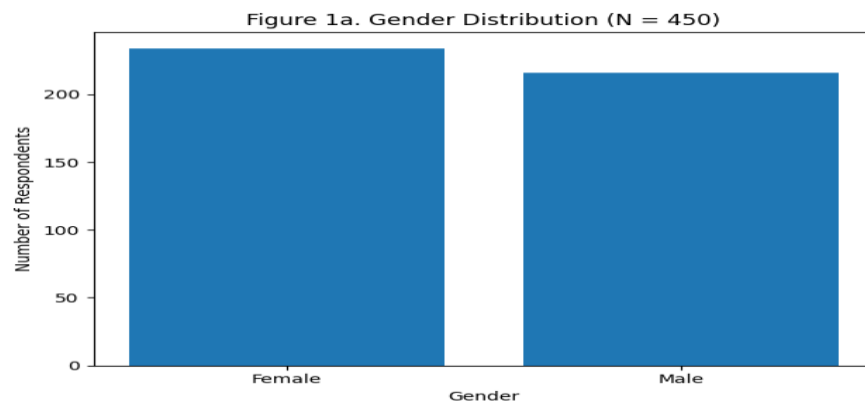
Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	234	52
	Male	216	48
Age Group	18–21	180	40
	22–24	158	35
	25–27	112	25
Education	Undergraduate	270	60
	Postgraduate	113	25
	Diploma/Technical	67	15
Country	Egypt	135	30
	Saudi Arabia	90	20
	Jordan	68	15
	UAE	68	15
	Other Arab countries	89	20

Note: Although the total sample recruited was 450, statistical analysis for specific variables was conducted on 428 valid cases.

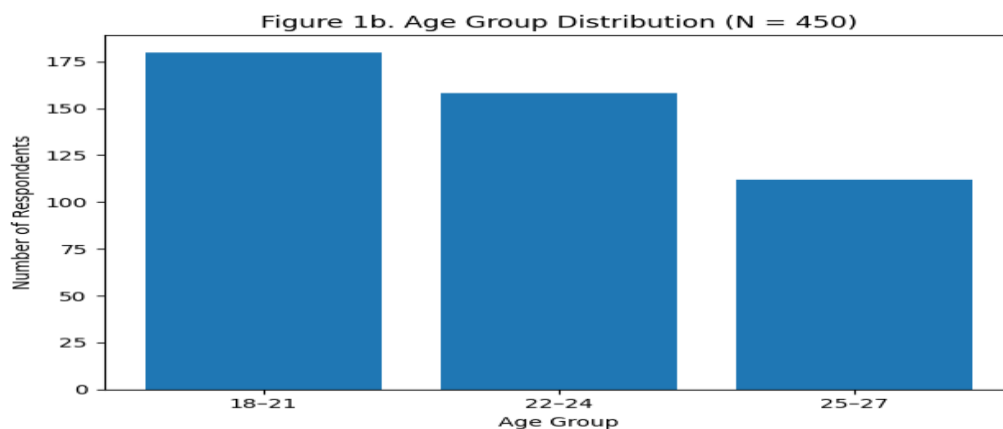
The questionnaire is structured as discussed in **Table 2**, and the number of items to be used to cover each domain. The demographic characteristics of the sample are illustrated in **Figures 1a–1c**. Prior to formal distribution, the questionnaire was pilot tested on a sample of 30 individuals, which is about 7 percent of the complete sample, to help in the understanding, reliability, and internal consistency of the questionnaire. Pilot information was studied, and internal consistency of the scale was measured with Cronbach's alpha = .82, indicating good internal consistency, which means high internal consistency of the Likert-scale items.

