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Analyzing social media marketing engagement among millennials in Saudi Arabia's evolving tourism industry

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing consumer engagement among Generation Y on Facebook within Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, aligning with Vision 2030 goals of economic diversification and digital transformation. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted using structured questionnaires distributed via Facebook Messenger. Data from 580 respondents were analyzed using reliability testing, correlation, and multiple regression to evaluate seven predictors: functional value, self-concept value, social interaction value, hedonic value, remuneration, co-creation value, and media richness. Results revealed that all predictors significantly influenced consumer engagement, explaining 66% of the variance. Media richness, co-creation value, and hedonic value emerged as the strongest drivers of engagement. Engagement is shaped by rich, interactive, and co-created content, reinforcing the need for experience-driven marketing strategies. Tourism marketers should prioritize immersive media, consumer participation, and emotionally appealing storytelling to convert passive viewers into active brand advocates.

Keywords: Positivism philosophy, Saudi Arabia, Social media platforms, Technology, Tourists.

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1. Introduction

A significant transition has taken place in the tourist industry throughout the world, making it one of the sectors that is expanding at the quickest rate. This expansion, which is driven by technological advancement, has altered the way in which passengers make choices, with the internet playing a crucial role in this process. As social media platforms such as Facebook continue to develop into marketing ecological systems, businesses are increasingly relying on these software applications to engage customers and advertise travel experiences [1].

The tourist goals of Saudi Arabia are in line with this move toward digital technology. One of the most important industries for economic diversification is tourism, which is highlighted in the Kingdom's Vision 2030 [2]. Despite the fact that the nation is making investments in infrastructure and historic sites, a significant obstacle still stands: how to successfully engage Generation Y, which is comprised of consumers who are tech-savvy, first for mobile devices, and socially connected, via social media marketing [3]. By the year 2022, there will be over thirty million active users of social media in Saudi Arabia, indicating that its usage has become firmly ingrained in daily life. Among the members of the generation known as Gen Y, who have been born between 1981 and 1996, this rise is especially noticeable. Because they were born and raised in the digital age, they are intensely impacted by user-generated content, endorsements from influential people, and brand interaction [4].

While the tourist industry in Saudi Arabia has made significant investments in social media advertising, there are still gaps in its knowledge of the variables that motivate Generation Y to connect with this sector. There is still a barrier involved in using the appropriate kind of material, whether it be instructive, emotional, or social [5]. Not only are platform dynamics something that marketers need to take into consideration, but also cultural preferences and patterns of digital activity.

One of the most important components of the Kingdom's plan to diversify its economy is represented by tourism. "Makkah, Medina, NEOM, and the Red Sea Project" are among the places that are attracting a rising amount of attention from people all over the world because of their immense cultural, historical, and natural assets. The Saudi Arabian government has set a goal to boost the contribution of tourism to the country's GDP to 10% and to generate more than one million jobs by the year 2030 [6].

In order to facilitate this, the authorities have relaxed their laws regarding visas, increased the number of people visiting the country, and supported digital innovation in the travel industry. There is a significant part that social media plays in this approach since it provides a medium that is both tailored and cost-effective for promoting destinations and interacting with customers [7].

It is difficult for the tourist sector to transform its internet presence towards significant customer involvement, particularly among members of Generation Y, notwithstanding the high level of social media integration this business enjoys. Previous research often generalizes the involvement of consumers or treats it as a single action, neglecting the multifaceted aspect of the phenomenon known as customer loyalty, which includes consuming, making a contribution, and producing [8].

In addition, there is a dearth of region-specific information on the manner in which marketing material is aligned with the aspirations of Generation Y. Engagement is influenced by a variety of factors, including the context of culture, personal identity, value perception, and platform interaction; nevertheless, these factors are still unexplored in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this research is to fill this void by determining the significant factors that influence the level of participation on Facebook within the Saudi tourist industry.

