

# Effat University Repository

## Leveraging Sentiment and Behavioral Data for the Development of Emotionally Resonant Advertising Campaigns: A Quantitative and Qualitative Inquiry

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Bayousef, Nada
Publisher	Effat University
Download date	2026-05-21 11:43:56
Link to Item	<a href="https://repository.effatuniversity.edu.sa/handle/20.500.14131/2427">https://repository.effatuniversity.edu.sa/handle/20.500.14131/2427</a>



**Leveraging Sentiment and Behavioral Data for the  
Development of Emotionally Resonant Advertising  
Campaigns: A Quantitative and Qualitative Inquiry**

**By Nada Bayousef**

*A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Science in Marketing*

*S21107090*


**Thesis Advisor:  
Dr. Ahmad Khraiwish**

**Fall 2025**

Certification of Approval

We hereby grant the approval of this dissertation report. The student has compiled the dissertation work as per the requirements of the University.

Supervisor's Name: Dr Ahmad Khraiwish

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ 

Department Chair, on behalf: Dr Mohamed Mokees.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ 

Declaration of Authenticity

I'm Nada Bayousef, declare that all of the materials presented in this paper are my own work, or fully and specifically acknowledged wherever adapted from other sources. I understand that if at any time it is shown that I have significantly misrepresented material presented to Effat College of Business at Effat University, any degree or credits awarded to me on the basis of that material may be revoked.

Student's Signature

1/7/26

x  \_\_\_\_\_

Department Chair Signature:

1/7/2026

x  \_\_\_\_\_

College of Business Dean Signature:

1/7/2026

x  \_\_\_\_\_

## *Abstract*

Emotional advertising has become one of the most powerful storytelling tools in today's digital environment, but its impact depends less on how loudly a campaign speaks and more on how deeply it is felt. This study explores how audiences in Saudi Arabia and globally connected online spaces respond to emotionally driven campaigns, not as passive viewers, but as participants who extend, reinterpret, and personalize the message. By examining audience reactions to five culturally resonant campaigns — ranging from national pride to nostalgia, pop-culture influence, and intimate everyday moments — the research reveals that emotional engagement emerges when a campaign mirror lived experience. Authenticity, cultural timing, and identity-based representation consistently outweighed production value, creating moments where audiences recognized themselves, their memories, and their values within the narrative. The analysis also highlights that meaningful engagement is expressed through interpretation, not metrics; comments, remixes, duets, and shared reflections revealed richer emotional participation than views or likes ever could. An emerging pattern also shows the growing influence of founders and public figures as emotional anchors, where audience form relationships with the person behind the brand, transforming marketing into a personal exchange. Overall, the study argues that emotional marketing succeeds when brands offer not a performance, but a place — a space where people can feel seen, understood, and invited into conversation. In a digital world shaped by expression, cultural nuance, and collective memory, emotional resonance is no longer created by storytelling alone. It is co-created with the audience, who ultimately decide what the campaign means and why it matters. The study concludes that emotional advertising succeeds when it engages audiences as cultural participants rather than passive consumers. It emphasizes the importance of cultural insight, collective symbolism, and narrative authenticity in shaping long-term audience trust and connection, particularly within the Saudi and broader Middle Eastern media landscape.

### Keywords:

Emotional engagement, cultural resonance, digital advertising, audience participation, sentiment analysis, authenticity.

## *Acknowledgment*

﴿وَأَجْرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

[ يونس: 10 ]

“And the last of their call will be: ‘Praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds.’”

*Surah Yunus (10:10)*

*All praise is to Allah. My faith in Allah and my belief that everything eventually finds its way back through divine wisdom is the only thing that has never failed me. I overcame moments, challenges, and turning points that no one else could have carried me through. I reached places I never imagined reaching. And every strength I had, every door that opened, and every difficulty that softened was because Allah was by my side. Everything I achieved in these four years, everything I have accomplished in my life, and everything I will strive for next comes from that faith that guided me through it all.*

*To my family, thank you for being the steady place in my life. Your support, your trust, and the way you always believed in me made this journey possible. Every value I hold, every part of who I am, and every step I took toward this moment was built on the foundation you gave me. I am forever grateful for the kind of support that doesn't always need words, the kind that simply exists. And I will always carry that with me wherever life takes me next.*