**Table 2.** Structure of the Quantitative Questionnaire

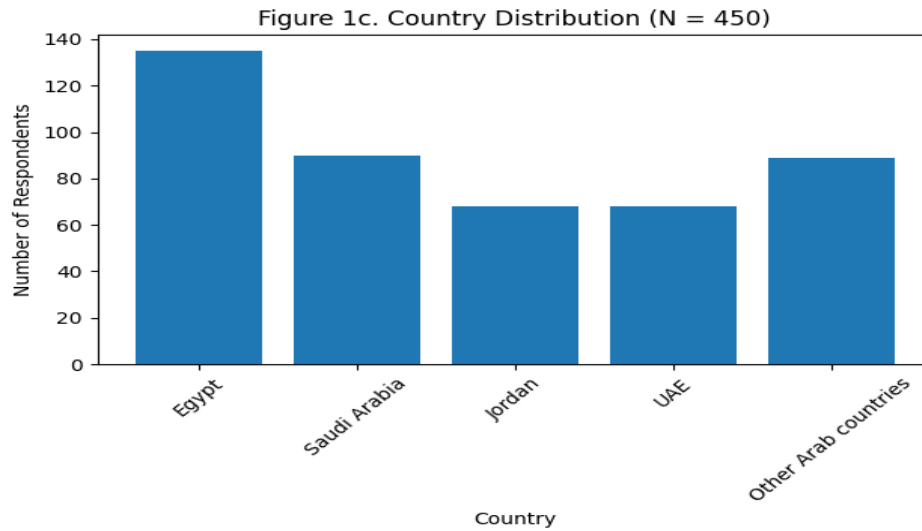
Section	Variable Measured	Number of Items	Measurement Scale
Section 1	Demographic information	6	Nominal
Section 2	Motivations for media consumption	8	Five-point Likert
Section 3	Interaction behaviors (likes, shares, comments, reposts)	7	Five-point Likert
Section 4	Perceived gratifications from AI-assisted content	9	Five-point Likert



**Figure 1a.** Gender Distribution of the Total Recruited Sample (N = 450) (Note: Although the total sample recruited was 450, statistical analysis for specific variables was conducted on 428 valid cases) (Source: Author's calculations based on survey data (2026))



**Figure 1b.** Age Group Distribution of the Total Recruited Sample (N = 450) (Note: Although the total sample recruited was 450, statistical analysis for specific variables was conducted on 428 valid cases) (Source: Author's calculations based on survey data (2026))



**Figure 1c.** Country Distribution of the Total Recruited Sample (N = 450) (Note: Although the total sample recruited was 450, statistical analysis for specific variables was conducted on 428 valid cases) (Source: Author's calculations based on survey data (2026))

The period of data collection was four weeks. On completion, the data were screened in terms of completeness and accuracy. Cases in which the percentage of responses lost or had inconsistent patterns was greater than 10% were rejected. Spreadsheets Visual tabulations were done with SPSS version 28 and Google Sheets. Demographic and behavioral patterns summarized were presented using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and percentages). Pearson correlation, independent samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA were used to test associations between AI awareness, interaction behaviors, and perceived gratifications among the respondents.

## Qualitative Phase

The qualitative stage was carried out in order to better understand the perceptions of the Arab Generation Z population (18-27 years old) regarding the role of artificial intelligence in the process of consumption of digital media content. Whereas the quantitative stage found quantifiable behavioral tendencies and statistical correlations, the qualitative one sought to find out the meanings, attitudes, and interpretative nuances behind such tendencies. The quantitative respondents were purposively sampled into a sub-sample of ten ( $n = 10$ ) to have the variation in gender, age, education level, and level of engagement. The sample comprised of five males (50%) and five females (50%), with an average age of 23.2 years. Each of the participants actively used at least one of the large AI-driven social media (Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube) and had earlier stated moderate to high interaction with AI-suggested or algorithmically recommended content. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, which was done through Google Meet or chat-based interviews, based on the preference of the participants. The interviews took about 30-45 minutes. There was the use of an interview guide to help the discussion, but with flexibility of probing and follow-up questions. Chat-based interviews were also considered to allow the participants to choose and to guarantee greater authenticity of responses in a digitally mediated communication space. The interviews were devoted to three main aspects: (1) knowledge and perceptions of AI capabilities in the digital media (e.g., auto-generated captions, voice synthesis, algorithmic recommendations); (2) emotional and attitudinal reactions towards AI-assisted media; (3) perceptions of the impact of AI on trust, authenticity, and engagement behaviors. The interviews were done in either Arabic or English, depending on the choice of the participant. All interviews were transcribed and translated into English in case of need, with being recorded. The anonymity of participants was ensured by using pseudonyms. Thematic analysis was done in accordance with the framework by Braun and Clarke (2006), which enabled the

systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of recurrent patterns in the data. To increase levels of credibility, two coders were independently reviewing the transcripts, and the rate of inter-coder agreement was 87%. The triangulation of the qualitative results with the quantitative and content analysis results allowed obtaining a comprehensive picture regarding the behavioral patterns of Gen Z in terms of consuming AI-assisted media content.