1.1. Research Gap

Previous studies often generalize consumer engagement or treat it as a singular behavior rather than a multidimensional construct involving consuming, contributing, and creating content. Moreover, little research has been conducted in the Saudi context, where cultural and social values play a significant role in shaping online behavior. There is a lack of empirical evidence on how value dimensions—functional, self-concept, social interaction, hedonic, remuneration, co-creation, and media richness—collectively influence engagement within Saudi Arabia's tourism industry.

1.2. Research Questions

- 1. Does functional value explain consumer engagement on Facebook among Gen Y in Saudi Arabia?*
- 2. Does self-concept value influence consumer engagement?*
- 3. How does social interaction value impact engagement behaviors?*
- 4. What is the role of hedonic value in shaping Gen Y engagement?*
- 5. Does remuneration content drive user interaction?*
- 6. How significant is co-creation value in enhancing participation?*
- 7. What effect does media richness have on engagement levels?*

1.3. Research Objectives

To examine the relationships between seven motivational variables and consumer engagement levels on Facebook.

To assess the relative influence of each value dimension—functional, self-concept, social interaction, hedonic, remuneration, co-creation, and media richness.

To provide practical recommendations for tourism marketers on optimizing content for Gen Y audiences.

1.4. Summary of Research Steps

To address these questions, this study adopted a positivist philosophy and a quantitative, cross-sectional design. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to 580 Gen Y respondents via Facebook Messenger. Reliability analysis ensured construct validity (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70). Correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses and determine the strength of relationships between predictors and engagement. The findings were interpreted to draw practical insights for tourism marketers and inform recommendations for enhancing digital engagement strategies.

2. Literature Review

Saudi Arabia had the potential to significantly contribute to its GDP via religious and cultural tourism. The World Travel Market study now estimates the value of Saudi Arabia's tourism business at around \$70 billion, constituting 9.3% of the nation's GDP [9]. Saudi Arabia is well recognized for deriving a substantial portion of its overall income from spiritual and cultural tourism, but by instituting appropriate rules and enacting essential modifications, this contribution might be augmented [10, 11].

Social media significantly influences the tourist sector. Individuals seeking to enhance the tourist industry should focus on the media. Through the production of television, radio, and other social media tourism programs, particularly those supervised, administered, and regulated by government agencies [12]. Saudi Arabia is increasingly using social media marketing strategies to enhance its tourist sector. Social networking marketing is a mechanism that enables countries to interact with their clients. The International Tourist Research Centres indicate that 70% of customers rely on recommendations from social media, while 88% of tourism industry officials use social media [13].

2.1. Consumer Engagement Metrics on Facebook

Researchers widely agree that customer engagement encompasses three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral [14, 15]. This research will focus only on the behavioral component of Facebook CE. This is because CE activities are more measurable and objective compared to cognitive and emotional engagement, which depend more on the consumer's self-perception [16]. The study's major target for CE will be brand-related information disseminated on Facebook, rather than members of the web community [17]. This research aims to provide marketing professionals with enhanced insights into improving social media marketing, namely Facebook marketing, in Saudi Arabia. This research will examine client engagement (CE) on Facebook using the framework for consumer involvement with brand-related information on social media established [18]. It identifies three tiers of consumer involvement with brand-related material on social media: viewing (minimal engagement), contributing (engaged), and producing (high engagement). When an individual consumes material, they just read, watch, or observe it without participation; when they contribute, they communicate with the content and other users through sharing, liking, and commenting; and when they create, they develop and disseminate user-generated content related to brands [18, 19].

2.2. Value-Based Factors Influencing Engagement.

As digital marketing changes, consumer engagement has become a key idea for figuring out the ways firms connect with their consumers. This becomes particularly important in the tourism sector, since people's choices are based on their experiences and the psychological and social value they get from them. Generation Y (those born between 1981 and 1996) has found that social media sites like Facebook are powerful ways to engage alongside travel firms. Investigators have highlighted how important it is to know what makes people interact with brand sites, especially via value-based ideas that shape their actions. A total of seven of these value dimensions, "functional, self-concept, social interaction, hedonic, compensation, co-creation, and media richness—have gotten a lot of attention in the literature on engagement. The functional value (FV) is how useful or practical individuals think a brand's content is. Whenever people think that a Facebook page has helpful information, such as vacation advice, schedules, or special bargains, they are more likely to involuntarily participate by reading the material [20]. However, a number of studies demonstrate that practical use may get people to participate at first, but it doesn't have the sentimental and comprehensive participation manner needed for long-term contact [21].