*To my friends, here we are in a moment we never thought would come. When we first met as freshmen, I never imagined we would be this close to the graduation ceremony as this version of us. And to EEC, the club we built together, the events we planned, the speakers we hosted, and the memories only we understand, being its president shaped me in ways I will always be grateful for. This journey would have been so much harder without all of you. As we move into new jobs and new chapters, know that everything we created together, the friendships and the years we carried each other through, stays with me. This is not an ending, it is simply a shift, and I cannot wait to see who each of us becomes.*

*To myself, thank you for smiling through the times people called you delusional, for knowing exactly who you were even when others couldn't see it, and for quietly proving every doubt wrong. Thank you for believing in my dreams even when they felt too big for*

*the time and energy I had. Thank you for the nights you stayed up late, for the work you did when no one was watching, and for choosing possibility over exhaustion when it would have been easier to say no. Thank you for going after every goal with a heart that refuses to settle, for choosing growth over comfort, and for showing up again and again with belief, ambition, and fire. I'm proud of you for wanting more, for never stopping, and for carrying yourself to this moment with a strength that is yours alone. We're not done yet, but today we pause long enough to see how far we've come, and to honor the girl who made all of this possible.*

## ***Dedication***

*To my Father,  
who didn't just support me, but shaped me.  
Through every conversation, every insight, and every quiet moment of wisdom,  
he influenced the person I grew into without ever forcing a thing.  
He's the one who taught me how to listen, how to think, and how to understand people.  
And nothing makes me prouder than being his daughter.*

*To my Mother,  
who taught me that the word impossible has never truly had an "im"  
and that with faith, effort, and a little stubbornness, everything finds a way.  
Your strength carried me, and your prayers protected me more than you'll ever know.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgment .....	iii
Dedication .....	v
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background of the Study .....	1
1.2 Research Gap .....	2
1.3 Problem Statement .....	4
1.4 Significance of the Study .....	4
1.5 Research Aim and Objectives .....	5
1.6 Definition of Terms .....	6
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Emotional Marketing and Engagement .....	6
2.2 Social Media and Audience Reactions .....	7
2.3 Combining Quantitative & Qualitative Data .....	7
2.4 Ethics and Privacy in Emotional Marketing .....	8
2.5 Emotional Advertising in the Saudi/GCC Context .....	8
2.6 Synthesis of Literature Review .....	9
<b>CHAPTER 3: HYPOTHESES &amp; RESEARCH MODEL .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Justification of Hypotheses .....	10

3.2 Research Model .....	10
<b>CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Research Approach .....	11
4.2 Research Design .....	12
4.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	12
4.4 Sampling And Campaign Selection .....	13
4.5 Data Collection Procedures .....	13
4.6 Data Analysis Method .....	14
4.7 Analytical Framework .....	15
4.8 Coding Procedure .....	16
4.9 Ethical Considerations .....	16
4.10 Research Instrument .....	17
<b>CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1 Case 1: Tourism Development Fund Campaign .....	18
5.2 Case 2: Visit Saudi × Lionel Messi .....	24
5.3 Case 3: GAP vs American Eagle .....	30
5.4 Case 4: Coca-Cola Middle East .....	39
5.5 Case 5: Zain Eid Campaign .....	42
5.6 Cross-Case Synthesis .....	47

<b>CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION &amp; INTERPRETATION</b> .....	48
6.1 Interpreting Findings Across Campaigns .....	48
6.2 The Power of Human Brand Faces .....	50
6.3 Interpretation In Relation to Hypotheses.....	53
<b>CHAPTER 7: KEY INSIGHTS &amp; IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	57
7.1 Insight 1: Emotional Authenticity .....	57
7.2 Insight 2: Cultural Relevance .....	57
7.3 Insight 3: Engagement Quality .....	57
7.4 Insight 4: Nostalgia & Collective Participation .....	58
7.5 Insight 5: Familiarity with Figures .....	58
7.6 Overall Implication .....	59
<b>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	59
<b>CHAPTER 9: LIMITATIONS &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	60
9.1 Limitations of the Study .....	60
9.2 Recommendations for Future Research .....	61
References .....	63

## 1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In contemporary digital environments, brands are no longer competing solely for visibility; they are competing for emotional relevance. Emotional advertising has been shown to enhance message recall, strengthen brand loyalty, and influence consumer decision-making in meaningful ways (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). However, while emotional appeals are widely used in marketing campaigns, determining which emotions resonate with specific audiences remains a persistent challenge. Many campaigns rely on intuition, trends, or generalized assumptions rather than grounded audience insight, often resulting in emotional messages that feel insincere or ineffective (Martin & Morich, 2011).