## Content Analysis

The third stage of the proposed research utilized the content analysis method of a mixed quantitative-descriptive content analysis to investigate real-life examples of AI-assisted media content that circulated in the digital environments that Arab Generation Z frequents the most. This step was created to supplement the quantitative survey as well as the semi-structured interviews because it would help determine the actual evidence of the use of artificial intelligence in the daily consumption of digital media. The target sample consisted of twenty-five ( $n = 25$ ) publicly available posts in three prominent social media sites, including Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, because these platforms are the most popular and even AI-driven among Gen Z users. The posts were chosen according to the high level of engagement and obvious signs of the algorithmic or AI participation. Specifically, each platform contributed roughly eight posts, guaranteeing that both textual and visual content were fairly represented.

The timeframe used to select them was one month (September 2025), with the focus being on trending media that used one or more of the following identifiable features related to AI: synthetic or cloned voices, auto-generated subtitles or captions, algorithmic recommendations, AI-generated images or filters, and personalized content suggestions. Screen recordings were used to capture posts and stored to be systematically analyzed. A semiotic and descriptive framework was used to code and analyze each of the posts according to the presence of visual and textual cues of AI use. The analysis consisted of both denotative (specifically the literal part of the post, i.e., captions, visuals, or hashtags) and connotative (that is, the implicit meanings or perception of using AI) aspects. The individual post was used as the unit of analysis, and specific AI indicators in each of the posts (e.g., a caption saying that it was AI-generated or an automated voice narration) served as the coding unit. Two trained coders were used to undertake the coding process manually.

To attain the reliability in analysis, the intercoder agreement has been computed as Cohen's Kappa (0.84), which depicts a high degree of consistency. Analytical focus was put on defining patterns that relate the evident utilization of AI with user engagement behaviors (likes, comments, and shares) and user feedback tone. The synthesis of all coded data was by semiotic interpretation, where the signifiers (AI symbols or cues) and the signified meanings (user perceptions of authenticity, creativity, and trust) were differentiated. This content analysis was then triangulated with both the quantitative data and the insights gained during interviews to bolster the validity and develop a multidimensional view of the influence of AI on the processes of engagement and meaning-making among Gen Z in the digital media spaces.

## Data Analysis

The analysis of data in this research was based on a multi-method approach that is integrated to synthesize quantitative, qualitative, and content-analytic data in the overall interpretation. All the methodological stages were examined individually and then triangulated to enhance the validity and reliability of the general findings. In the case of the quantitative data, responses that were obtained in the online questionnaire ( $N = 450$ ) were exported using Google Forms to SPSS version 28 and to Google Sheets to be analyzed. Following a data cleaning process to remove 22 incomplete or inconsistent cases (approximately 4.7%), a final sample of 428 valid responses was used for the analysis. The demographic characteristics and media usage patterns were summarized using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations.

A sequence of inferential statistical tests was performed to test the relationships between the primary constructs, which are the awareness of AI, the base of interactions, and perceived gratifications. In particular, the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to test the relationship between AI awareness and engagement behavior, and independent-samples  $t$ -tests were used to test differences in means between male and female participants in their perception of AI-assisted media. Besides that, one-way ANOVA was done to identify the presence of significant differences in engagement patterns between the three age subgroups (18-21, 22-24, and 25-27 years). The statistical significance was determined to be  $p < 0.05$ , and all confidence intervals were computed at the 95% level. The Likert-scale items' reliability analysis resulted in a Cronbach alpha = .82, which was considered to be high in internal consistency.

In the case of qualitative data, thematic analysis was performed on the transcripts of the ten semi-structured interviews and according to the six-phase framework in the study by Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis was executed as follows: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) first code generation, (3) theme search, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) creation of the final report. The analysis attempted to determine the repetitive trends and emotional response connected with the awareness, attitudes, and trust of the participants in the AI-assisted content. Credibility and dependability were achieved through the review of the codes by two independent coders. The inter-coder agreement was high (87%), and the thematic interpretation was consistent. In the content analysis, the data derived from the twenty-five posts sampled on social media were analyzed using a semiotic analysis approach. To interpret each post, both denotative (literal meaning) and connotative (symbolic meaning) meanings were taken into consideration, as the visual and textual clues of the AI usage, which included synthetic voices, algorithmic captions, and AI-generated images, were taken into consideration. The AI symbols that were found in each of the posts were decoded using a semiotic table and divided into the categories of the form (visual/textual), their functionality (informative, aesthetic, or manipulative), and the reaction of the user (acceptance, skepticism, or rejection). The triangulation of the three datasets was carried out after conducting individual analyses to create a complete view of the behavioral pattern and perception of Gen Z. Quantitative correlations were compared with qualitative themes and content patterns to indicate convergent and divergent results. This combination strategy made sure that statistical evidence would be backed by contextual interpretation, and this would give the study findings depth and generalizability.