Self-concept value (SCV) occurs when a brand's image matches the way a user sees themselves. Individuals commonly interact with brand websites that show their beliefs, way of life, or goals. Gen Y is recognized for using electronic media to express their identity. Self-concept may affect both involvement and the development levels of involvement, but its impact is frequently affected by other things like social approval or peer pressure [22].

The social interaction value (SIV) tells you how well visitors can engage with other people on your company page. Platforms that encourage conversation, along with community, tend to get more people involved. But a study by De Vries and Carlson [21] shows that this importance alone may not be enough unless it is paired with ways for people to participate in immediate situations or share things on social media.

People often say that hedonic value (HV) is a strong motivator for involvement. It means the fun and happiness that material brings. Research shows that information that is funny, interesting, and full of pictures greatly increases both active as well as passive engagement [23]. For tourist businesses, appealing to emotions and immersive storytelling are quite important.

Remuneration (R), or the promise of real benefits like price reductions, competitions, or giveaways, has a well-known effect on engagement. It appeals to people's external drives and works especially well to get people to share or tag things [23].

Co-creation value (CCV) lets consumers help create written material, which makes them feel like they own it and makes them more loyal. Studies show that it helps people become more involved, particularly in traveling, where people may share their own experiences [14].

Lastly, media richness (MR) is the usage of several types of interactive material, such as movies, polls, and live streaming. The theory of media wealth, Daft, et al. [24], says that rich media make messages clearer and more responsive, which leads to greater audience involvement.

2.3. Hypotheses Development

Based on the above literature, the following conceptual framework is proposed. It positions the seven independent variables (FV, SCV, SIV, HV, R, CCV, MR) as predictors of consumer engagement (consuming, contributing, and creating) on Facebook.

2.4. Hypotheses

H₁: Functional value has a significant positive effect on consumer engagement.

H₂: Self-concept value positively influences consumer engagement.

H₃: Social interaction value contributes to engagement behavior.

H₄: Hedonic value enhances engagement across all three levels.

H₅: Remuneration increases user participation.

H₆: Co-creation value positively impacts active engagement.

H₇: Media richness strengthens the consumer-brand interaction.

3. Methodology

This study implemented a quantitative, cross-sectional approach based on the framework of positivism. This approach focuses on unbiased, qualitative data collection and statistical evaluation to figure out how advertising factors affect Generation Y's interest in Saudi Arabia's tourism industry. The study's goal was to find quantifiable trends using structured questionnaires; hence, a monomethod quantitative strategy was used. We used a survey technique with closed-ended queries that were sent out through Google Forms. We targeted Gen Y respondents who are engaged via the internet through Facebook Messenger. The poll contained consent that was informed consent and screening questions to make sure that the data was accurate and that the participants were following at least one Facebook brand page connected to tourism and had been created between 1981 and 1996. Generation Y in Saudi Arabia was chosen as the target audience because they have a large social media following and influence, making up around 23.63% of the country's population. There was no sampling frame; thus, random sampling with purpose was used to make sure the samples were relevant. G*Power 3.1 showed that a sample size of 580 was enough to find the medium effect sizes with a total of seven predictors, a significance threshold of 0.05 level, and 95% power. The research tool was a structured questionnaire with three parts: demographic information, "independent variables (functional value, self-concept value, social interaction value, hedonic value, remuneration, co-creation value, and media richness), and dependent variables (levels of consumer engagement consuming, making a difference, and creating)". We used the Likert scale with seven points to assess the items. To make sure that the material was legitimate, elements were taken from known literature, and a pilot test with 50 respondents made sure everything was clear. Cronbach's Alpha showed that internal uniformity was good, with all constructions getting values higher than the acceptable level of 0.70. This strong technique makes sure that insights on how Gen Y interacts with tourist companies on platforms such as Facebook are reliable and genuine.

