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## Barriers to Youth Engagement in Museums: A Study of Visitation, Participation and Interaction

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# Barriers to Youth Engagement in Museums: A Study of Visitation, Participation and Interaction

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## Abstract

Engaging youth is pivotal to museums' sustainability and social mission. However, persistent gaps remain between museum offerings and youth interests and leisure practices. This mixed method study investigates youth engagement barriers in Jeddah via an in depth case study of The House of Islamic Arts Museum. Data were collected from two parallel surveys, one onsite instrument by 261 visitors during their visit, and one offsite instrument distributed across community centres, shopping malls and youth clubs with six observational sessions inside galleries and nine semi structured interviews with museum staff.

Descriptive statistics reveal high satisfaction among onsite youth (85%) rating the experience "Excellent", strong revisit intentions (72% yes), showing clear preferences for history and interactive elements. Offsite respondents report lower visit frequency (70% rarely/never), identifying lack of interest, limited awareness and insufficient publicity as key barriers. Observations recorded brief dwell times at some exhibits with sustained attention and discussions at others, actively sharing and occasional technological use (QR codes and VR). Interviews emphasise marketing reach, guided interpretation, programme design and pricing as improvement areas, highlighting evolving practice aligned with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

The study argues that engaging youth in Jeddah is limited more by awareness, access, interpretive mediation, and programme relevance than culture. It recommends youth centred engagement strategies blending community partnerships, tiered pricing and passes, co-curated interactive programmes, multilingualism and sustainable influencer digital outreach. The study contributes a scholarly based portrait of youth museum relations, proposing practical frameworks for Islamic Art museums operating in transformative cultural ecologies.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1: Background

Museums as creative, public spaces are positioned to preserve culture, foster education and cultivate lifelong connections with the public through direct engagement. Over the years, museums developed and adapted to change. However, recently, museums have become more than repositories of artefacts and knowledge. They have actively transformed as contributors that uphold collective memory and dialogue, empowering the community, particularly youth, to reflect on their past, interpret the present and reimagine their future (Falk & Dierking, 2018; Bunning et al., 2015). This transformative understanding presents youth as catalysts of change who preserve the stories of today to inform the generations of tomorrow. These efforts are underpinned by youth perceiving museums as static formal institutions that do not adapt and fulfil their contemporary interests. Youth, instead, opt for interactive, entertaining activities, aligning with digital culture (Martin, 2003).

In Saudi Arabia, with the onset of Vision 2030, cultural institutions are being transformed and repositioned to contribute to a thriving nation. Museums are active contributors to the change. Considering that approximately 60% of the population is below 35 years, as reported by General Authority for Statistics (2023), Saudi Arabia is presented with a unique opportunity to acknowledge the transformative power of youth by utilising their sharpened perspectives to develop the vibrant cultural infrastructure of the nationwide framework. Vision 2030 recognises museums as contributors, fostering cultural literacy, identity and participation (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). It is important to recognise that the challenge is particularly relevant with youth. Evidence from preliminary observations and surveys highlight significant limitations regarding youth engagement in museums. Museums in Jeddah have an exceptional

potential to transform from underutilised repositories of artefacts to dynamic spaces, inviting youth to become co-contributors and share stories relevant to contemporary culture.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Jeddah is home to several museums both modern and historical. Despite a diversity of interest areas and collections, youth in Jeddah aged between 16-31 reflect low levels of visitation. This trend is not limited to Jeddah nor to Saudi Arabia. Rather, global research identified several emerging barriers to youth engagement including financial barriers, lack of awareness, perception of elitism and irrelevance, and competition with digital leisure (de Oliveira & Bizerra, 2024; Packer & Ballantyne, 2016). While global implications are observed, there may be significant implications in the localised Saudi context that are to be uncovered. The trend hinders the immense efforts made by the Ministry of Culture, Museums Commission and cultural policymakers who collaborate and come together to project museums as inclusive, dynamic and cultural spaces that foster collaboration. By doing so, the transformative power of young people to become active agents of change, is recognised. For youth to thrive in the ambitious nation of Saudi Arabia in Vision 2030, it is important that museums and other cultural institutions realise that if young people continue to view museums as irrelevant to their contemporary interests or inaccessible, museums would risk failing to uphold their potential as catalysts for cultural development and social inclusion. In turn, this would deter visitors, especially youth.

## 1.3 Study Significance

At a practical level it aspires to inform the museum sector at large, and specifically Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Culture and Museums Commission, with insights regarding youth preferences and the barriers faced upon engaging with museums. These insights are vital upon designing inclusive strategies targeted to foster youth participation and enhance accessibility

to cultural institutions nationwide. While youth represent future audiences, they are potential curators, contributors and advocates for cultural heritage (Simon, 2010). Engaging youth in cultural institutions is vital, particularly sustaining cultural institutions in the future. By investigating youth perspectives in Jeddah, this research contributes to a participatory cultural landscape, integrating culture into the social and leisure fabrics of youth. This study aligns with the cultural development of Vision 2030 by supporting cultural participation, fostering national identity and emphasizing museums as spaces for learning and dialogue.

## 1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

**1.4.1 Aim:** The study's core aim is to identify and analyse barriers to youth, in Jeddah, from visiting, participating and interacting with museums.

**1.4.2 Objectives:** For the above aim, the objectives placed are:

- Examining the level of awareness and youth perceptions about museums in Jeddah
- Exploring potential psychological, social, economic and institutional barriers to improved youth engagement in museums
- Evaluating potential of museum design, communication and outreach in addressing or neglecting youth participation
- Proposing strategies for improving youth access and participation in museum activities, enhancing their inclusivity and sustainability

### 1.4.3 Research Questions

Guided from the aim and objectives, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the main factors that hinder youth from visiting museums in Jeddah?
2. How do youth relate museum content to their contemporary interests?

3. What are potential social, cultural and economic barriers that prevent youth from participating in museum events?
4. How can museums in Jeddah foster youth inclusivity through their space and programmes?

## 1.5 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed method approach providing a comprehensive overview of youth engagement in museums in Jeddah. Quantitative data was obtained from two structured surveys. One was conducted on site, which yielded 261 responses from visitors at the House of Islamic Arts Museum. The offsite survey produced 277 respondents from the wider community, including youth clubs, shopping malls and community centres. Both were designed to provide meaningful real time insights into visitation patterns, participation levels and perceptions of museums. This strategy ensured the perspectives consisted of current visitors and non-visitors, attempting to formulate a comprehensive understanding of youth attitudes towards museums.

The observations recorded youth engagement behaviours including their interaction with exhibits, levels of social engagement, emotional and behavioural responses, participation in programmes, use of technology and how youth reflected instances of curiosity and learning. It combines real time data on youth engagement with evidence of lived experiences rather than relying on different reported perspectives. Nine semi structured interviews were conducted with staff members in the museum. The interviews were designed to capture staff's professional perspectives regarding challenges and opportunities for youth engagement. They shared their perspectives on critical context-specific information on institutional priorities, current strategies and perceived limitations. The diversity of responses combined with insights from the surveys and observations, formed a multi-dimensional dataset that is capable of addressing the research questions in depth.

### 1.5.1 Sampling Strategy

The study's target sample comprised of young people aged 16-31 years from a wide spectrum of youth, forming a significant demographic in Jeddah. A purposive sampling technique was employed to cater to the study's specific interests regarding individuals within the age range who could contribute meaningfully about museum engagement. Offsite survey participants were engaged through multiple social media campaigns, universities, community centres and youth clubs. Onsite recruitment occurred naturally depending on the presence of youth visitors to the museum. This purposive approach ensured the sample included individuals from diverse backgrounds, collectively representing the heterogeneity of Jeddah's population. While this limits the generalisability of the findings in statistical terms, it allows for both depth and relevance in understanding the barriers and potential solutions specific to this age group and cultural context.

### 1.5.2 Data Analysis

A dual mode analysis was adopted to reflect the study's mixed method design. Quantitative survey data were analysed using basic descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages to summarise youth responses on visitation habits, attitudes, and perceived barriers. These statistics allowed for the identification of dominant patterns across both survey participants, enabling comparisons between offsite and onsite respondents. Tables and charts were used to visualize the findings for more clarity and interpretability.

The qualitative data, which comprised of interviews and observational fieldwork, thematic analysis was undertaken. Recurring themes were identified through the coding of transcripts, where particular attention was paid to patterns relating to youth perceptions of museums, barriers to engagement, and institutional responses. This process ensured that the findings were grounded in perspectives of participants while remaining informed by the wider literature on

youth cultural participation. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a richer and more nuanced understanding of the research problem.

### 1.5.3 Ethical Considerations

This study remained in line with the ethical research guidelines set out by SOAS University of London in all parts of the data collection process. The House of Islamic Arts Museum was informed of the project, and all participants were made aware of the purpose of the research and how their data would be used at the start of every interview and sessions. Before recording, they were informed of maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Identifying information was removed from all datasets with all responses reported in an anonymous manner.

Before data collection, formal permission was obtained from the House of Islamic Arts Museum. The schedule of both observations and the interviews was agreed upon by museum management, set during times that ensured minimal interruption to museum routines. This dual understanding of the project's purpose ensured institutional support and assisted in complying with organisational policies. The study was conducted in consideration and respect to any potential cultural sensitivities, emphasizing the importance of minimising potential discomfort or harm to participants. By solidifying ethical integrity within the research process, participants were protected and the study benefitted from enhanced credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Background

Over the past two decades, museums shifted from institutions that revolve around collections and perspectives to audience centred engagement. This shift stems from the need to recognise youth as active members of society, understanding the influence of their needs, interests and beliefs. Youth are reshaping their participation, interpretation, programming and institutional culture. To address the change, museum learning has been defined as a process founded upon understanding visitor's background goals and identities as much as the exhibitions themselves (Falk & Dierking, 2018). Furthermore, research has pioneered in participatory and co-creative models that focuses on dialogue, collaborative and shared authorship with diverse community members including youth (Simon, 2010).

This literature review analyses key theoretical findings and empirical evidence on youth engagement, highlighting international barriers on their engagement in museums. It then places museums within Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 broader framework by examining evolving contemporary youth culture and leisure related preferences. The review recognises the effects of visitation on youth culture; it adequately positions museums within the broader objectives of Saudi Arabia's cultural transformation. The review then encapsulates lessons and key takeaways that emerged from global case studies applicable to museums in the Gulf including the House of Islamic Arts Museum in Jeddah.

This review consults a diverse range of sources that include peer reviewed research, policy documents and sector evaluations. It prioritises information from more recent data sources from 2018 to 2025 while attributing earlier foundational work. The study draws connections between well-established theories including Hooper-Greenhill's Contextual Model of Learning and

Attention Value approaches. It applies them to emerging evidence about digital engagement, immersive and gamified interpretation as well as youth leadership and governance in museums. The study integrates current Saudi policy and relevant statistical material to guide opportunities and understand constraints specific to the contexts of Vision 2030.

## 2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical foundation for understanding different perspectives on youth engagement with museums can be linked to Falk and Dierking's Contextual Model of Learning that finds that museum learning is initiated from the interactions in personal, sociocultural and physical contexts that are considered before, during, and after the visit (Falk & Dierking, 2018). It links prior understanding, perceptions, identities and motivations to determine how audiences interpret exhibits among themselves.

By applying the model to youth, it is observed that the social dimension is guided by features that invite conversations with friends, family and online networks which are interwoven with features that invite collaboration (Falk & Dierking, 2018). Bitgood's Attention Value Model compliments this, offering a design oriented approach that considers the capture, focus and holding of attention as precursors of meaning making (Bitgood, 2016). By emphasizing how intrinsic value and exhibit affordances influence decision-making related to an interaction where the model assists in explaining the relationship between short dwell times and text heavy exhibits. The model accommodates using multi-sensory and interactive stations for sustained attention among youth. This approach has been adopted in exhibition development to balance out novelty and appropriateness for youth.

Participatory frameworks and overall interests in museums have redefined engagement by identifying it as a dual relationship. Simon's The Participatory Museum initiates and proposes a spectrum comprised of contributory activities such as visitor comments, co-created object

labels and collaborative communities sharing decision making power (Simon, 2010). It sets across agency, voice and cultural relevance that could elevate the position of youth from being passive recipients of expert knowledge to co-authors of museum narratives and programmes. Youth, when not perceived as uninterested are provided an opportunity to actively transmit expert knowledge. Participatory projects can be more suitable for digital practices that integrate user generated content, social storytelling and platform specific formats, collectively enhancing the appeal and resonance for a digitally native audience.

A similar shift has been observed in educational museology. It shifted from transmission to constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning that encourage interpretation, dialogue as well as identity work (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). Therefore, museum learning is not only limited to school groups. It involves recognising the potential to include designing interpretative media, facilitation and environments that position enquiry and personal meaning making as pivotal for diverse audiences such as teenagers and youth. Contemporary museum education utilizes narrative, inquiry based tasks and peer discussions to cultivate broader learning disposition to extend beyond transferring knowledge during the visit. The digital transition in engagement, such as the strategic use of social media in particular, has become pivotal. Research in Europe highlights the adoption of social media strategies in museums is not for promotional purposes, they show everyday interactions with youth and are created on touch points that extend beyond the physical visit (Lema & Arnaboldi, 2022). Finally, social media can contribute towards inclusivity and accessibility, providing equal access through social media platforms. This way museums can reach those audiences who have not been connected before, essentially eliminating or reducing barriers such as physical distance from museum experiences.

## 2.3 Barriers to Museum Engagement

While international evidence from established theory provides robust guidance and strategies, empirical studies have consistently identified barriers hindering youth participation. Recent scholarly works recognise practical constraints such as cost, transport, and time. Another observable pattern is the relationship between free admission and attendance. While free entry can boost attendance, it is insufficient alone to diversify audience. Other suggestions include opting for targeted museum programmes and outreach (Hume, 2025). Academic literature also reports that high admission prices are rarely the primary barrier. Other factors such as perceived relevance, social belonging and prior cultural capital could be stronger indicators of visitation habits, that could also be embedded into further inclusion based strategies (Canovan, 2020). These distinctions could potentially imply that pricing strategies alone, for more impact, should be embedded in inclusive frameworks (Harp et al., 2018).