## RESULTS

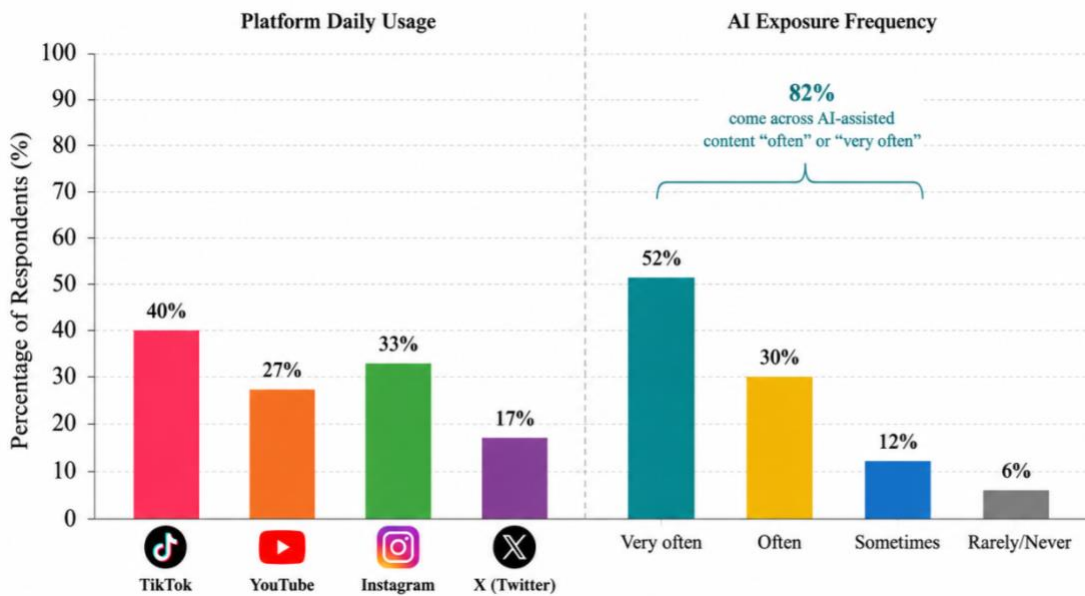
### Quantitative Results

"After eliminating 22 incomplete or inconsistent submissions, a final sample of 428 valid responses from Arab Generation Z participants (ages 18 to 27) was obtained for analysis. With a mean age of 23.1 years ( $SD = 2.4$ ), the final dataset included 52% female respondents ( $n = 223$ ) and 48% male respondents ( $n = 205$ ).

#### *Platform Preference and Media Usage*

With an average of 4.6 hours per day ( $SD = 1.8$ ), respondents reported high levels of daily engagement with digital media. The most popular platform was TikTok (40%), which was followed by YouTube (27%) and Instagram (33%). Approximately 82% of participants said they come across AI-assisted content "often" or "very often," such as algorithmic recommendations or auto-captions.

**Figure 2** shows how TikTok dominates Gen Z's media consumption, with Instagram and YouTube following closely behind. This shows how strongly AI-driven recommendation algorithms impact the way that short-form videos are consumed.



**Figure 2.** Respondent Usage of platforms and AI Exposure among Arab Gen Z (Source: Author's calculations based on survey data (2026))

## Media Awareness and Media Perception of AI

Only 61% of the survey correctly identified that personalized content feeds are due to AI, 24% were uncertain, and 15% thought that such suggestions were human-made. Nevertheless, three out of four indicated a rather positive view of AI in the media, calling it either useful or innovative, in contrast to 18 percent whose attitude was neutral, or 8 percent whose attitude was doubtful or worried about authenticity.