3.1. Differentiation from Past Studies

Unlike many earlier studies that treated consumer engagement as a single, undifferentiated construct, this research adopted a three-level engagement framework (consuming, contributing, and creating), allowing for a more nuanced understanding of engagement behavior. Additionally, while past research has often relied on small, convenience-based samples or generalized findings from non-Saudi populations, this study specifically targeted Generation Y users in Saudi Arabia, ensuring cultural relevance and contextual accuracy. Another key distinction is the integration of seven motivational variables into a single predictive model, providing a comprehensive view of the drivers of engagement. Previous studies often focused on one or two variables (e.g., hedonic or social value) in isolation, which limited their ability to explain complex behavioral patterns. The present study, by combining multiple factors and using a statistically powerful sample size ($n = 580$, with 95% power), offers stronger empirical evidence and more actionable insights for tourism marketers.

4. Results and Discussion

This section demonstrates the quantitative analysis of data found from a web-based questionnaire of 580 respondents belonging to Generation Y in Saudi Arabia. The findings are based on statistical methods such as "reliability testing, correlation analysis, and multiple regression". The goal is to see how a total of seven independent variables—"functional value (FV), self-concept value (SCV), social interaction value (SIV), hedonic value (HV), remuneration (R), co-creation value (CCV), and media richness (MR)—affect three levels of consumer engagement: consuming, contributing, and creating".

4.1. Demographic Profile

Of the 580 individuals who responded, 52% were men and 48% were women, which shows that the gender distribution was rather even. A large majority, 84%, had a college degree, which shows that the sample was well-educated. 67% of the people were working, while the other 33% were either students or those actively looking for work. All of the people who answered satisfied the requirements that they were born between 1981 and 1996 and followed at least one Facebook brand page connected to tourism. These demographic traits suggest that the sample is technologically savvy, well-educated, and socially active, which is quite similar to what prior research has shown about Generation Y [25].

4.2. Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the questionnaire constructs was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. All variables recorded acceptable to excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.70$).

Table 1.
Reliability Analysis.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Functional Value (FV)	0.82
Self-Concept Value (SCV)	0.85
Social Interaction Value (SIV)	0.78
Hedonic Value (HV)	0.88
Remuneration (R)	0.84
Co-Creation Value (CCV)	0.9
Media Richness (MR)	0.87
Consumer Engagement (CE)	0.91

Cronbach's Alpha was used to check how consistent the concepts utilized in the research were with each other. In every aspect of the constructions were quite reliable, alongside alpha values over the usual cutoff of 0.70 (Table 1). In particular, Consumer Engagement (CE) had the greatest dependability ($\alpha = 0.91$), following the Co-Creation Value (CCV) at 0.90 and the Hedonic Value (HV) at 0.88. Media Richness (MR) and Remuneration (R) likewise had strong dependability, with alpha values of 0.87 and 0.84, respectively. The Cronbach's Alpha values for Self-Concept Value (SCV) and Functional Value (FV) were 0.85 and 0.82, which means that they were both very consistent. The alpha value for Social Interaction Value (SIV) was the lowest at 0.78, but it was still acceptable. These findings show that all of the constructs utilized in the research are dependable and consistent with each other, which means they may be used for further statistical evaluation.

4.3. Correlation Analysis

Table 2.
Correlation Analysis.

Predictor	CE Correlation Coefficient (r)
FV	0.52
SCV	0.61
SIV	0.5
HV	0.67
R	0.64
CCV	0.69
MR	0.72

The correlation study between multiple factors and the customer Engagement (CE) shows that all of the factors have strong positive connections (Table 2). The greatest link between Media Richness (MR) and CE ($r = 0.72$) shows that the variety and interactivity of multimedia content on tourism-related social network sites have a big effect on how many Generation Y users engage with them. Co-Creation Value (CCV) and Hedonic Value (HV) both have substantial beneficial connections with CE, with $r = 0.69$ and $r = 0.67$, respectively. This shows how important it is for people to have fun and be involved in activities. Paid time off (R) ($r = 0.64$) and Self-Concept Value (SCV) ($r = 0.61$) both show strong relationships, which means that real incentives and identity alignment are important for user participation. There is a moderate relationship between Functional Value (FV) and the relationship between Social Value (SIV) and CE, with $r = 0.52$ and $r = 0.50$, respectively. Even though the above criteria are lower than those of other variables, they nonetheless show that practical usefulness and social connectedness can increase dedication, just not as much. The data as a whole show that consumer involvement is complex and supports the use of these components in more regression equations or structural analysis research.