Other observed barriers could be psychologically inspired or stimulated. They are often linked with identity and relevance among teenagers. The aforementioned age group could potentially perceive museums as formal and adult oriented institutions that are disconnected from youth's contemporary interests. Recent studies and other longitudinal evaluations considering intensive teen programmes across major US museums noted that if museums invest in youth leadership and social practices, then participants report significant growth in confidence, cultural literacy and attachment to museums, observed to continue to adulthood (Munley, 2015). Reports on teen councils reflects on young people's expectations related to ethical, inclusive institutions and their capacity in influencing museum agendas (Li, 2024). Such barriers visualise the importance of raising awareness on youth roles in museums while continuing to maintain relevance and identity to transform museums to cultural institutions that are inclusive to all.

Attention economy considers competing digital stimuli combined with static displays and textual information. It can reduce dwell time and depth of engagement. This barrier could be overcome easily by utilizing immersive media, AR/VR and gamification if integrated with clear learning goals to increase motivation, presence and recall (Ariya et al., 2025; Sangamuang, 2025). The effectiveness of these tools depends on narrative coherence, usability and alignment with youth expectations. The Covid 19 pandemic brought about more constraints such as closures, reduced capacities and a sharp pivot to digital content. UNESCO's (2021) assessment documented a sharp decline in both attendance and revenue. It saw a rapid expansion of digital programming mostly targeting families and youth. Therefore, the sector's subsequent hybrid practice that combined both onsite and online approaches was noticeable for access challenged communities.

Several barriers, such as cultural, spatial, and psychological, interrelate with the above mentioned ones. These barriers effectively contribute to an overall underrepresentation that is particularly prevalent among certain communities in museum spaces. However, developing an understanding of these barriers is crucial for museums to promote inclusivity and engagement among a broader range of communities in society. Underrepresented or minority communities often come across cultural barriers, considered among the most significant obstacles to museum participation, where their histories and identities are not equally represented in traditional museum narratives. Hooper Greenhill (2007) proposes that museums have historically been positioned to address dominant cultural groups, leaving room for minimal and narrowed interpretations of culture that excludes the minority voices. This perception could potentially alienate visitors from underrepresented or nondominant cultural backgrounds, moved by a belief that museums do not adequately reflect their histories or lived experiences.

Spatial and geographical barriers consider the connections between distance from museums and cultural institutions from potential visitors. Knowledge of museums or knowledge obtained

after museum visits is unevenly distributed due to physical barriers such as distance affecting individuals unevenly where potential visitors from rural, peripheral or underdeveloped areas are amongst the most affected. This is supported by accounts and reports by cultural institutions. According to Harris (2013), many museums are located within the city centres and other affluent neighbourhoods, suggesting potential accessibility challenges for society members with limited access to transportation or of those living in remote areas. Therefore, accessibility issues extend beyond limited transportation and physical distance to encompass considerations regarding the design and infrastructure of the museums themselves. Gani (2018) argues that individuals with physical disabilities face challenges due to inadequate ramps, poorly marked pathways or inaccessible restrooms. It is important to consider that spatial design could cause unintended discomfort or potential exclusion stemming from the use of formal or imposing architecture which some may consider unwelcoming or elitist (Sandell, 2015).

To conclude this section, it is important to recognise that the limited or lack of youth voices and perceptions within museum governance and programme design could potentially be perceived as a barrier within itself. Emerging scholarship recommends and reminds institutions that youth participation frameworks should centre around purpose, positioning, and power relations. There, co-creation requires real influence are not simply for consultation (Zhang et al., 2023). Proposed participatory frameworks seek to integrate innovative solutions and strategies such as youth advisory boards and cross institutional panels attempting to address this, guided by evidence that they improve reliance, relevance and trust (Jensen, 2022).

## 2.4 Youth Leisure and Cultural Participation

Understanding youth engagement is important in Saudi Arabia, a country where youth comprise over a third of the population, thereby presenting opportunities for cultural

participation (General Authority for Statistics, 2023). For example, positioning museums within broader leisure related systems that utilise the highly digital community. It attributes screens and mobile devices to how cultural content is discovered and shared (Almaqawi et al., 2022). A MENA wide survey represents a socially connected cohort that seamlessly blends local heritage with global aesthetics, reflecting an entrepreneurial and expressive society particularly in areas such as fashion, design and music (Almaqawi & Albarqi, 2022).

Domestic cultural participation indicators reflect positive responses, suggesting strong growth under Vision 2030. This is acknowledged by recent reports. The Ministry of Culture's State of Culture reports and supporting statistical releases highlighting rising attendance in places such as cultural events, characterised by a rapid expansion and diversification of multiple creative industries and a diversifying institutional landscape. GASTAT's Culture and Entertainment bulletin (2022-2023) reported a high level of participation overall in cultural and other entertainment oriented activities, particularly among those aged 15 and above despite the variety of entertainment formats such as cinemas, festivals and museums. Furthermore, a significant proportion of people in Saudi Arabia are reported to have been engaged in cultural and entertainment activities from the middle of 2022 to the middle of 2023 (General Authority for Statistics, 2023). When analysed collectively, these contextualise structured leisure among young people with more hybrid cultural consumption opportunities that combine online and offline. In turn, it utilises youth interests in social media for discovery and peer network connectivity amplifier. Saudi culture is undergoing a rapid cultural renaissance as a part of Vision 2030 (Ministry of Culture, 2019).

From a more international perspective, youth leisure is often characterised by peer affiliation, creative production and a consumption driven by experience. Museums are presented with a unique opportunity to align with these patterns. Museums that integrate participatory practices including workshops, maker spaces, pop up activations and curation by youth have shown a

tendency to report stronger repeat visitation among youth. This could potentially influence museum managements that are diversifying and entering the leisure ecosystem. They do not only compete with other cultural venues but extend their competition including gaming, social platforms and other entertainment outlets. This sets expectations for the entertainment industry as a whole to look into both interactivity and personalisation. This aspect is widely stressed upon when engaging with literature, finding that museums must design for sociability and agency rather than for didactic transmission (Lema & Arnaboldi, 2022).

## 2.5 Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030

Vision 2030 recognises culture as an integral element to the quality of life in a nation, the pride in national identity and an engine for economic diversification, specifically pledging to create world class museums inclusive to both residents and visitors (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Successive annual reports emphasize the progress in creativity, tourism and heritage achieved through the formation of new institutions, sector commissions and partnerships. within this architecture, the Museums Commission (under the Ministry of Culture) is tasked with sector independent professionalisation and audience growth aiming to extract the concept of museums as “vibrant and enriching places” a term that all visitors and demographic backgrounds can attest to (Report on the State of the Culture, 2024). Policy documents have articulated a broad cultural vision. They adopted the integration of heritage, supporting contemporary creativity, expanding participation and placing youth engagement as an implied thorough line (Ministry of Culture, 2019).

Contemporary programmes, such as Vision 2030's notable Quality of Life programme, repurpose cultural participation as a central outcome of urban and social development. Here, leading institutions such as the King AbdulAziz Centre for World Culture (Ithra), have pioneered and set examples for newly established and previously established museums on

integrated engagement. Recent reports documented examples of initiating large scale community programmes, extensive partnerships and harnessing innovation in interpretation and digital outreach. While Ithra is not a museum by definition, it offers opportunities of lifelong learning that are essential in a thriving society such as fusing exhibitions, provision of learning opportunities, maker culture and festivals, adapting to youth oriented and cross disciplinary approaches that Vision 2030 envisions and thrives to reach across the cultural sector at large (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025; Ithra, 2025).

This overarching strategic direction relevant to cultural practices is observable in the guidance of heritage documents and digital archiving. At large, this underscores the nation's commitment to providing foundational work that adheres to infrastructures and standards, which are essential preconditions for the vigorous programming and interpretations in museums. These policies, along with the organizational developments, cultivate an enabling environment founded to transform museums. They focus on youth engagement principles that include expanded institutional capacity, new funding channels and meeting expectations of participatory, digitally integrated experiences (General Authority for Statistics 2024).

## 2.6 Global Case Studies

Various international examples provide transferrable insights for museums engaging with youth. Tate Exchange, London (UK), initiated this shift. The Tate Modern, provided a platform for engaging artists with multidisciplinary backgrounds such as universities, who collectively co-produced programmes. Participation was a provider of institutional learning. The Tate Exchange aspired to represent a creative space that blurred boundaries between museums and everyday life by encouraging and discussing social issues such as education, health, and the environment from the perspective of art. It was a platform for experimental learning that reshaped audience engagement with museums, through hands on learning and interactivity. It

redefined the role of a visitor to that of a participant. Independent evaluations and impact case studies reported that the programme successfully fostered dialogue, agency and learning, relating to institutional practice around public engagement (Calafate - Faria et al., 2018).

The Brook Lane Museum Programme (USA) integrates outreach programmes and community engagement, through paid internships in the Teen Nights Committee, Museum Apprentice Programme and the Creative Practice. They immerse in museum education, public programming, studio teaching and organising socially charged events and activities. By positioning youth as co-curators, it fosters collaboration with staff and peers, transforming the museum as a community engagement platform. Whitney Museum's multi-year room to rise reflects lasting impacts regarding civic engagement, education and cultural participation. Other case studies highlighted paid internships and cohort modules as guides to youth pathways in cultural institutions (Munley, 2015).

The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha (Qatar) is a regionally relevant example about combining creativity, collaboration and multisensory approaches through workshops and other interactive activities to promote understanding Islamic art and heritage among youth. This case study prioritises the museum's emphasis on education, interpretation and community engagement around Islamic heritage. Professional exchanges through ICOM/ICOFOM emphasise the museum's integration of curatorial strategies to reflect best practices, guiding museums in deepening accessibility and appreciation of Islamic Art among youth (International Committee for Museology, 2024).

The integration of digital and immersive practice is effective in improving youth engagement. Reviews and studies across Europe and Asia suggest AR, VR and gamified learning and strategies to increase engagement, presence and motivation. Its effectiveness, if embedded, enhances learning narratives supported by facilitation. These findings support strategically

adopting immersive media in galleries while cautioning their integration without narrative or interpretative depth (Sangamuang et al., 2025). Emerging research supports integrating youth advisory initiatives to foster real world decision-making powers to reflect relevance and equity. Cross institutional reflections underscore the importance of sustained relationships to ensure visibility regarding their decisions on exhibitions and events (Silva, 2022).

## 2.7 Synthesis and implications

Combining the literature visualises a coherent set of design principles catered towards youth engagement in museums. From theoretical perspectives, youth learning is contextual, social and practically embodied where sustained attention is fostered by initiating interactive, participatory and narratively coherent exhibitions. Observable barriers such as cost, logistics and a perceived irrelevance to contemporary interests are potentially best addressed through multi-modal targeted strategies including digital or peer led targeted outreach, participatory programming, inclusive facilitation and the adoption of a structural mechanism for amplifying youth voices and perspectives in governance. The evidence for the integration of immersive and gamified media is growing, emphasizing integrating story with pedagogy rather than technology. The Vision 2030 framework paved way for a policy window and institutional infrastructure that encourages innovation. National demographic profiles and participation data reflect that Saudi Arabia is comprised of a large and digitally fluent young population, where there is both growing interest and a demand for more cultural experiences. By comprehensively understanding this context, museums can be more aligned and capable to test global participatory models, including teen councils, maker studios, co-curated displays and youth centred interpretation. The review uses regionally relevant case materials on Ithra and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha to draw insights on festivals, community partnerships and digital storytelling. The case materials from both Ithra and the Museum of Islamic Art Doha along with UK and US examples provide a diverse range of pathways for translating theory

into practice that can be tailored to local audience needs and policy practices (General Authority for Statistics, 2023).

## 2.8 Justification for the study

Globally, challenges in youth retention persist, with research suggesting that youth perceive museums as formal and educational spaces rather than leisure destinations. This is enhanced by competition posed by various digital accessibility formats (Falk & Dierking, 2018; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Packer & Ballantyne, 2016). Western institutions have transitioned to participatory spaces, with Tate Exchange (UK) and Brooklyn Museum's Teen Council at the forefront. However, museums remain regarded by youth as elitist or irrelevant (Alnasser & Yi, 2023).

Despite Jeddah's expanding cultural infrastructure, emerging evidence suggests that youth visitation to museums remains relatively low. Both onsite and offsite surveys reflect barriers including lack of awareness, limited interactivity and the perception that museums are designed to serve tourists. This is concerning for a nation where 60% of its population is below 35 years (General Authority for Statistics, 2023). Without significant youth engagement, museums could be marginalised within the cultural ecosystem and undermine their long term sustainability.

Another justification is the scarcity of scholarly work on Saudi youth and museum engagement, given there is extensive international literature on cultural participation, in nations such as Australia and North America (Sandell & Nightingale, 2012; Message & Witcomb, 2015). In the Middle East, studies focused on heritage conservation, with little guidance on their engagement with cultural spaces. This absence is amplified in cities like Jeddah, where youth engage globally while maintaining tradition (British Council & University College London,

2020). This study directly addresses a theoretical gap, emphasizing youth cultural participation in the Saudi context.

The study's importance is emphasized by its alignment with Vision 2030 that solidifies culture as foundational to social and economic transformation, with goals to increase cultural participation (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Without engaging youth, these aspirations risk underachievement. Museums that successfully attract youth contribute directly to the Vision's social cohesion objective. The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha is a useful case study on how cultural institutions can meet the expectations.

Museums are recognised as socially inclusive spaces (Sandell, 2015) that encourage dialogue and shared experience. Youth engagement is critical, otherwise this understanding cannot be realised. The findings of this study are justified in terms of academic contribution, addressing a clear research gap and practical impact. This provides museum professionals and policymakers strategies to strengthen accessibility, inclusion, and long term sustainability of youth participation.

## Chapter 3: Findings and Results

This chapter presents the study's scholarly findings, reported objectively and systematically to mirror its mixed method design. Evidence was collected using three means: (1) two structured surveys administered to youth visitors at the House of Islamic Arts Museum and offsite across community centres including youth clubs and shopping malls; (2) six observation sessions within the museum that assess youth engagement with exhibits, programmes and spaces; and (3) nine semi structured interviews with staff members to obtain professional insights on youth participation and challenges to engagement. The surveys comprised of the largest data set, with 277 collected offsite and 261 onsite. The observations solidified observational trends through documentation of behavioural aspects such as social interactions, emotional response and use of technology in the galleries. The interviews provided insights that documented museum staff perceptions on barriers and opportunities for youth engagement, including the relevance of Vision 2030 to their practice.