### *Motivations and Gratifications*

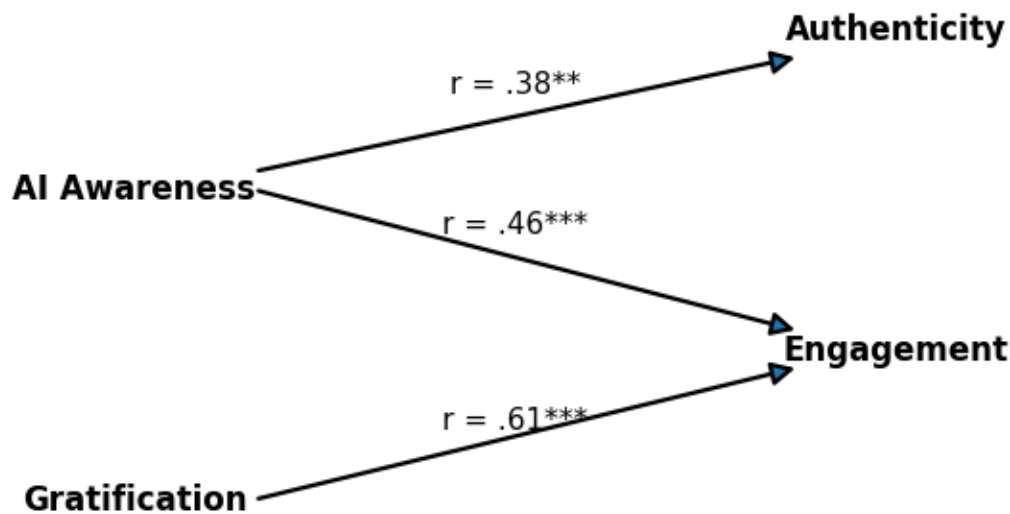
Motivations and Gratifications entail the factors that drive people to purchase a particular good or service. The mean scores of the four key motivational dimensions have shown that the strongest motivating factor influencing the use of the media is entertainment ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), followed by social connection ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ), trend awareness ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ), and information-seeking ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ). On the question of satisfaction with gratifications based on AI-assisted content, 67 percent concurred that the presence of AI-based algorithmic recommendations saves time and effort, 58 percent said AI is useful in making the content more relevant, and 46 percent said it increased creativity and discovery. Conversely, one out of every four individuals had the concern that AI reduces exposure to different opinions.

### *Interaction Behaviors*

An independent-samples t-test showed that the female participants responded to being much more engaged ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) than the male participants ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ),  $t(426) = 2.46$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $d = .35$ .

### *Correlational Findings*

When the correlation analysis was done in terms of Pearson, the results showed that there was a moderate positive relationship between AI awareness and behavior of engagement ( $r = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and a strong positive correlation between felt gratification and frequency of interaction ( $r = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ). **Figure 3** shows that the attitudes towards authenticity are also positively linked to AI awareness ( $r = .38$ ,  $p < .01$ ).



**Figure 3.** Correlational Relationships between AI Awareness, Gratification, Engagement, and Authenticity (N = 428) (Note: \* $p < .01$ .  $p < .001$  (Source: Author's statistical analysis based on survey data (2026))

The diagram represents the most significant statistically significant relationships that are identified in the quantitative data, which implies that both perceived gratification and AI awareness are positively and significantly related to engagement behaviors among Arab Gen Z users. One-way ANOVA did not indicate any significant difference in AI awareness between the three subgroups of age ( $F(2, 425) = 1.89$ ,  $p = 0.15$ ), which means that the level of understanding is relatively homogenous in the Gen Z range. The most important quantitative findings are shown in [Table 3](#).

## Qualitative Results

The thematic analysis of the ten semi-structured interviews showed the existence of three themes that could

**Table 3.** Findings in a Table of Quantitative Results: (N = 428)

Variable	Key Result	Percentage / Mean	Statistical Test
AI exposure (frequent)	Encounter AI-assisted content "often" or "very often"	82%	Descriptive
Positive attitude toward AI	"Helpful" or "innovative" perception	74%	Descriptive
Mean motivation – entertainment	M = 4.21, SD = 0.63	—	Descriptive
Mean gratification – relevance	M = 3.98, SD = 0.66	—	Descriptive
Engagement (likes/shares/comments)	Active weekly interaction	68% overall	Descriptive
AI awareness ↔ engagement	$r = .46$ , $p < .001$	Moderate correlation	Pearson
Gratification ↔ engagement	$r = .61$ , $p < .001$	Strong correlation	Pearson
Gender difference in engagement	Higher for females	$t(426) = 2.46$ , $p = .014$	t-test

be considered in their entirety as the reflection of the awareness and attitudes of the participants in connection with how they felt about AI-assisted content.

### *Theme 1: Awareness and Recognition of AI features*

The majority of the participants showed a general understanding of AI participation in content curation, but had difficulties distinguishing between algorithmic and human intervention. According to one of the respondents (P1, F, 22), when she stated that the app knows what she likes, she did not consider that captions or voices would also be generated by AI. Algorithm recommendations were the most visible AI feature mentioned by eight out of ten respondents.