4.4. Multiple Regression Analysis

To test the hypotheses, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed with the seven predictor variables as independent variables and overall consumer engagement as the dependent variable.

Table 3.
Multiple Regression Analysis.

Predictor	Beta	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Functional Value (FV)	0.11	3.24	0.001
Self-Concept Value (SCV)	0.1	2.89	0.004
Social Interaction Value (SIV)	0.08	2.17	0.031
Hedonic Value (HV)	0.17	4.91	<0.001
Remuneration (R)	0.16	4.48	<0.001
Co-Creation Value (CCV)	0.19	5.02	<0.001
Media Richness (MR)	0.21	5.47	<0.001

We used an analysis of multiple linear regression to look at how seven predictor factors affected total customer interaction (CE) on the social networking site brand pages about tourism among Generation Y users (Table 3). The model fit well overall, with an R value of 0.81, which means that there was a significant association between the variables that were predictive and the dependent variable in the model. The R² value of 0.66 means that a combination of "function value, self-concept value, social interaction value, hedonic value, compensation, co-creation value, and media richness can explain 66% of the differences in consumer involvement. The model's ability to explicate is further supported by the adjusted R² of 0.65 and the highly significant F-statistic \ [F (7, 572) = 160.45, p < 0.001].

At p < 0.05, all seven factors were significantly different, which supports hypotheses H1 through H7. The media richness ($\beta = 0.21$, t = 5.47, p < 0.001) was the biggest predictor, showing that media material that is rich, interactive, and immersive greatly increases engagement levels. Co-creation value ($\beta = 0.19$, t = 5.02, p < 0.001) and hedonic value ($\beta = 0.17$, t = 4.91, p < 0.001) also had considerable beneficial impacts. This shows just how vital it is for digital-native customers to have fun and participate in encounters.

Compensation ($\beta = 0.16$), self-perception value ($\beta = 0.10$), and functional value ($\beta = 0.11$) were all moderately linked to CE. This means that real incentives, aligning with one's identity, and practical advantages all play a big role. The effect of social interaction value was the lowest but still important ($\beta = 0.08$), which means that social engagement is important but not as much as other aspects. In general, the data shows that consumer interaction is complex and that media richness, collaborative creation, and pleasure are important factors for Gen Y consumers in a multimedia tourism setting.

4.5. Hypotheses Testing Summary

Table 4.
Represents the summary of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported?
H1	FV positively affects engagement	Yes
H2	SCV positively affects engagement	Yes
H3	SIV positively affects engagement	Yes
H4	HV positively affects engagement	Yes
H5	R positively affects engagement	Yes
H6	CCV positively affects engagement	Yes
H7	MR positively affects engagement	Yes

5. Discussion of Findings

Detailed Discussion of the Results 4.7.1 The Richness of the Media and Engagement Rich content is the greatest predictor, and it lends credence to the concept of the theory of media richness (MRT), which proposes that rich material improves communication and raises engagement levels. Interactive elements, such as video tours, storytelling, and feedback systems that replicate real-world engagement, are becoming more appealing to users of the Gen Y generation in Saudi Arabia. This conclusion is consistent with the observations made by Mandal and McQueen [26] and Schivinski, et al. [18], who found that rich media results in a greater level of participation and loyalty to a brand.