### 3.1 Structure of the Results

The survey findings analysed each question in terms of response frequencies and percentages. Observations are summarized outlining youth behaviour in museums. Interviews are presented descriptively and arranged thematically, with direct quotations to illustrate staff opinions in their own words.

### 3.2 Survey Findings

This chapter visualises a detailed descriptive analysis of collected data through two distinct surveys, one administered onsite to museum visitors and one offsite to understand perspectives of the broader youth demographic, including non-visitors. Data is categorized into three primary areas that are participant demographics, emerging visitation patterns and barriers to

engagement. Analyses highlight contrasts between the groups. The onsite survey captured an overall young segment of 16 to 20 year olds representing 32%, compared to offsite respondents where 27% are aged 21-25 years. Both surveys had a predominant female majority, with 56.7% onsite and 59% offsite. The onsite survey saw an overall lead in Saudi respondents representing 51.6% (majority residing in Jeddah), suggesting that the museum is more locally oriented. House of Islamic Arts emerged as most visited, followed by Al Tayyebat Museum and Biennale.

Visitation frequency, as highlighted from the data, remains a critical challenge for museums, with an astonishing 33.5% of respondents reporting to never visiting a museum. In addition to that, only 5.8%, accounting to a minority of respondents, reported as frequent visitors, presenting the museum with an opportunity to convert non-visitors into attendees. For those who do visit, their motivations were explored, where “interest in museum themes and exhibits” accounted for 41.8% of responses, with the social motivation of “family outings” for 24.5%. This highlights the role of content relevance and social experiences in maintaining attractiveness for existing audiences.

Both onsite and offsite surveys successfully pinpointed a spectrum of barriers. In terms of museum offerings, a striking 26% reported a “lack of interest” while 17% reported a “lack of awareness”. Of those who were aware of the museum admitted limited knowledge of similar institutions. In addition to that, financial accessibility was highlighted a key area for review with 15.2% reporting “high costs” as deterrents to visitation.

Regarding onsite visitors who are already in the museum tend to relate more to the quality of the visit. That said, the most frequently reported issue was “crowding” (16.5%) with a large proportion noting noise from the shopping mall, distracting from visitation enjoyment and “language barriers” at 13.4% limiting access to content to a significant proportion of visitors

who link motivations to learning, cultural enrichment and socialising. Interestingly, while often discussed in museum literature, “lack of interactivity” was only reported by 3.8% of onsite respondents, suggesting that there are other more pressing factors.

Attitudes were measured through concluding questions, many interested in visiting museums, suggesting need of visibility and accessibility. Onsite respondents reported current visits to be positive, with suggested improvements to exhibitions and outreach.

Following are the graphs showing the results for each question for both surveys:

