



TikTok Usage in Saudi Arabia: A Study of Videos From a Generational Point of View - Generation X, Y, and Z

Ruqayya Soli Haji Abdulrahman
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3749-0117>
Taibah University, Saudi Arabia

Sophia Alim
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0413-3893>
Independent Researcher, UK

ABSTRACT

TikTok's rising popularity among Saudi youth calls for deeper insight into how content is perceived across generations. This study focuses on the top 20 Saudi TikTok influencers as of June 2023, analyzing metadata from 15,526 videos and 5,159 comments. Over 500 videos were reviewed, with 183 closely examined across Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z to explore differing interpretations and emotional responses. English-language sentiment analysis of comments revealed that humorous and talent-based videos, particularly pranks, were most popular, while music and lip-sync content drew higher engagement. The study concluded that Generation Z participants preferred fun and entertaining video content, whereas Generation X participants tended to be more critical of content and content creators. Cultural themes were especially impactful for younger viewers. Statistical analysis highlighted that emotional responses varied significantly by generation, highlighting differences in emotional expression and regulation. Generation Y participants reported significantly higher levels of joy and trust compared to the other generations, while Generation Z participants exhibited significantly more disgust in their responses.

KEYWORDS

TikTok, Saudi Arabia, Content Analysis, Sentiment Analysis, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z

INTRODUCTION

The world of social media has engulfed society and introduced different marketing methods. One area of significant growth in digital marketing is the use of influencer marketing (Ashraf et al., 2023; Harrigan et al., 2021). Social media influencers (SMIs) have become famous by other social media users sharing their digital content. This has allowed users to connect with the influencers via interaction and build up a trusting relationship, where the influencer is perceived as genuine (Arora et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2022).

SMIs can affect followers in a variety of fields (e.g., fashion, travel, health, music, etc.). Thus, they inspire them in purchasing decisions, as highlighted in previous studies (Ashraf et al., 2023; Hsieh, 2023; Taillon et al., 2020). The study by Ashraf et al. (2023) examined how SMIs impacted consumer purchasing through parasocial relationships. A parasocial relationship is a one-sided emotional bond

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that a person forms with an SMI or celebrity, for instance, despite having no interaction with them. Data was collected via purposive sampling from 506 active social media users. The results suggested that factors, such as expertise, trustworthiness, similarity, interpersonal, procedural, and information fairness, were positively related factors in fostering parasocial relationships with followers.

Unlike Ashraf et al. (2023), Taillon et al. (2020) conducted two studies, qualitative content analysis and modeling with path analysis, to understand the role of closeness in the relationship between the follower and the influencer. An online survey was designed for data collection, and 201 responses were used for the analysis. The results highlighted that attractiveness and likability positively influence the purchase intentions of followers. Hsieh (2023) explored the difference between brand image and brand attitude on virtual and traditional websites. The methodology involved randomly assigning 80 voluntary participants to one of four scenarios for comparative analysis, content analysis, and observation of the companies' official website and virtual business locations. The results highlighted the differences between the participants' attitudes toward brands and levels of familiarity with companies prior to the study. Virtual world approaches were found to be more effective in building a brand attitude among participants.

All three studies explored the relationship between the follower and the influencer. Factors, such as attractiveness, likability, trustworthiness, similarity, information fairness, and consistent cues (i.e., information and image consistency), all contributed towards predicting attitudes between followers and influencers. The power of social media to influence its users is evident, as shown in the studies. Social media usage in the Middle East has grown above the global average in recent years due to high social media penetration (Dixon, 2025). Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest users of social media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The number of social media users in Saudi Arabia is forecasted to continuously increase between 2024 and 2029 by six million users (+28.05%) (Mabkhot et al., 2022).

The Mabkhot et al. (2022) study explored the relationship between SMIs and purchasing intentions in Saudi Arabia through data collection via a survey conducted online at the end of 2021. The survey questions covered social media applications, such as Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, X (previously known as Twitter), and Facebook, which were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling. The results showed that credibility plays a mediating role between SMIs and consumers' purchase intentions. This is also true of influences who can affect customer purchase intentions.

A similar study by Alotaibi et al. (2019) on Instagram users proposed a model and explored factors, such as SMIs, key opinion leaders, and consumer feedback, in Saudi Arabia. Following a quantitative approach and using partial least squares structural equation modeling, the study found a positive relationship between consumers' trust and the intentions of the purchaser. The impact of influencers and consumer feedback was a factor that impacted the intent to buy from Instagram stores. In addition, opinion leaders and Maroof, an e-service provided by the Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Investment to evaluate the reliability of online stores and serve as a Saudi e-commerce watchdog (Saudi Ministry of Commerce & Investment, 2024) also impacted consumers' intentions to purchase.

One social media platform that is not mentioned in the studies stated above but is one of the most influential social media platforms around the world, including the Middle East, is TikTok. TikTok currently has 1.59 billion active users around the world. TikTok advertisements reach 19.4% of the global population and 28.6% of internet users (The Global Statistics, 2025).

Launched in 2016 by ByteDance in China, TikTok is a video-sharing application that allows users to get creative when creating short-form videos, which can be shared on the application. Users can customize background music, filters, stickers, effects, and voiceovers to make unique video content. Users can also do duet videos where the videos of two users play at the same time, so the users can sing together or interact otherwise. The app has also made livestreaming popular. Livestreams allow influencers to interact with their followers in real time. In addition, TikTok offers users the ability to create videos in response to specific comments.

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