### *Theme 2: Conceived Convenience vs. Authenticity Concern*

The respondents noted that they liked that AI helped to make content more personal and save time, but they were also worried that it might strip something of its genuineness. One of the male respondents (P2, M, 25) shared the thought that AI enables them to find the things they like faster; however, sometimes it is too mechanical, and the person does not feel they are picking anything anymore. This theme was an intellectual clash between effectiveness and genuineness.

### *Theme 3: Emotional Involvement and Trust*

Emotions changed based on the perceived control of AI systems by the participants. Individuals who perceived that they had control over algorithms were more likely to report higher trust and satisfaction, as compared to those who did not know about the mechanisms of an algorithm and said that they felt a bit uncomfortable or cynical. Altogether, qualitative evidence has been used to confirm that awareness, perceived control, and emotional resonance are at the heart of Gen Z's interpretation of AI-mediated content.

## Content Analysis Results

Twenty-five (n = 25) social media posts were analyzed on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. All sampled posts (100%) contained at least one identifiable AI indicator, as the selection criteria required observable evidence of AI-assisted features. Auto-created captions (40%), artificial or AI-created voices (27%), and recommendation tags that are algorithm-generated, including For You or Suggestions (20%), were the most common features.

In 13% of the posts, the AI-created images and filters were used. The level of user engagement was significantly greater in posts that were clearly identified as being AI-generated (average engagement rate 5.4%) than those that were not marked as such (3.2%). User comments reflected a predominantly positive tone (62%), while 24% were neutral and 14% expressed skeptical or negative attitudes, indicating an overall favorable yet cautious audience response. Semiotic interpretation showed recurring indications of the presence of increased creativity and technological novelty of AI features, but some evidence of distrust was noted in remarks about authenticity or fake content.

Semiotic interpretation showed recurring indications of the presence of increased creativity and technological novelty of AI features, but some evidence of distrust was noted in remarks about authenticity or fake content. The distribution and frequency of identified AI indicators within the 25 analyzed posts are detailed in [Table 4](#).

## Integrated Findings

The combination of the three sources of data (quantitative, qualitative, and content analysis) was triangulated to prove that there was a strong alignment between the awareness of AI, engagement, and attitude. Quantitative data were able to define the measurable correlations; qualitative interviews were able to explain

**Table 4.** The Distribution of AI Indicators in Posts Under Analysis (N = 25)

AI Indicator	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Average Engagement Rate
Auto-generated captions	10	40	5.2 %
Synthetic voices	6	24	4.8 %
Algorithmic recommendations	5	20	4.1 %
AI-generated visuals/filters	4	16	3.9 %
Total (AI-indicative posts)	25	100 %	Mean = 4.5 %

the psychological basis of the said relationships, and content analysis proved to visualize the presence of AI elements in the media environment itself. A combination of these findings indicates that Arab Gen Z has a rather positive but cautious optimism attitude towards AI-mediated media. The patterns of their interaction are predisposed by convenience and personalization, but enhanced by certain anxiety towards authenticity and control.

## DISCUSSION

### AI Extending Uses and Gratifications

The current paper examined the consumption and usage of AI-assisted content of digital media by the Arab Generation Z through the prism of the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and the Interactive Theory of Media Use. The discussion extends the statistical results, thematic understanding, and content analysis results to explain the trends of AI awareness, motivations, and gratifications among Gen Z users.

For education, these results suggest that the AI media consumption is potentially also an informal learning platform for Generation Z. It does not necessarily mean that the dominance of entertainment and personalization is in opposition with achieving learning outcomes; recent research has shown that exposure to algorithmically-generated content can improve digital literacy, SRL skills, and the acquisition of knowledge in non-formal settings (Al-Zahrani & Alasmari, 2024; Jo, 2024). In this way, platforms enhanced by AI can simultaneously serve the hedonic needs and enable incidental and experiential learning processes.

The results indicated that the strongest motivators in the use of the media among the Arab Gen Z users were entertainment, social connectivity, and trend awareness. This is consistent with Flecha-Ortiz et al. (2023), who concluded that hedonic and utilitarian gratifications are both predictors of social media loyalty and parasocial relationships on TikTok. On the same note, Liestia (2023) pointed to the fact that, even in a shifting media ecology, the dominance of entertainment-based gratifications is still common. The current study supports the enduring relevance of hedonic motives among Gen Z audiences since the mean score on entertainment (M = 4.21) is quite high.