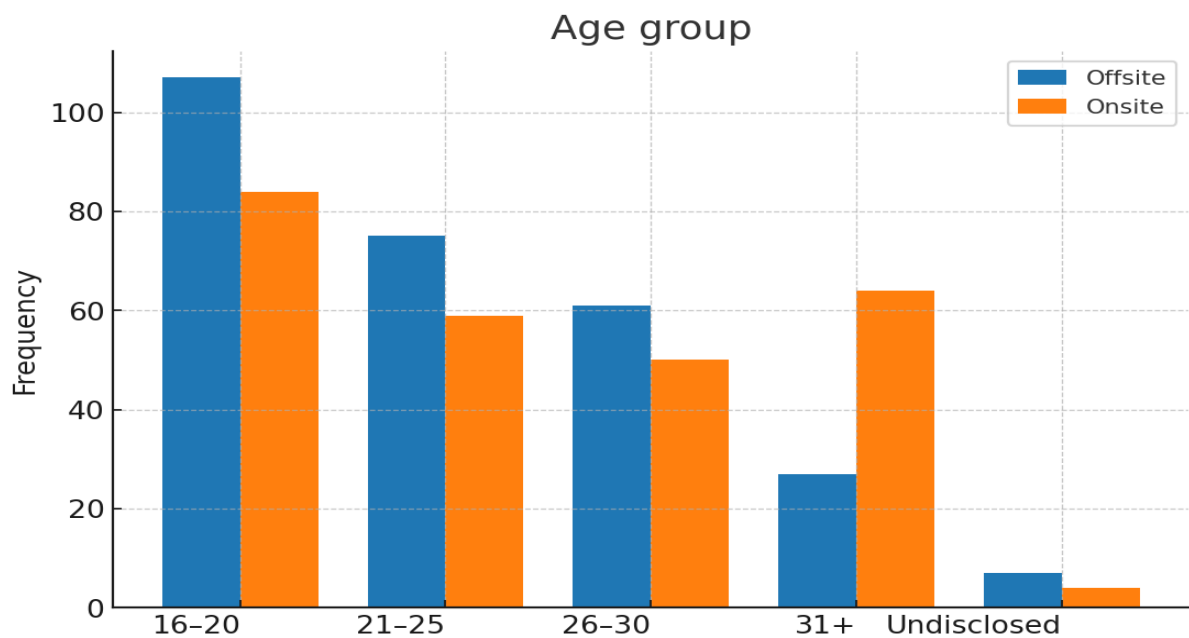


Figure 1. Onsite & Offsite Q 1: Age

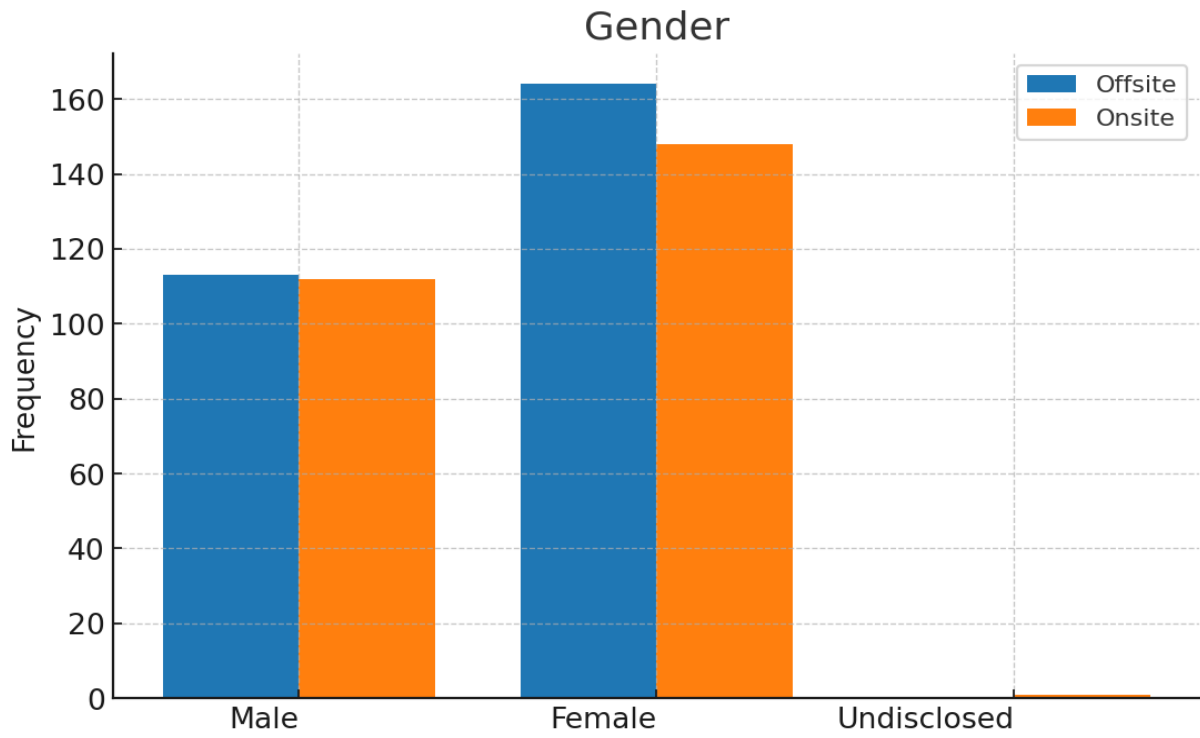


Figure 2. Onsite & Offsite Q 2: Gender

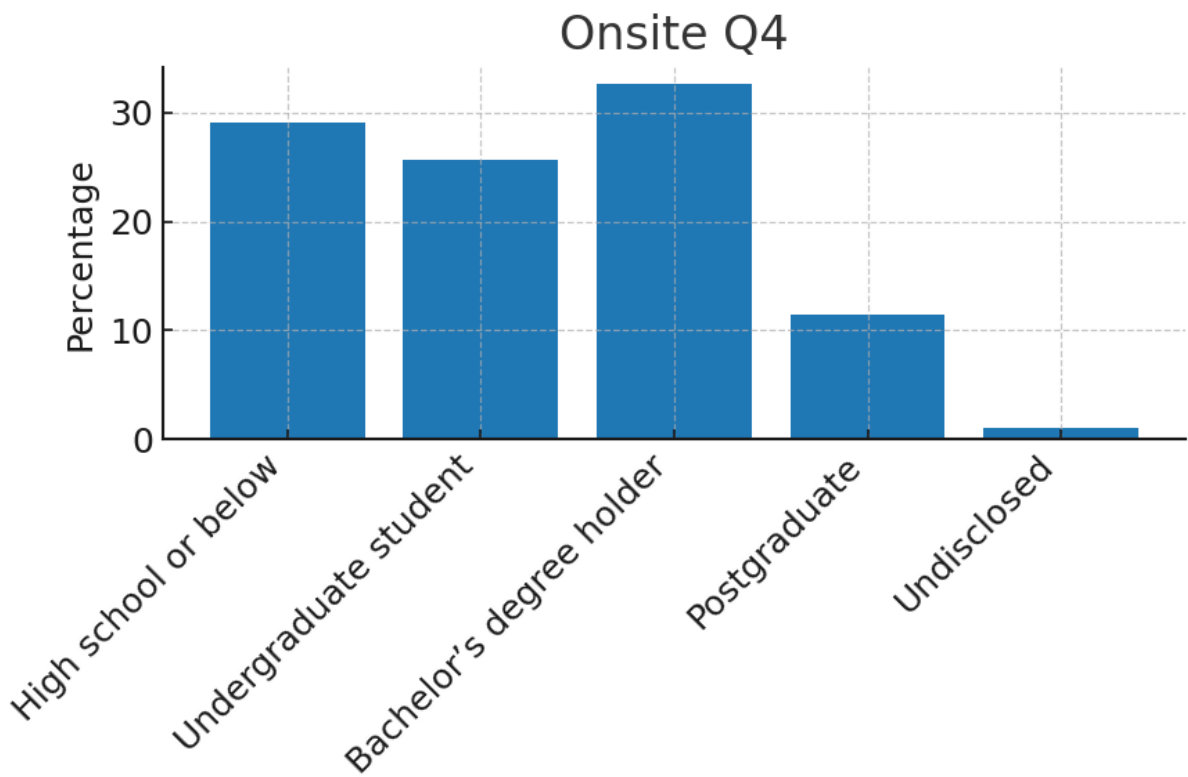


Figure 3. Onsite Q 4, Education Level

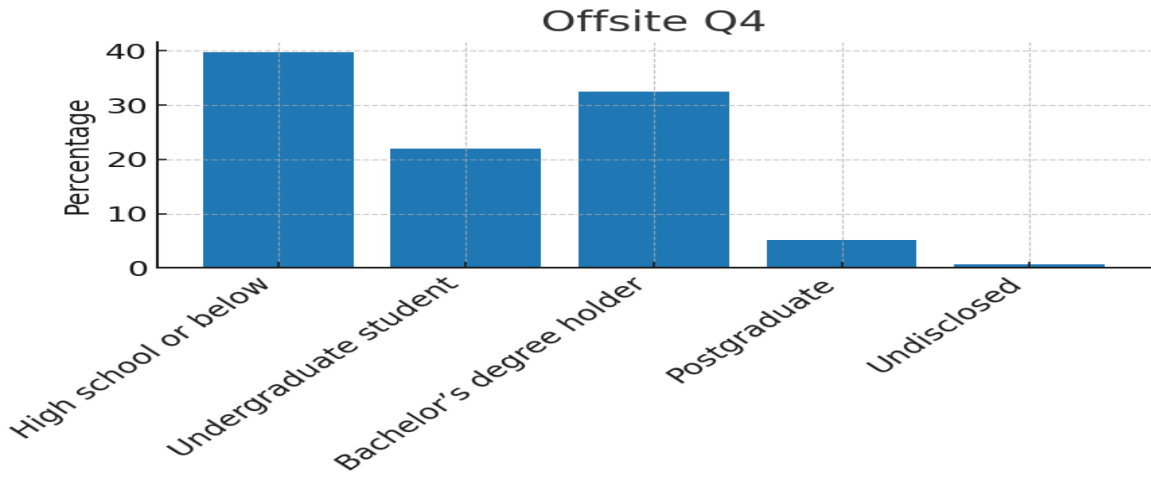


Figure 4. Offsite Q 4: Education Level

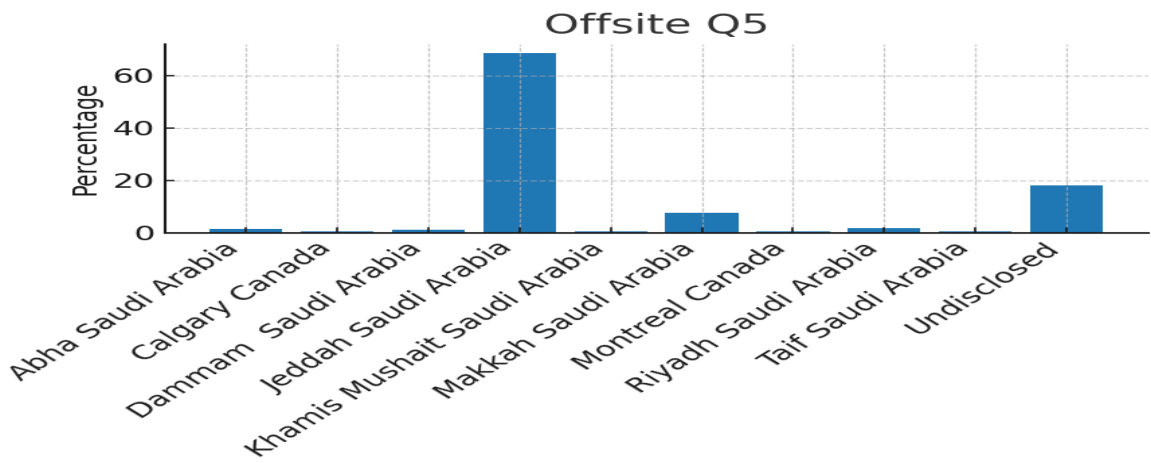


Figure 5. Offsite Q 5: Area of residence

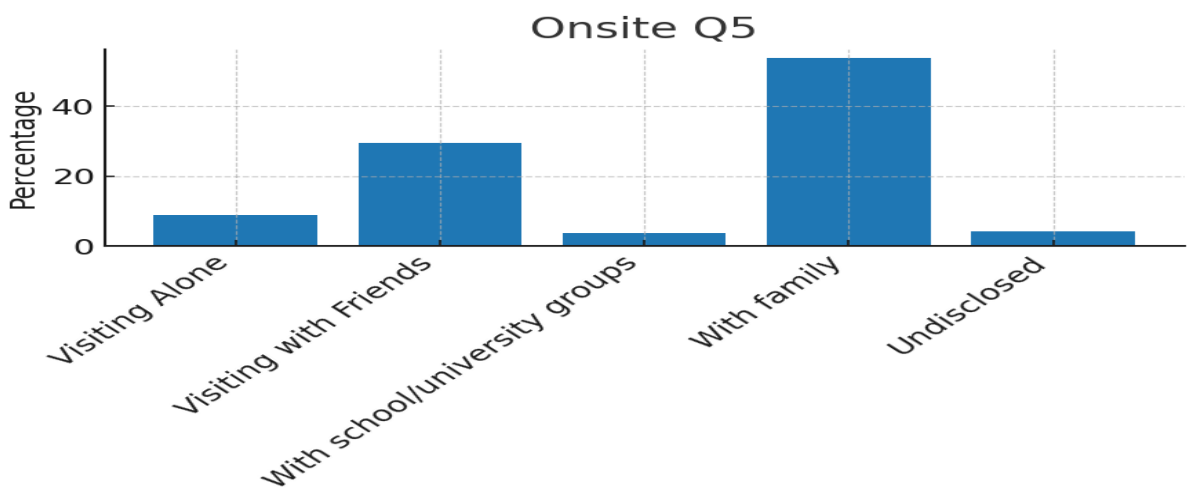


Figure 6. Onsite Q 5: Are you visiting alone or with others?

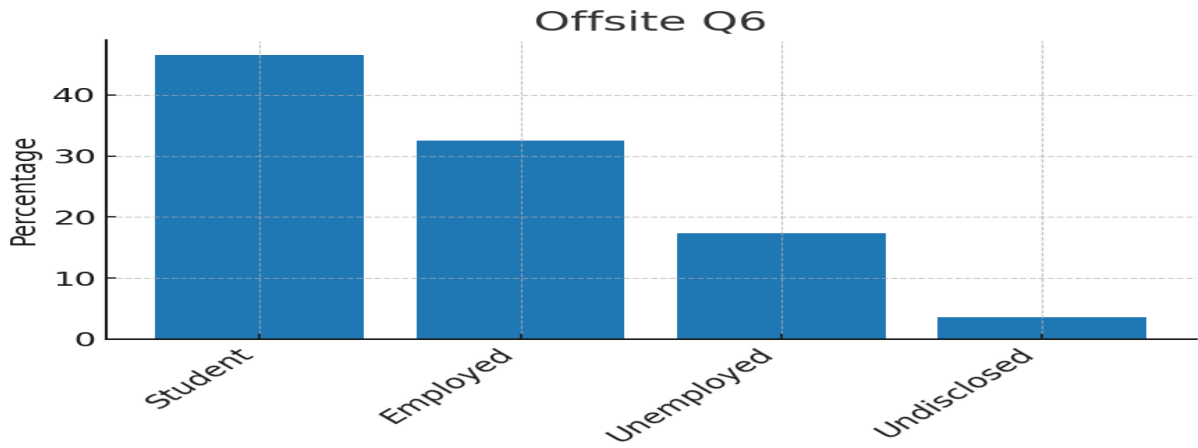


Figure 7. Offsite Q 6: Current occupation/status

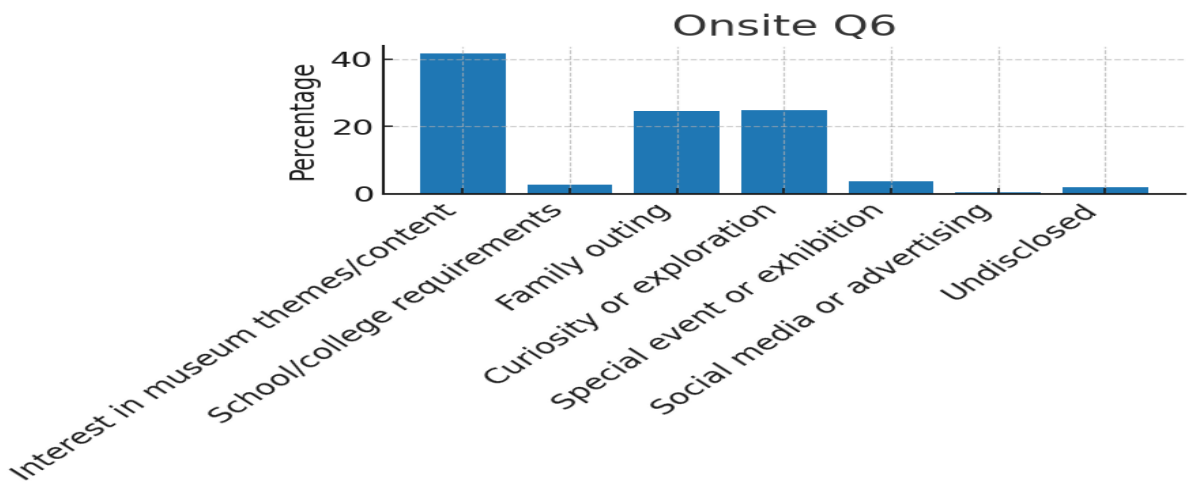


Figure 8. Onsite Q 6: What motivated you to visit today?

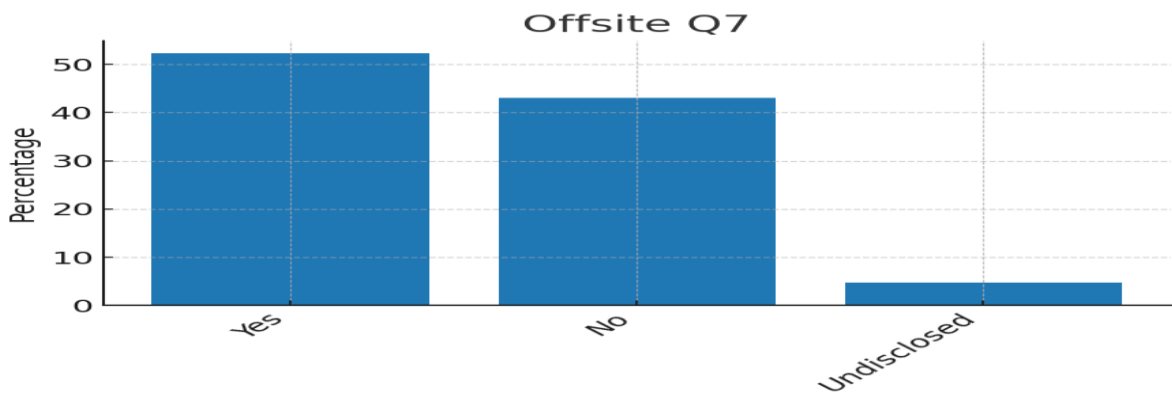


Figure 9. Offsite Q 7: Are you aware of museums in Jeddah?

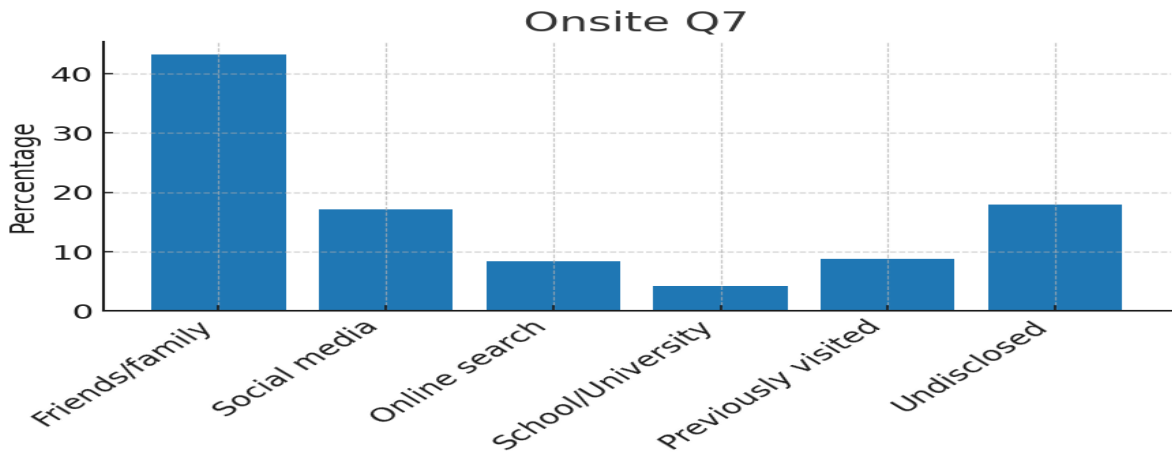


Figure 10. Onsite Q 7: How did you hear about this museum?

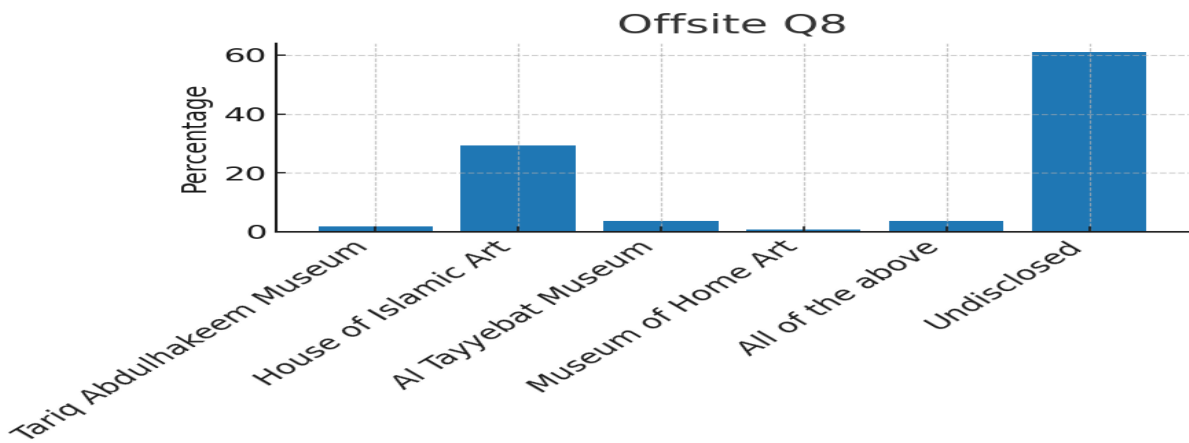


Figure 11. Offsite Q8 Which museums are you familiar with?

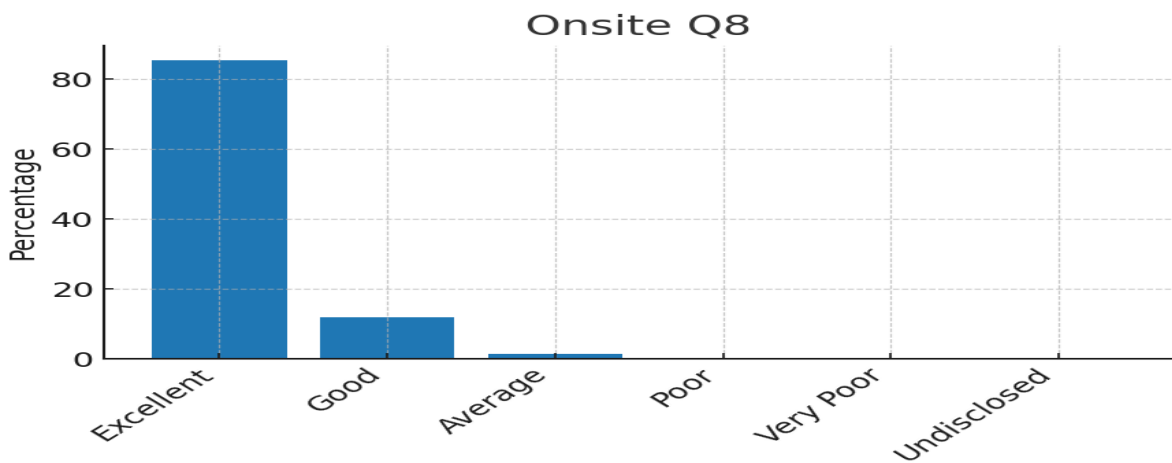


Figure 12. Onsite Q 8: How would you rate your overall experience in museum so far?

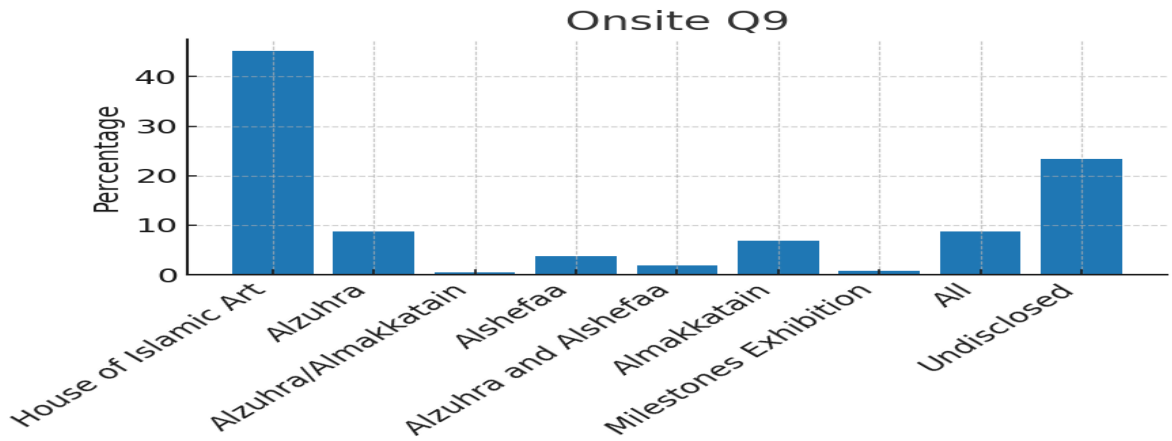


Figure 13. Onsite Q 9: Which section of the House of Islamic Arts Museum did you enjoy most?