Hedonic Values and the Process of Co-Creation;

A further significant influence was the importance of co-creation. When consumers have the sense that they are contributing to the development of content, whether it be via the sharing of images, the participation in surveys, or the suggestion of itineraries, they are more inclined to become active advocates for the brand. This is consistent with the concept of participation enjoyment that is emphasized by UGT. In addition, hedonic value, sometimes known as delight, played an important part. According to Hennigs and Siebels [27], information that is visually appealing, amusing, and engaging connects with the inclination of Generation Y for experiences that are driven by entertainment. Values that are both functional and social; Despite the fact that functionality, self-concept, and social interaction all had lower beta values, these factors were nonetheless statistically significant. It is not enough to just have informational material in order to promote deep engagement; feelings and features that encourage participation are more important for Generation Y. The results of this study lend credence to the findings of De Vries and Carlson [21], who discovered that whereas informational material is effective in attracting early views, ongoing participation requires social and emotional activity.

6. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that consumer engagement among Generation Y in Saudi Arabia's tourism sector is significantly shaped by media richness, co-creation opportunities, and hedonic value, supported by functional, self-concept, social interaction, and remuneration factors. The results confirm that meaningful engagement is not just transactional but experiential and participatory, suggesting that tourism marketers should adopt strategies that emphasize interactivity, personalization, and storytelling to build lasting relationships with their audiences.

7. Practical Implications

A well-rounded engagement strategy for the Saudi tourism sector should focus on creating immersive and interactive experiences that resonate with Generation Y consumers. Marketers should invest in rich media formats such as 360° virtual tours, live streaming events, and visually compelling storytelling to capture attention and encourage prolonged interaction with content. Equally important is the provision of co-creation opportunities, such as photo contests, polls, and user-generated campaigns, which foster a sense of community and ownership, turning passive viewers into active brand participants. Effective experience design should combine functional elements like itineraries, travel tips, and special offers with emotionally engaging visuals, ensuring that content appeals to both rational decision-making and hedonic motivations. Additionally, reward mechanisms such as discounts, loyalty programs, and gamified campaigns can be used strategically to drive engagement, while ensuring that consumer participation is not solely dependent on external incentives.

8. Limitations

Its focus was exclusively on Generation Y, which excludes Gen Z and older cohorts whose engagement behaviors may differ significantly, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings across all age groups. Second, the research was confined to Facebook users, overlooking other popular platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, where content formats and user interaction patterns may yield different engagement outcomes. Finally, the study relied on self-reported data, which carries the risk of bias due to participants' tendency toward socially desirable responses or inaccuracies in recalling their actual online behaviors. These limitations highlight the need for caution in interpreting the results and underscore opportunities for more inclusive, multi-platform, and mixed-method research in the future.

9. Future Research Directions

Future research should expand the scope of inquiry by exploring engagement patterns across different generational cohorts, particularly Generation Z, who are rapidly emerging as dominant digital consumers with unique behavioral characteristics. Comparative studies across multiple social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, could reveal variations in engagement drivers and platform-specific strategies that resonate with diverse audiences. Longitudinal research would also be valuable in tracking how engagement behaviors evolve, providing insights into the long-term effects of campaigns, technological advancements, and global events on consumer interaction. Moreover, incorporating qualitative approaches such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews can uncover deeper psychological motivations and cultural nuances that quantitative data alone may overlook. Finally, examining cultural moderators such as religious values, collectivist tendencies, and family influence could shed light on how these contextual factors shape participation patterns in Middle Eastern markets, allowing for more culturally sensitive marketing strategies.

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Appendix 1.

Measurement of Variables.

Variable	Description	No. of Items	Source
Functional Value (FV)	Usefulness of content	4	De Vries and Carlson [21]
Self-Concept Value (SCV)	Alignment with self-image	4	Jahn and Kunz [22]
Social Interaction Value (SIV)	Facilitates social connection	4	De Vries and Carlson [21]
Hedonic Value (HV)	Entertainment and pleasure	4	De Vries and Carlson [21]
Remuneration (R)	Tangible rewards or benefits	5	Ashley and Tuten [23]
Co-Creation Value (CCV)	Participation in service/content creation	6	De Vries and Carlson [21]
Media Richness (MR)	Interactive and rich content features	4	Fernandez, et al. [28]
Consumer Engagement (CE)	Consuming, Contributing, Creating	15	Schivinski, et al. [18]