AI involvement in the formation of such gratifications carries UGT to a different level. The current research revealed that 67 percent of interviewees felt that AI-generated recommendations save time, and 58 percent of the interviewees felt that AI increases content relevance. These impressions indicate the adaptive gratifications that arise due to personalization by machine-learning that confirms the fact that users develop new types of satisfaction based on the efficiency and convenience of the generative AI systems, as observed by Lin and Ng (2025). In such a sense, not only cognitive or affective but also algorithmic satisfaction of the users is evident, which is their knowledge of mediated automation.

The Interactive Theory of Media Use can also provide another point of analysis of the meaning and control negotiation that Gen Z engages with in the context of AI mediation, beyond UGT. The theory assumes that the users of media are active participants who influence the result of interaction through dialogic interaction and feedback. The results of this paper, where the participants believed that they could manipulate the algorithm by their actions, are consistent with this interactive paradigm. Xie et al. (2023) and Bae (2025) also focused on perceived control and mutual interaction as key factors of continued use of AI systems. The combination of both quantitative correlation and qualitative evidence in this case indeed proves the non-linearity of the dynamics of interaction; interaction is co-created between the user and the algorithm.

## Gratification Algorithms as a Hybrid Model

Moderate to strong correlations were found between AI awareness and interaction behaviors ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ) and between gratification and engagement ( $r = .61, p < .001$ ). It means that users who are aware of the existence of AI would tend to consume the AI-generated or AI-edited content. Similar results were obtained by Xie et al. (2023), who discovered that the intention to further use AI assistants is strongly positively correlated with their awareness of the functions of the assistant, which are mediated by the perceptions of usefulness and trust. Similarly, Bae (2025) established that gratifications are also mediators of user engagement with a gamified AI chatbot, and therefore, so is the general media consumption.

This blended learning approach also fits the modern educational theories based on adaptive and customized learning spaces. User prediction models are similar to the type of AI systems that adapt content to user behavior and engagement patterns, such as in intelligent tutoring systems (Rojas & Chiappe, 2024). The parallels imply that the same factors that lead people to engage with media can also be used to enhance the learning environment in digital education.

This paper shows that Uses and Gratification Theory is still applicable but needs to be developed to include algorithmic mediation. The partially AI-generated gratifications have formed due to its capacity to forecast and customise user preferences, forming hybrid patterns of satisfaction merging human motives and machine learning results (Lin & Ng, 2025). Similarly, the Interactive Theory is given a new significance in the explanations of how users assess, bargain, and sometimes oppose the AI-driven content streams.

The qualitative stage identified a cognitive-emotional conflict between convenience and authenticity. Though the majority of participants valued the personalization ability of AI, some of them were not comfortable with a loss of authenticity or human touch. This duality reflects the fact that Lin and Ng (2025) identified both gratifications and ethical issues in the adoption of generative AI, with people admiring the creativity and, at the same time, being frightened by the artificial nature of generative AI. Qian et al. (2026) also reported that when AI-created images and news story contents are congruent, Gen Z audiences are more inclined to believe them, whereas any discrepancy undermines the credibility of something that feels fake or machine-generated, which also applies to the participants of this study, as they were sensitive to the perceived fake or machine-generated content.

## Gender and Patterns of Engagement

Also, such a gender difference that was observed in this study (greater participation of females) reflects the findings of Kathuria (2023), who demonstrated that female Gen Z users experience a greater number of symbolic and emotional gratifications in immersive online worlds like the Metaverse. This implies that gender still mediates the process of gratifications being internalized even in AI-enhanced settings.

## Practice and Cultural Implications

The proposed study will contribute another dimension of discussion to the Arab digital context, which is still a cursory area of AI-media research. The fact that the AI exposure rate (82%) and awareness (61%) among the respondents are relatively high suggests an emerging AI literacy among the Arab Gen Z users. Similar results have been noted by Ebrahim and Mosad (2025) in Bahrain, where young people have strong leanings towards using smart applications in social media. The overall outcomes are that the region is progressively turning to the normalization of AI in daily digital life.

Nevertheless, even with this increased familiarity, a group of respondents (15%) thought that the material they were interacting with was still human-generated, implying the existence of persistent algorithmic literacy gaps. Parsons (2024) made the argument that younger audiences want to see more transparency in digital news coverage and would rather see more indicators of how algorithms are influencing news feeds. In the same vein, Mufeba (2023) pointed out that the perception of authenticity and quality of service relies directly on the awareness of the African youth about the AI-driven systems. The remaining uncertainty in this research is the continuous process of getting used to media environments filled with AI.