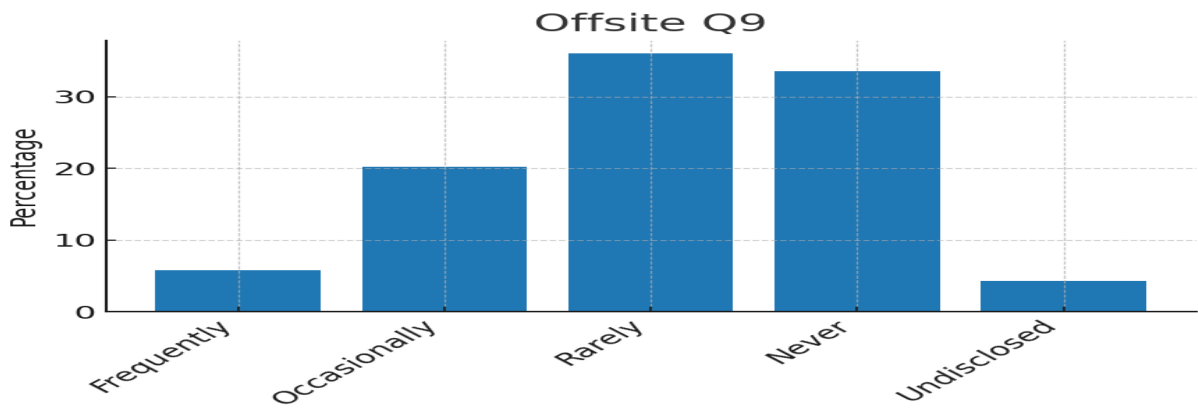


Figure 14. Offsite Q 9: How often do you visit museums in Jeddah?

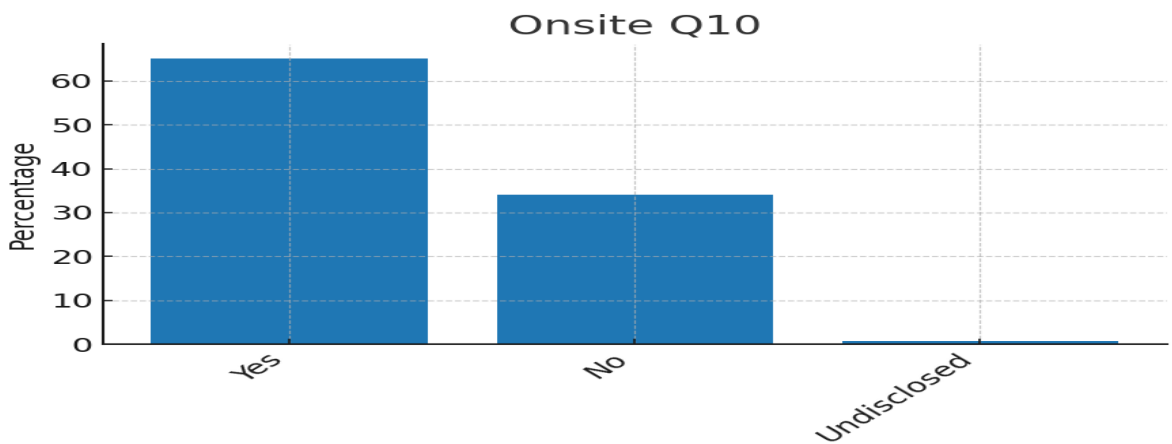


Figure 15. Onsite Q 10: Have you interacted with any museum guide, staff or digital resources during your visit?

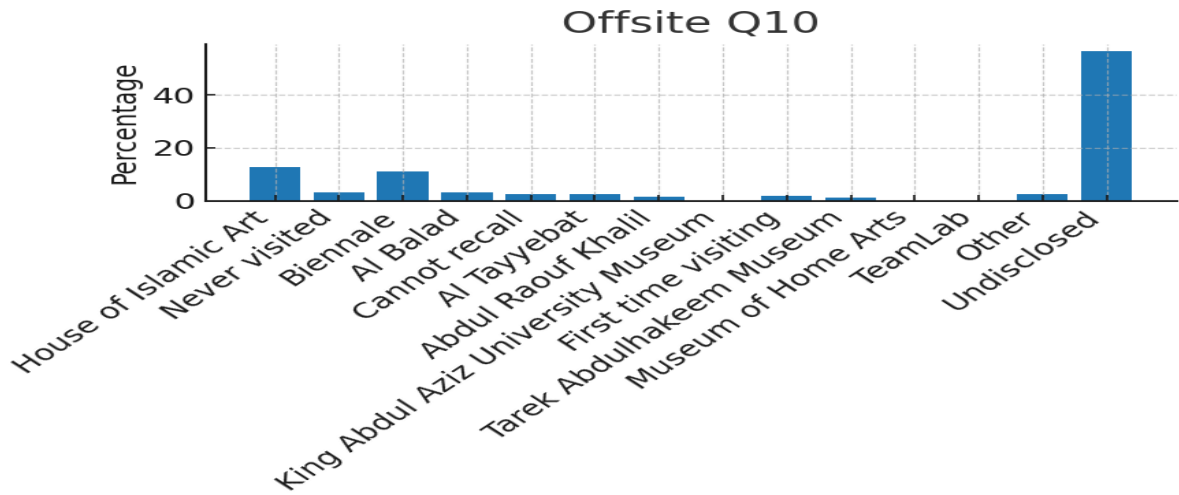


Figure 16. Offsite Q10: What was the last museum you visited in Jeddah?

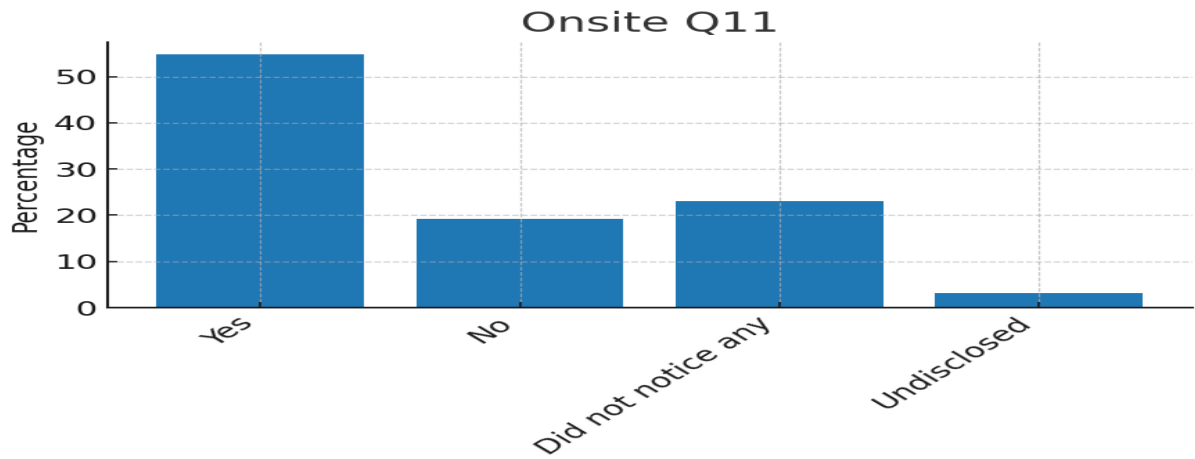


Figure 17. Onsite Q11: Are there any interactive elements (touch screens, audio guides, and activities) you found useful or enjoyable?

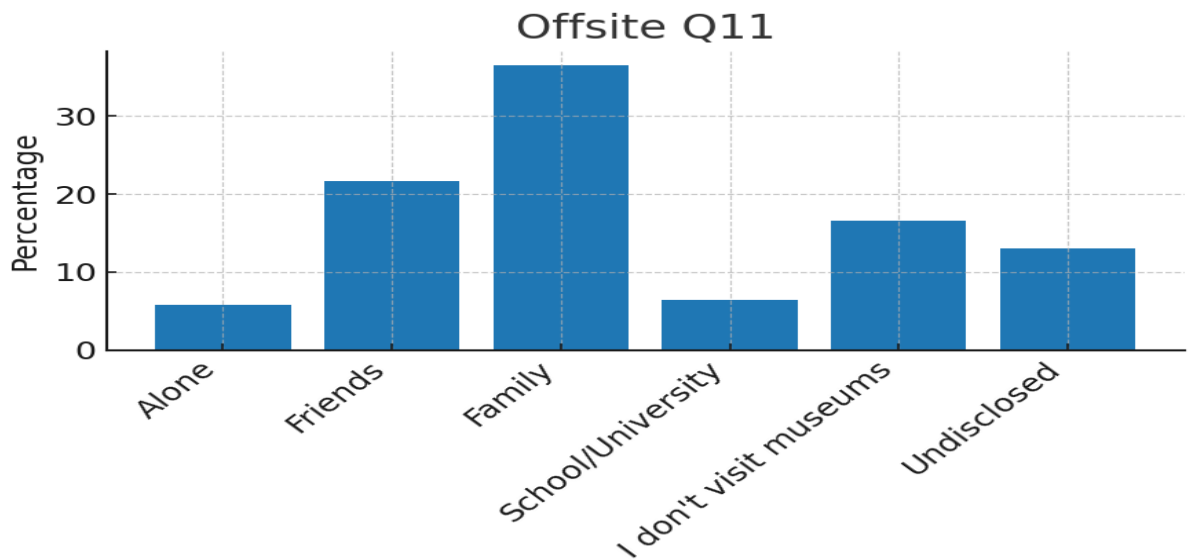


Figure 18. Offsite Q11: Who do you usually visit museums with?

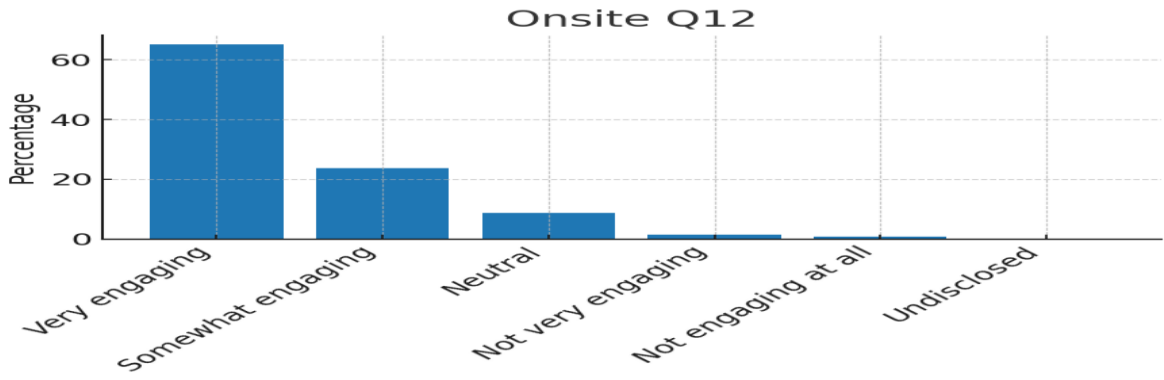


Figure 19. Onsite Q 12: How engaging did you find the displays or exhibits?

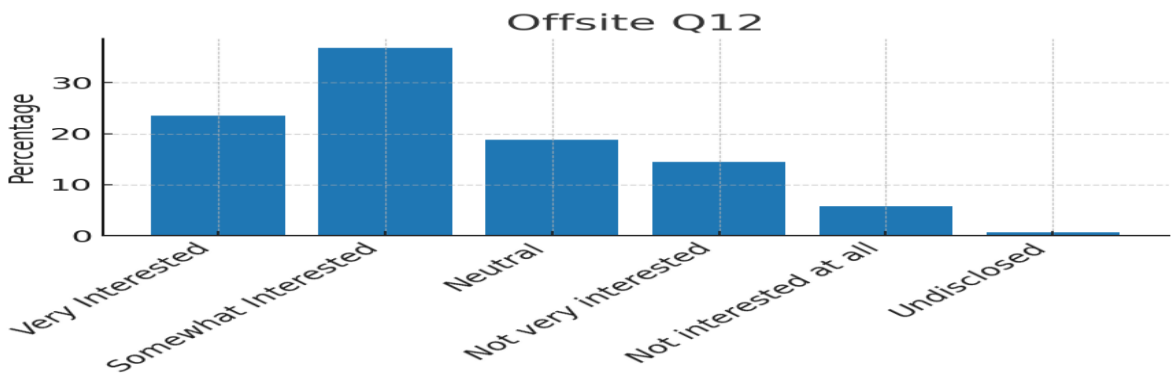


Figure 20. Offsite Q 12: How interested are you in visiting museums and cultural institutions?

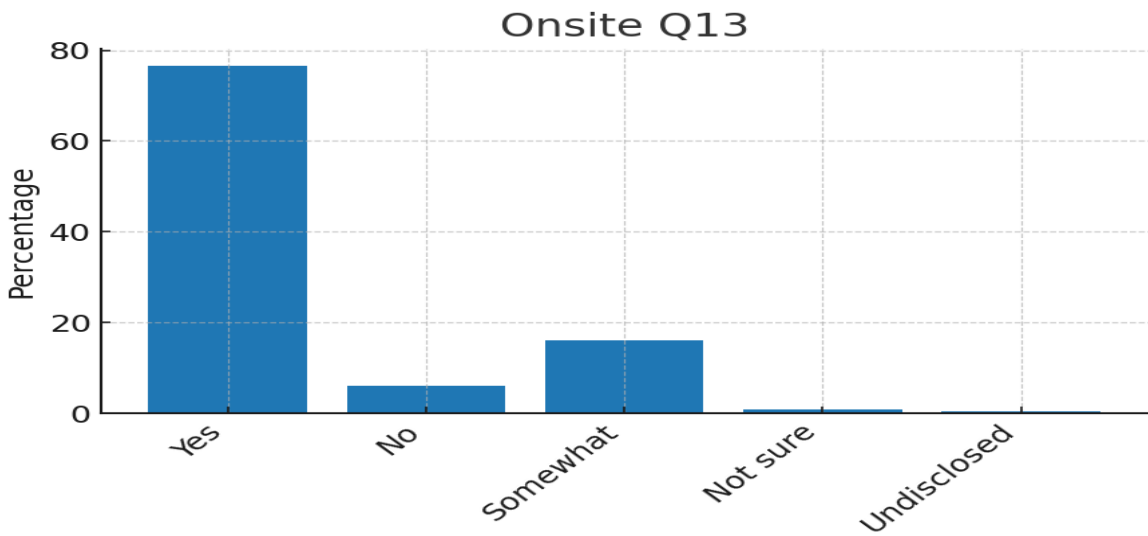


Figure 21. Onsite Q13: Do you feel that the museum provides a youth friendly environment?

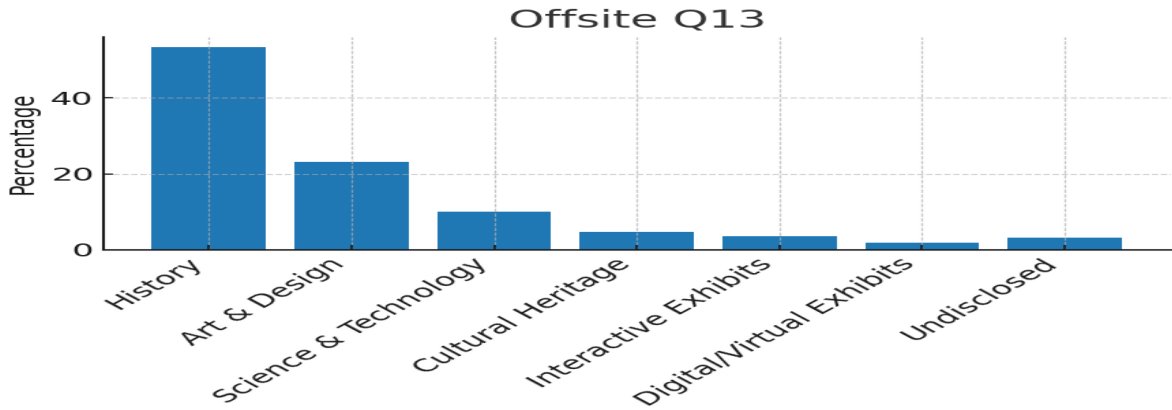


Figure 22. Offsite Q 13: What type of museum content do you find most appealing?

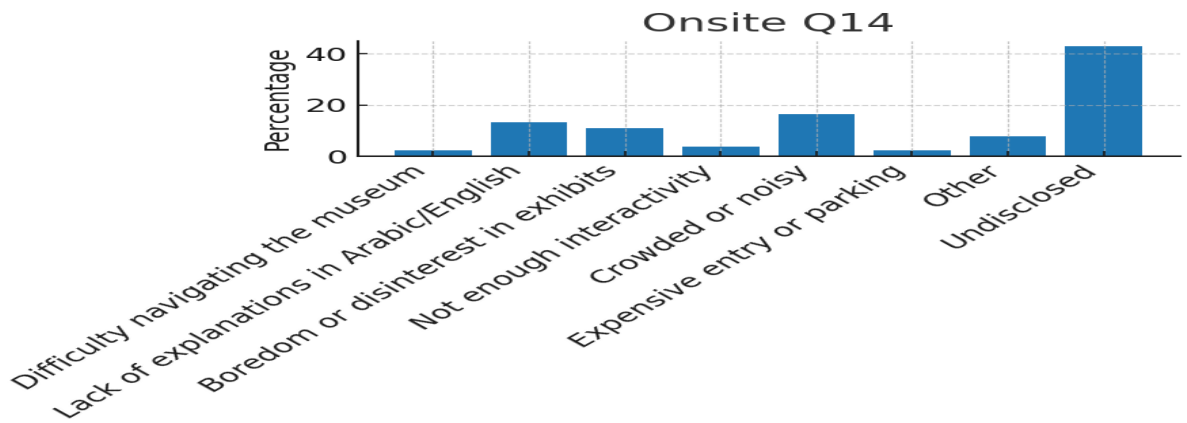


Figure 23. Onsite Q14: Did you experience any of the following during your visit?

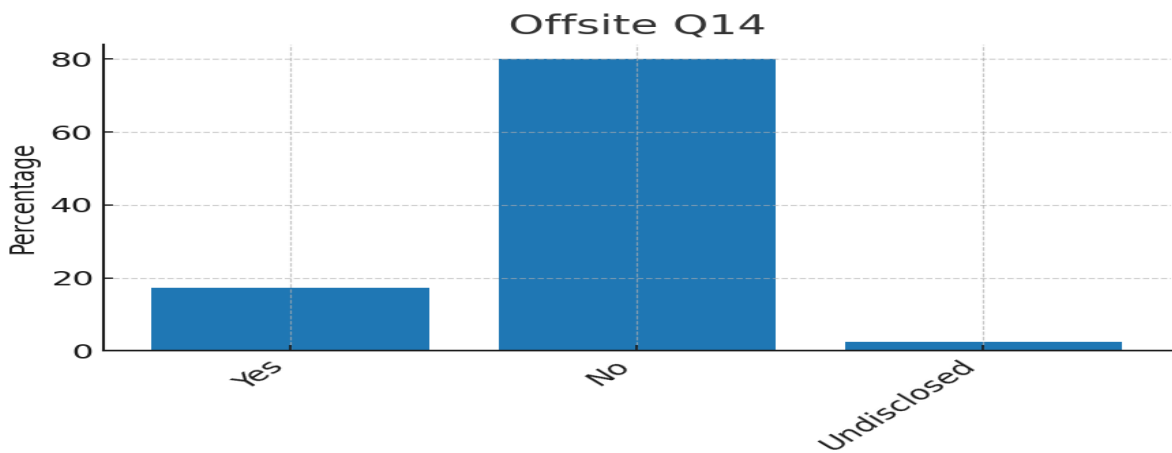


Figure 24. Offsite Q 14: Have you ever participated in any museum programme, workshop or event in Jeddah?

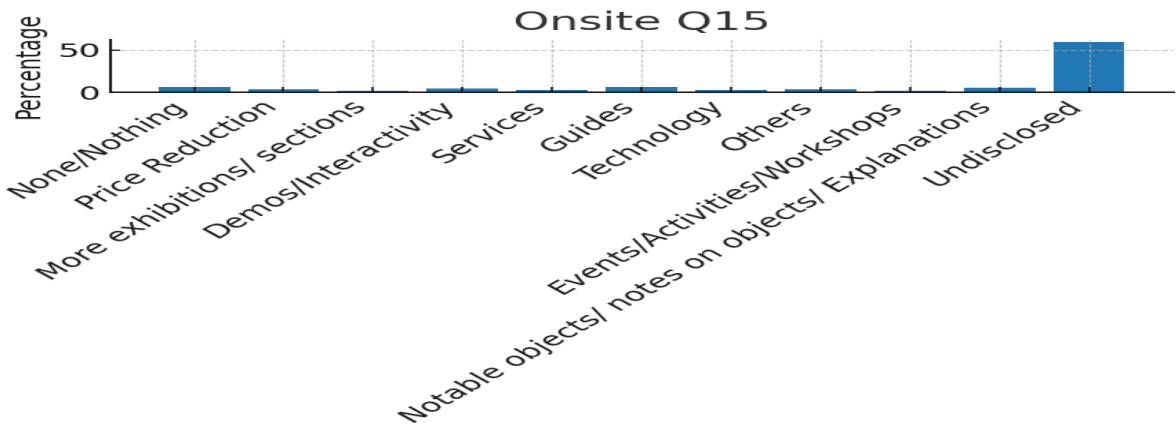


Figure 25. Onsite Q 15: What could improve your current visit experience?

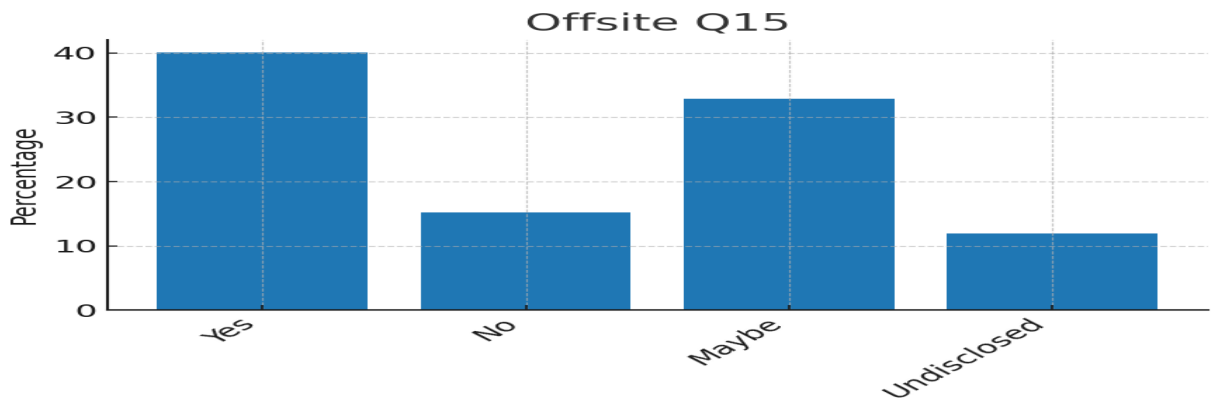


Figure 26. Offsite Q 15: Would you like to be more involved in museum activities?

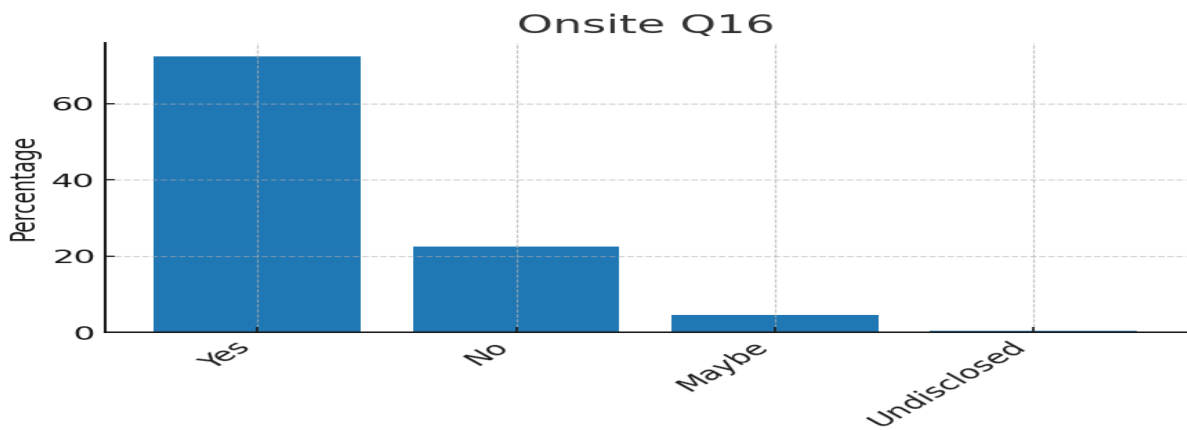


Figure 27. Onsite Q16: Would you like to visit this museum in the future?

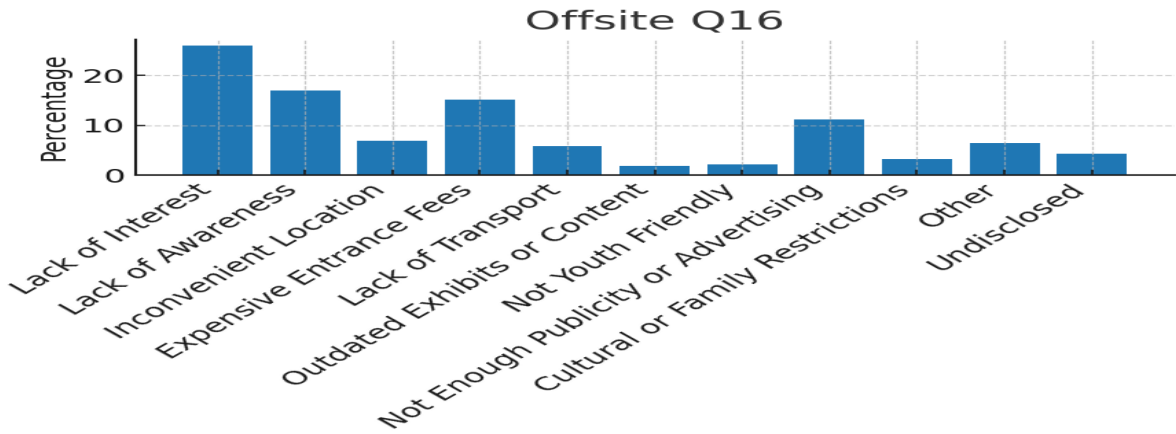


Figure 28. Offsite Q16: What prevents you from participating in museum related activities?

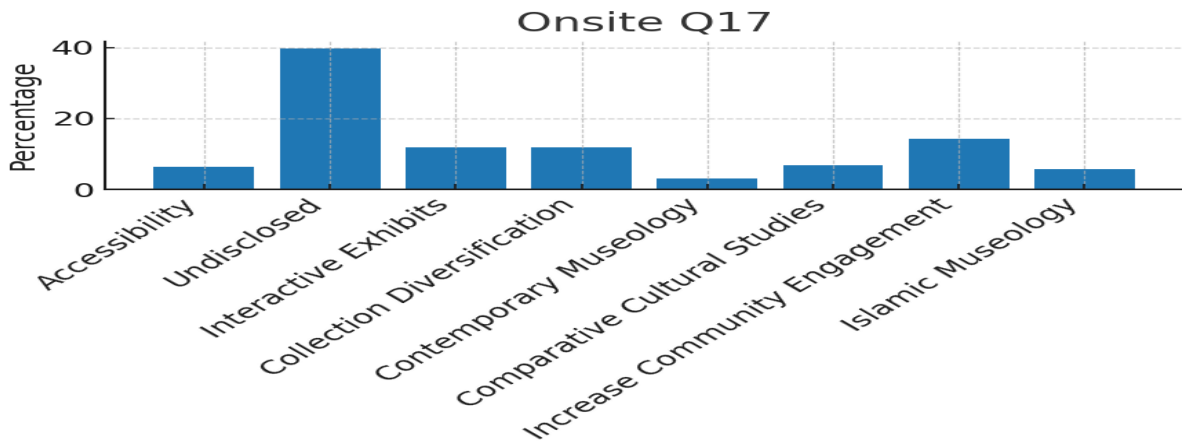


Figure 29. Onsite Q 17: What themes or activities would make museums more appealing to young people like you?