The results of the content analysis also help to contextualize the behavioral data since All sampled posts included identifiable AI indicators, reflecting the pervasive presence of AI-mediated features in digital environments, with auto-generated captions and synthetic voices being the most common ones. This follows Sardanelli et al. (2025), who have observed that digital automation and algorithmic personalization of cultural consumption patterns are on the rise among Gen Z consumers. Semiotic cues revealed, i.e., the ideas of increased creativity and technological novelty, are associated with the findings of Lisha (2024), who states that the Gen Z practices of leisure are placed in audiovisual discourses of technological experimentation. The fact that positively labeled posts with AI-labeled were accepted better (engagement rate 5.4%) supports the findings of Qian et al. (2025) that the overt recognition of AI application can facilitate, but not deter, the engagement rate, when it is in correspondence with the expectations of the audience.

The results of the study have important implications for education in the Arab world, especially regarding the use of AI-powered media in education and training in the Arabic context. As AI becomes more prevalent in the lives of Generation Z users, they are more prepared to embrace the use of AI-based learning tools that can enhance engagement, motivation, and accessibility of educational material (Onjewu et al., 2025).

In practice, these lessons can be used by digital media strategists and AI developers. Correlating the design of the algorithms with emotional and moral satisfaction may create a feeling of trust and follow-up. According to Ebrahim and Mosad (2025), cultural sensitivity and transparency play a key role in maintaining the continued use of AI media tools in youth. Thus, personalization should not be the sole objective of AI-assisted media, but also the perceived authenticity and the power of users.

Altogether, the analysis proves that the interaction of Arab Gen Z with AI-assisted digital media is motivationally hedonic, behaviorally active, and emotionally ambivalent. Users value the personalization capability of AI, though users are also sensitive to originality and authority. These findings suggest the relevance of UGT and Interactive Theory and show the new type of gratification, namely algorithmic gratification, which is characterized by being satisfied with automation, relevance, and efficiency.

## Limitations and Future Research

Although the current research offers empirical data on the behavior of Arab Gen Z media, it could be constrained by the fact that the study relied on self-reported data, which could reduce the applicability of the results. Not only that, the purposive sampling of digital platform users can be biased to include tech-savvy respondents. Longitudinal or even experimental research might be used in the future to determine causal

relationships among AI awareness, emotional gratifications, and sustainability of engagement. Other comparisons, including cross-cultural ones, like the one provided by Sardanelli et al. (2025) and Qian et al. (2025), can also help explain whether these trends are universal in other sociocultural settings.

Future studies and applications are needed in the area of embedding AI-based media tools in learning processes, especially in the field of higher education and digital learning. AI literacy initiatives are encouraged in educational institutions to improve students' understanding of the critical aspects of algorithmic systems and the personalization of content. In addition, adopting social media like TikTok and YouTube for micro-learning can boost the engagement and reach of learning materials to Generation Z learners. Lastly, establishing ethical standards for the application of AI in educational contexts is crucial for promoting transparency, trust, and responsible educational practices (Al-Zahrani & Alasmari, 2024; Xia et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

The paper offers a holistic insight into the interaction of Arab Generation Z with AI-assisted media content in the virtual world. Through quantitative and qualitative evidence, the findings substantiate that the media behaviors of Gen Z are driven by intrinsic motivation, e.g., entertainment, self-expression, and social connection, and extrinsic motivation, e.g., algorithmic recommendations and personalized content delivery. Despite most respondents stating their positive attitude towards AI-assisted media content, a significant number of people did not realize its ubiquitous nature, and a cognitive gap between the use and understanding was present.

The findings acknowledge the Uses and Gratifications Theory by affirming that Gen Z actively pursues gratifications by means of digital interaction, but take the theory further by adding the role of AI mediation as a structural force. The results also confirm the Interactive Theory that highlights the mutuality between users and AI-driven systems as a contributor to the development of the pattern of engagement. This study not only enhances the theoretical understanding of media and communication studies but also offers valuable insights for educational settings, as it reveals the impact of AI-supported media use on the evolving learning habits of Generation Z. The results indicate that artificial intelligence-based digital platforms are no longer only places for entertainment but are also becoming places for informal learning, skill development, and knowledge acquisition.

Comprehensively, this study can be concluded that the digital experience of Generation Z is characterized by hybrid gratification, i.e., the presence of human will and algorithm support in the consumption of content. The research suggests the need to promote AI literacy in the youth and promote open media design to promote critical awareness. The research needs to be extended to the comparative cultural context and carried out through experimental designs in the future to gain deeper insight into both emotional and ethical aspects of AI-mediated media use.

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personally identifiable information was disclosed in the study, and data were stored securely to ensure participant anonymity and data protection.

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