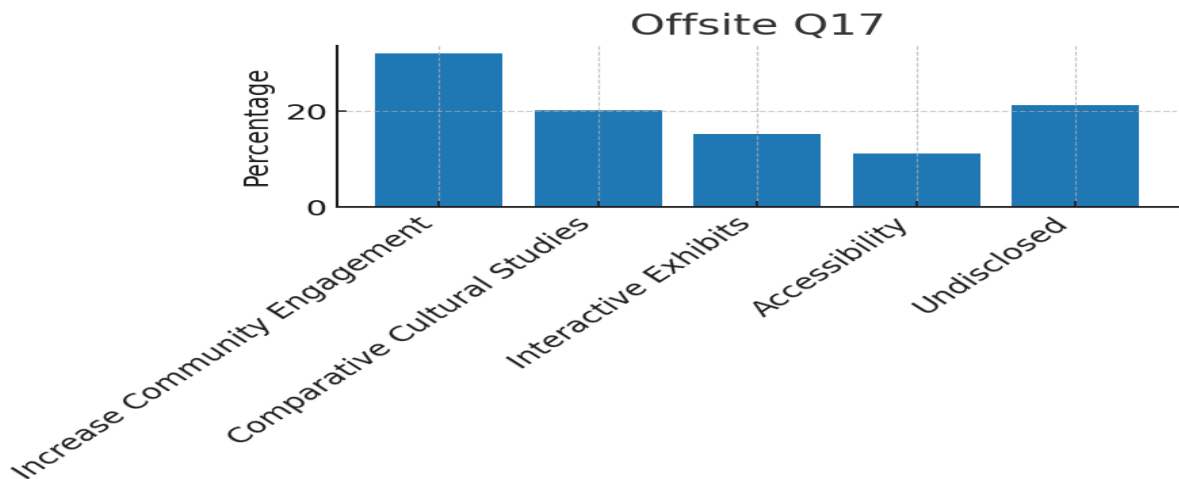


Figure 30. Offsite Q17: What could museums do to make museums more appealing to young people?

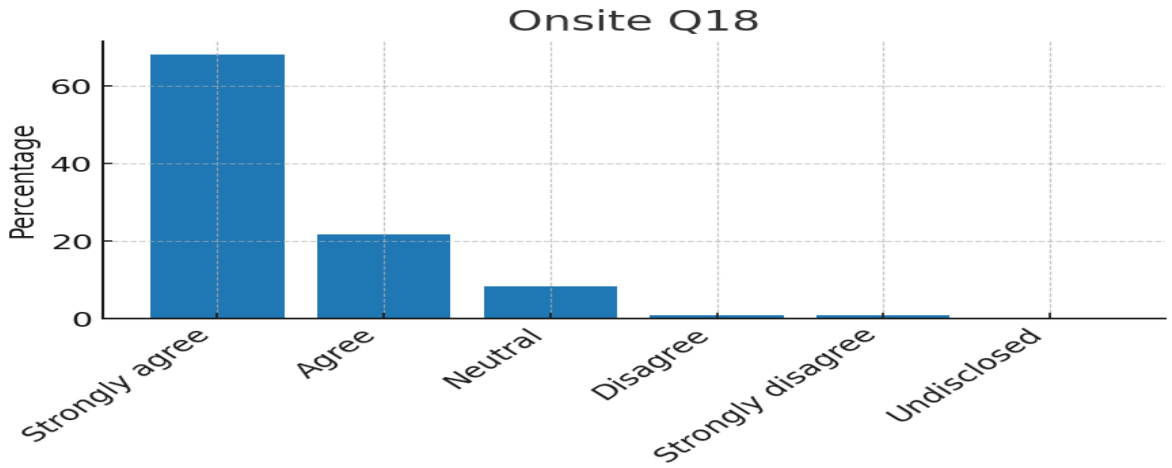


Figure 31. Onsite Q18: Do you think museums in Jeddah play an important cultural role?

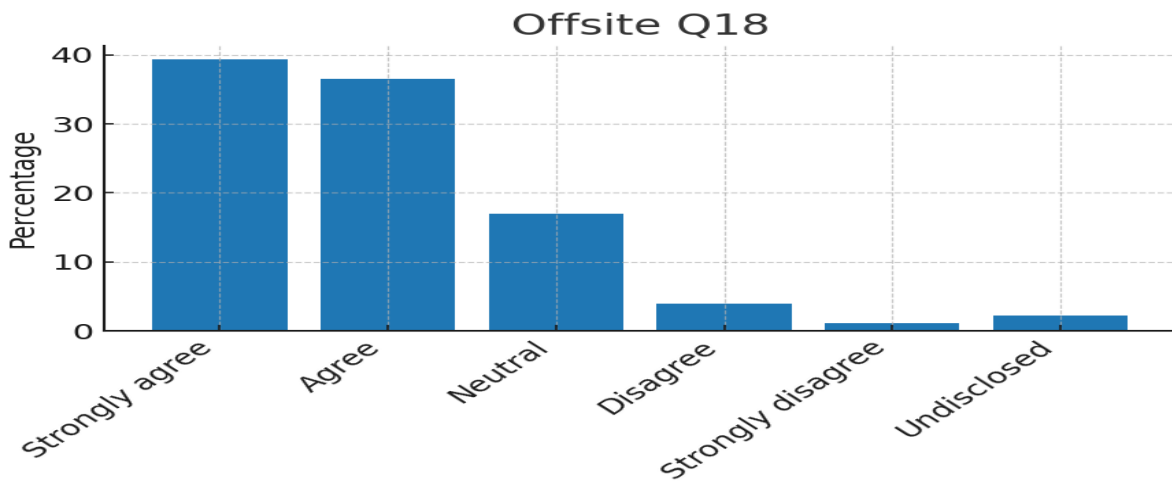


Figure 32. Offsite Q 18: Do you think museums in Jeddah contribute to cultural and educational growth?

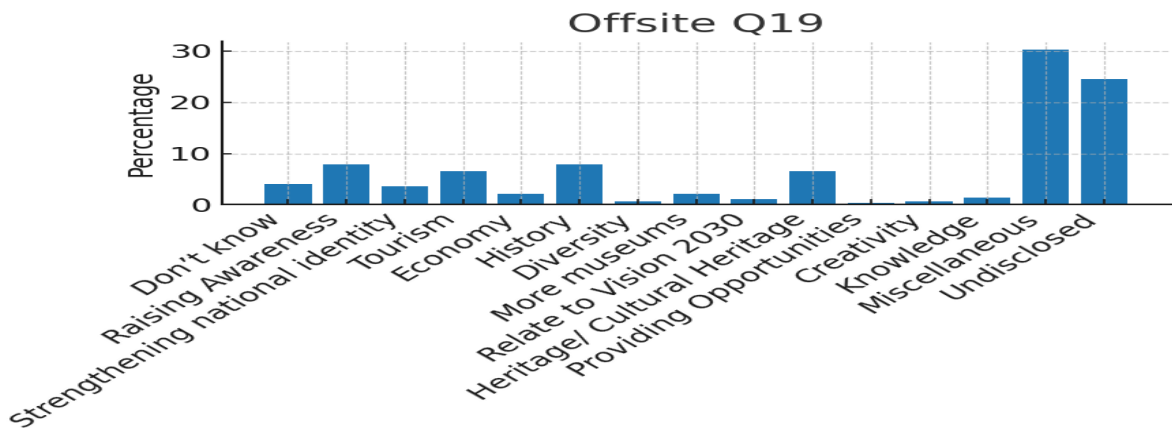


Figure 33. Offsite Q 19: In your opinion what role do you think museums should play in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030?

### 3.3 Summary

In conclusion, the results form a complete picture of two distinct youth experiences, with one group remaining outside the museum and disengaged due to a lack of interest, awareness, or financial means, and the other group, though engaged enough to visit come across barriers related to physical comfort and content accessibility within the museum spaces.

### 3.4 Observation Findings

Six observational sessions were conducted inside the House of Islamic Arts Museum. Observations aimed to examine youth engagement with the museum environment. Specific aspects included interaction with exhibits, social engagement, emotional behavioural response, programme participation, technology usage, learning and curiosity. Data led insights reflected on youth experiences during the visits.

#### 3.4.1 Interaction with Exhibits

Observations analysed how youth approach and interact with physical displays. Visitors mainly looked briefly at objects spending under a minute at each exhibit. A smaller proportion were more engaged, reading labels and pointing out details. Some took photographs, highlighting device-mediated engagement.

#### 3.4.2 Social Engagement

Observation sessions noted museum visits to be social. Youth attended in groups of friends, peers or family. Conversations were about specific displays, with some exhibits prompting discussion. Sometimes, social engagement dominated over focused observation, with laughter and discussions common. Individual visitors who moved quickly and engaged less with the social environment.

### 3.4.3 Emotional and Behavioural Responses

Observations documented emotions ranging from curiosity to indifference. Certain displays, such as colourful artefacts or photographs, drew attention. In several cases, neutral or disengaged behaviour was observed. As a result, behavioural patterns varied.

### 3.4.4 Programme Participation

When guided tours and structured programmes were available, youth engagement was mixed. Some groups participated in storytelling and guided explanations. Session attendance was inconsistent, with some youth preferring independent explorations. Shorter and more interactive programmes saw enhanced participation.

### 3.4.5 Use of Technology

Mobile phone usage was consistent across all observations. Youth photographed artefacts, labels and themselves in front of displays. Sometimes, the museum provided QR codes and digital screens which saw little uptake. Observer noted technology was utilised as an engagement tool through photos and social sharing, with visitors messaging rather than experiencing the museum.

### 3.4.6 Learning and Curiosity

Active learning and curiosity were present but infrequently observed. Some asked staff and peers' questions, and fewer read labels and compared objects. Curiosity was present when there was a stronger visual impact or clear narrative. There was little evidence of deeper learning such as a prolonged study.

### 3.4.7 Summary of Findings

Observation data reflected that youth visits to museums in Jeddah are social and shaped by group dynamics while being mediated with technology. Though moments of curiosity and

enthusiasm are observed, engagement is primarily brief and superficial. Formal programme participation is inconsistent, with varied emotional responses. These findings highlight critical evidence on youth behaviour in museum settings, complemented by the survey results.

## 3.5 Interview Findings

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted at the House of Islamic Arts Museum. They explored staff perceptions to youth engagement, challenges to participation and opportunities for development. Findings are thematically presented, with each theme summarising responses from participants.

### 3.5.1 Youth Visitation Patterns

Staff acknowledged limited youth attendance. While some groups visited in organised trips, independent visitation as rare. They noted that younger children attended with their families while older youth (late teens to twenties) were less frequented. In turn, this was making sustaining youth audiences challenging.

### 3.5.2 Barriers to Engagement

Multiple identifiable barriers discouraged youth engagement, including perceptions that museums were “boring” or “irrelevant” signifying limited awareness due to other leisure activities. Practical considerations included transportation difficulties and limited visiting hours. One staff member noted that “many young people prefer to spend time in shopping malls” rather than visiting cultural sites.

### 3.5.3 Youth Focused Programming

Staff highlighted the diversity of programmes available such as temporary exhibitions, educational workshops or guided tours. They acknowledged programmes were not tailored to youth, suggesting the need for interactivity and alignment with contemporary culture. They

mentioned that while school trips were arranged, individual visits were rare. Furthermore, children attended with families but older youth (late teens to twenties) less frequently, making it a challenge in sustaining youth.

### 3.5.4 Promotion and Outreach

When asked about promotion strategies, staff highlighted a reliance on traditional methods and some collaborations, majority recognising necessary improvements through social media. One participant stated that “youth live on their phones, so museums must reach them through these platforms”. Findings reflected that current strategies did not connect with target demographic.

### 3.5.5 Accessibility and Facilities

Staff mentioned practical aspects that can influence museum engagement, suggesting facilities such as seating areas, refreshments and limited Wi-Fi access, reducing perceptions of museum as social spaces. Other interviewees highlighted difficulties reaching out to people across the city.

### 3.5.6 Relevance to Vision 2030

Museums in Vision 2030 and cultural development recurred often. Staff felt proud of the museum’s role in preserving and presenting heritage, while acknowledging that more efforts were required to align programming with an emphasis on youth participation, innovation and inclusivity, with one remarking “if we want to achieve Vision 2030, we must find ways to make museums relevant to youth”.

### 3.5.7 Interview Findings Summary

The interviews revealed limited youth engagement. Programmes on offer are not designed with youth in mind. Outreach and promotion remain underutilised, particularly in digital spaces.

They understand the museum's importance within Vision 2030, acknowledging that greater effort is needed to attract and sustain youth.

### 3.5.8 Concluding Summary of Findings

The three way data collection approach allowed for a comprehensive account of youth engagement in the House of Islamic Arts Museum. The surveys (offsite n=277; onsite n=261) reflect diverse patterns in awareness, visitation, motivations and preferences. Demographic data reflects a predominantly student based sample, with fewer employed or unemployed. Awareness of museums in Jeddah was limited among offsite respondents, with onsite respondents more aware. Visitation was infrequent with a minority citing regular attendance. When asked about the last museum visited, majority reported House of Islamic Arts, but many did not recall or reported never having visited a museum. Motivations included learning and cultural enrichment; barriers included lack of interest, lack of time and limited relevance, preferring activities such as workshops and exhibitions which suggests demand for interactive formats.

The observations verified survey findings providing evidence on youth engagement during visits. Most interaction were brief and mediated through mobile phones and photography being common. Visits were mainly social and shaped by peer or family dynamics which saw mixed emotional response diversifying from enthusiasm to indifference. Participation in guided programmes were inconsistent, limiting deeper learning and curiosity.

Staff interviews provided professional insights to the emerging trends. They recognised low youth visitation among older age groups, highlighting perceived irrelevance and competing leisure activities. While youth programming had been attempted, it was not tailored to their interests. Outreach was weak, with limited social media usage. Staff noted some accessibility

issues including location and facilities. They stressed the importance of aligning with Vision 2030 and making museums inclusive and appealing to youth.

These findings weave together an inclusive picture; the surveys highlighted levels of awareness, visitation and preferences while the observations reflected actual behaviours, while the interviews captured institutional perspectives. Combined, they formulate the next chapter which aims to interpret the results in light of literature, while considering implications for museum practice and cultural policy in Saudi Arabia.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to interpret study findings by contextualising established scholarly literature, theoretical frameworks and overarching objectives of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The previous chapter highlighted results objectively, this discussion situates them within broader debates on audience engagement, youth culture and cultural participation.

The structure mirrors the research questions. It examines youth awareness and visitation to museums in Jeddah before analysing barriers to participation. It considers motivation, technology and social dimensions of museums and understanding institutional perspectives of global case studies to contextualise Jeddah experiences within worldwide youth engagement strategies. The aim is not to highlight problems, but analysis of data, extracting intersections of social and cultural factors to shape youth engagement or a lack thereof with museums.

### 4.2 Youth Awareness and Visitation Patterns

A striking finding is the low awareness of museums among youth in Jeddah. Question 7 from the offsite survey highlighted a significant proportion of respondents unaware of museums in Jeddah. Stylianou-Lambert (2020), in her study in Cyprus, noted awareness of offerings an important determinant to visiting. As youth were not exposed to museums, their visits reduced.

The gap between both surveys is striking. Onsite participants had already visited the museum, demonstrating increased awareness levels with slightly more regular visitation (onsite Question 3 and Question 4). Contrastingly, offsite respondents from malls and youth clubs, reported infrequent or non-existent visits (offsite Question 9). This deviation reflects the importance of sample context in cultural participatory research (Falk & Dierking, 2018). Onsite data reflects

perspectives of those already engaged with offsite data to project wider disengagement of the youth population.

Infrequent visitation is consistent with international findings. The UK Museums Association report (2017) found that while youth visit occasionally, they do not frequently visit, instead depending on specific exhibits. Research from the US finds that youth engage more with digital media, leading to fewer visits unless the museum visit is embedded in school curricula (Falk & Dierking, 2018).

Findings from Jeddah reflect that museums face similar challenges amplified by limited visibility in urban cultural environments. Interviewees acknowledged irregular youth attendance, opting for activities such as shopping instead. These insights align with the analysis of “leisure ecologies” which reports that cultural institutions must compete in places dominated by digital and commercial entertainment (Jensen, 2022). The evidence collectively suggests that museums in Jeddah do not yet represent youth’s cultural habits, with patchy awareness, infrequent visitation and unsustainable engagement.

## 4.3 Barriers to Engagement

The mixed method data collection highlights various dimensions of youth engagement barriers: psychological, social, economic and institutional.

### 4.3.1 Perceptions of Irrelevance

A frequently cited barrier was a perception that museums are “boring” or not relatable to youth culture. In offsite Question 13 and onsite Question 6, lack of interest was dominant. This finding aligns strongly with Hooper-Greenhill’s (2007) argument that museums must constantly negotiate their cultural relevance. Youth, at times, perceive collections or exhibitions outdated, particularly when struggling to connect them to their identities and contemporary

practices. International research confirms this. Black (2012) highlights that youth in the UK regard museums as catering to older generations unless exploring youth oriented design. Similarly, Stylianou-Lambert (2020) found that Cypriot youth associate museums with education not leisure. As the study observed similar barriers in Jeddah, it could be inferred that perceived irrelevance is a global barrier rather than a local one.

#### 4.3.2 Time and Accessibility

Time constraints frequent survey responses, echoing Falk and Dierking's (2018) observation that museum visits compete with other leisure activities. Those who are employed or students, busy schedules limit opportunities.

Physical accessibility was raised by staff. Some noted the location and limited transport options as practical obstacles, mirroring findings from Sandell (2015) where it identified accessibility in social and cultural forms as barriers to participation.

#### 4.3.3 Economic Considerations

While entrance fees were not direct barriers in Jeddah, some interviewees reflected that unemployed youth or youth from less affluent families may choose free forms of leisure. Other contextual research such as Webber (2023) highlight that even modest fees can be deterrents when weighed against other forms of leisure.

#### 4.3.4 Competing Leisure Preferences

The interviews highlighted influences of shopping malls and digital media competed with museums. As highlighted in interviews, "many youths prefer to spend their time in shopping malls or online, rather than visiting cultural sites." This observation is consistent with Jensen's (2022) competitive leisure markets with museums struggling to attract youth unless innovating with contemporary cultural formats.

### 4.3.5 Summary of Barriers

The study identified a complex set of barriers: perceived irrelevance, lack of time, physical accessibility, limited outreach and competing priorities, aligning with global patterns of youth disengagement from museums. Within a Saudi context, this is highly significant due to Vision 2030's emphasis on increasing cultural participation.

## 4.4 The Role of Technology

Survey and observation findings emphasize the integration of technology to shape youth engagement in Jeddah's museums. Both surveys (Question 9 in onsite and Question 17 offsite) saw respondents commenting that use of interactive digital tools including touch screens, QR codes and mobile applications could enhance experiences. Observations confirmed the usage of mobile devices to document or navigate spaces.

This reliance on digital tools aligns with global studies highlighting youth integration of cultural participation and digital practices (Drotner & Dziekan, 2020). Photography and social media sharing is not a distraction but a means of engagement. As Kidd (2014) argues, museums in the digital age should adopt meaning making to occur physically and online.

The interviews supported this perspective. Interviewees emphasised on traditional advertising and collaborations with schools. They acknowledged digital engagement through social media remains underutilised. One participant noted "youth live on their phones, so museums must reach them through these platforms", aligning with Turton (2024), suggesting that museums must adopt digital first strategies to remain relevant to contemporary audiences.

The evidence suggests that technology can have a dual role as a means of engagement within the museum and a means of outreach beyond it. Observations noted that the museums is not capitalising this potential, hindering digital engagement with Jeddah's youth.

## 4.5 Social and Emotional Engagement

The social and emotional character of youth visiting museums was frequently highlighted. Observations across six sessions found most visits were in groups such as friends or family, with social interaction central to the experience, with conversations and laughter common. Solitary visits moved quickly, engaging shallowly.

This aligns with Falk and Dierking's (2018) Contextual Model of Learning. The model emphasises that museum experiences are shaped by personal, sociocultural and physical contexts. The social dimension is critical; museums are places of shared experiences rather than solitary learning. Observations provided clear evidence, with social dynamics influencing pace and focus of the visits.

Varied emotional responses were observed where some displays incited curiosity, smiles, and photography. Youth exhibited little acknowledgement to other displays, mirroring findings from Packer and Ballantyne (2016) who argue that emotional appeal is uneven and likely depends on resonance of exhibits with identities and expectations.

The surveys verified observation findings. When asked about visit motivations (onsite Question 5, offsite Question 12), respondents reported socialising, learning or curiosity, strengthening the idea that museums act as social and leisure spaces for youth. A lack of supplementary facilities was noted in interviews, thereby limiting the potential for engaging.

Youth engagement with museums in Jeddah respond to changing social and emotional dynamics. Museums experiences are not for knowledge but for contextualising shared identity and group belonging.

## 4.6 Institutional Perspectives and Vision 2030

Staff interviews provided critical insights acknowledging low visitation among older age groups, where barriers included perceived irrelevance, lack of awareness, and competition from other leisure activities. Insights from interviews noted limitations in programming which did not prioritise youth.

Promotion and outreach were weak areas as insights from interviews highlight use of traditional methods such as collaborations and posters, systematic use of digital outreach and social media remained limited. The museum hindered visibility to youth. The findings correspond with global literature, recommending developing targeted marketing (Jensen, 2022).

A key theme discussed was the relevance of Vision 2030 in terms of diversification and cultural development. Staff were proud contributing to cultural preservation, acknowledging that achieving inclusivity and youth empowerment would require significant changes. Vision 2030 emphasises cultural participation as a central component (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). While museums are positioned to contribute, current practices fall short. The House of Islamic Arts could consider utilising case studies from this study, in particular the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, to benchmark diversification of cultural development to promote youth engagement.

Staff reflected that museum programming should be inviting with digital outreach to meet Vision 2030's benchmarks, aligning with (Almaqawi & Albarqi, 2022), who reason that Saudi cultural institutions must modernise both content and delivery for enhanced alignment with youth expectations and meet national role.

## 4.7 Comparative Reflections

Findings from Jeddah identify many challenges, aligning with international research showing youth perceiving museums as peripheral, opting for interactive, social and digitally mediated

activities (Black, 2012; Stylianou-Lambert, 2019). Results from Jeddah, with surveys and interviews confirming youth visit museums infrequently, regarding them as irrelevant or unexciting.

Global case studies reflect prior successful responses to the challenges. The Tate Exchange Programme in London became a youth engagement flagship, creating spaces where youth co-curate events, participate in debates and contribute to exhibitions (Wilmot, 2018). This approach contrasts with top – down programmes, demonstrating how youth empowerment can foster ownership.

In New York, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) integrated technologies to reach youth. Interactive apps and online exhibitions allowed engagement before, during, and after visits (Turton, 2024). The Smithsonian Institution developed partnerships with schools and youth organisations to embed museums within educational systems (Falk & Dierking, 2018).

In the Middle East, museums in Dubai and Doha introduced art, design and digital exhibitions appealing to youth. The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha integrates digital collections with modern identity (Al Mulla & Exell, 2016). That said, success is not only attracting youth to museums but reimagining them as spaces for creativity, dialogue and digital interaction.

Comparisons of the practice to Jeddah reveals similarities and differences. Barriers including relevance, accessibility and competition are global, the Saudi context is distinctive in ripe opportunities for innovation but also expectations for reform.

## 4.8 Summary of Discussion

The discussion contextualised the findings within broader debates. Several key themes emerged:

1. Low awareness and infrequent visits remain major challenges with offsite youth who do not visit museums regularly
2. Engagement barriers including perceived irrelevance, time pressures, limited accessibility and competition from leisure activities
3. Utilising the dual role of technology as a tool and for outreach, with its potential being underused
4. Positioning social and emotional engagement as central to youth, with visits shaped by interactions and affective responses.
5. Institutional limitations in outreach, programming and facilities that limit youth participation despite staff recognition of its importance in light of Vision 2030
6. International comparisons highlighting successful youth engagement, focusing on participatory programming, digital innovation and community partnerships

Museums in Jeddah mirror global trends. Vision 2030's national context providing urgency and opportunity. The following chapter will analyse the insights, propose targeted suggestions and recommendations for enhancing youth engagement in Jeddah and across Saudi Arabia.

# Chapter 5: Recommendations

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides practical suggestions for enhancing youth engagement with museums in Jeddah, informed by the findings and supported by international practices. They address barriers identified in surveys, observations and interviews, aiming to contribute to the broader cultural goals of Vision 2030. Recommendations are structured around four key areas: (i) raising awareness and visibility, (ii) designing youth-focused programmes, (iii) integrating technology and digital outreach, (iv) improving accessibility and inclusivity.

## 5.2 Raising Awareness and Visibility

Strengthening school and university partnerships: Youth encounter museums through education. Sustained school and higher education collaborations ensure more regular visits beyond one-off field trips (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007).

Digital-first marketing strategies: Surveys and interviews reflect youth “live on their phones”. Targeted social media campaigns including Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and Twitter/X replacing traditional promotion. Case studies such as Tate Exchange highlight that visibility on youth preferred platforms can increase awareness (Barnes & Mcpherson, 2019).

Community-based outreach: Collaborations or working alongside youth clubs, malls, and local cultural centres that ensure their presence where youth already spend time. Installations such as pop-up exhibitions or small displays as potential museum gateways.

## 5.3 Designing Youth Focused Programmes

Interactive and participatory activities: Both surveys confirmed that youth prefer workshops and hands-on programmes over lectures. Developing makerspaces, art workshops and storytelling appeal to youth who learn by doing (Black, 2012).

Co-curation and youth councils: Involving youth in exhibition planning and programming to foster ownership. Examples such as Tate Exchange and MoMA Teen Programmes emphasize the value of youth-led initiatives (Turton, 2024).

Link to contemporary youth culture: Staff interviews highlighted a gap between collections and youth interests. Temporary exhibitions on topics including fashion, gaming or contemporary design bridging between heritage and modern identity.

## 5.4 Integrating Technology and Digital Outreach

Expanding in-gallery technology: Observations highlighted youth usage of smartphones in the galleries, enhanced through QR codes, augmented reality or gamified apps making collections interactive (Drotner & Dziekan, 2020).

Virtual Access: Providing virtual tours and exhibitions enhances accessibility and participation to those who cannot physically attend. This was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and remains relevant.

Encourage digital creation and sharing: Museums can invite and encourage creativity by sharing their photography online under an official hashtag, elevating youth from visitors to cultural ambassadors.

## 5.5 Improving Accessibility and Inclusivity

Addressing physical accessibility: Transport challenges could be overcome through collaborations with shuttle services, discounted public transport or ride-sharing apps.

Youth-friendly facilities: Presenting the museum as educational and social through affordable refreshments, seating areas and reliable Wi-Fi.

Inclusive design: Programming reflecting diversity of youth communities in Jeddah, inclusive of both Saudi nationals and expatriates. A variety of activities that are appealing to interests and cultural backgrounds aligning with Vision 2030 inclusivity goals.

## 5.6 Institutional Development

Capacity building for staff: Development of trainings for staff in youth engagement, digital literacy and participatory methods. International research stresses that staff confidence and skills are vital to successful implementation (Sandell, 2015).

Monitoring and evaluation: Regulating youth surveys and focus groups as mechanisms to institutionalize feedback ensuring programming evolves with changing youth preferences

## 5.7 Aligning with Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 highlights the role of culture in fostering a vibrant society and empowering youth. The outlined recommendations contribute by positioning museums in social inclusion, learning and creativity. By enhancing visibility, tailoring programmes to youth interests, harnessing technology and addressing accessibility barriers, Jeddah's museums can transform from underutilised institutions into dynamic cultural hubs for youth.

## 5.8 Summary of Recommendations

Combined evidence illustrates the current underutilisation of museums in Jeddah among youth due to low awareness, limited relevance and accessibility challenges. International models along with staff perspectives outline clear pathways forwards. By strengthening outreach, creating participatory youth-led programmes and embracing digital engagement, museums can be positioned to align with Vision 2030 and establish themselves as inclusive cultural spaces pivotal to young people in Saudi Arabia.

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