The expansion of social media has fundamentally changed how audiences interact with brands. Comments, reviews, reactions, and forms of user-generated content now offer direct insight into how individuals feel and respond to advertising messages (Belk, 2013). These interactions are not merely digital traces; they represent lived experiences, personal associations, and emotional interpretations shared publicly. When analyzed systematically, such sentiment and behavioral data can support marketers in designing campaigns that align more closely with the values, motivations, and emotional experiences of their audiences (Pappas, 2018). Research has shown that effectively integrating both quantitative indicators of engagement and qualitative expressions of emotion can deepen the understanding of how audiences form emotional bonds with brands (Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013).

This study seeks to explore the relationship between emotional sentiment and audience engagement, integrating both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. By examining measurable patterns in audience reactions alongside the meanings expressed through commentary and discourse, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how emotional resonance is formed and sustained in advertising contexts. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the ethical use of emotional data, recognizing the importance of

privacy, consent, and respect for individual expression in the development of emotionally driven marketing strategies (Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010). The overarching goal is to contribute to marketing practices that are both effective and human-centered — enabling brands to communicate in ways that are authentic, responsible, and genuinely meaningful to audiences.

## 1.2 Background Of the Study

In my early experience working in marketing, I noticed how certain campaigns could create genuine emotional reactions, whether through storytelling, music, visuals, or simple, relatable moments. Some campaigns made people laugh or feel nostalgic, while others encouraged them to reflect, share, or even change their behavior. These experiences made it clear to me that emotional meaning plays a central role in how people connect with brands. Research supports this as well, showing that strong brands often resonate because of emotional associations rather than just functional benefits (Keller, 2013). However, I also encountered campaigns that did not connect, even when they had high production value or striking imagery. They felt distant or forced. This raised a central question for me: *What makes an emotional campaign meaningful to audiences?* Studies suggest that emotional resonance occurs when people recognize parts of their own identity, values, or lived experiences within a narrative (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). When that happens, emotional engagement deepens naturally.

With the rise of social media, this emotional engagement has become more visible. Audiences no longer simply consume campaigns — they respond to them, comment on them, share them, recreate them, and attach their own stories to them. These reactions reveal authentic emotional experiences and shape longer-term relationships between audiences and brands (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Instead of relying only on surveys or assumptions, marketers can now observe real-time emotional responses directly. At the same time, social platforms generate large amounts of emotional data that can be analyzed to understand audience sentiment. Tools like sentiment analysis and opinion mining offer ways to interpret emotional expression in language and behavior (Liu, 2015). When combined with qualitative interpretation, this

emotional data helps reveal deeper patterns in how people feel, react, and connect (Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019). However, using emotional and behavioral data requires careful ethical consideration. Interpreting or influencing emotional states touches on privacy and personal expression. Scholars emphasize the need for transparency and respect to ensure that emotional insights are not used in manipulative ways (Martin, 2019). This research emerges from both personal experience and academic inquiry.

By examining real audience sentiment and behavior alongside interpretive analysis, it aims to understand how emotionally resonant campaigns are formed — and how they can be developed in ways that are authentic, meaningful, and ethically responsible.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

Although emotional appeals are widely used in both commercial and social campaigns, we still do not fully understand which emotional elements create meaningful engagement. Research shows that emotional narratives influence how people interpret and relate to brand messages (Escalas & Bettman, 2005), and that emotional brand meaning is central to building strong consumer relationships (Keller, 2013). Emotional branding in the digital era is no longer limited to storytelling it thrives on interactive and participatory engagement that allows audiences to co-create meaning with brands (Smith & Wallace, 2020). However, much of this work focuses on the intended emotional strategy rather than the audience's lived emotional response.

Today, with the rise of social media, audiences express their feelings directly through comments, sharing patterns, and interactive behaviors. These forms of engagement reveal real emotional reactions, yet research often focuses more on surface-level metrics like likes and views rather than the emotional meaning behind them (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). At the same time, advances in sentiment analysis have created new opportunities to interpret emotional expression within audience discourse. Still, these tools are often used in a purely technical or descriptive way, without being linked back to how campaigns can be designed to feel emotionally resonant (Liu, 2015).

Recent studies suggest that combining quantitative engagement data with qualitative emotional language provides a deeper understanding of how audiences make meaning, but this approach has not yet been consistently applied to campaign development across either

commercial or social-impact contexts (Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019). Additionally, the growing use of emotional data introduces important ethical questions regarding privacy, consent, and the respectful use of emotional insight (Martin, 2019). This research addresses these gaps by integrating emotional sentiment analysis with qualitative interpretation, with the goal of offering practical and ethically grounded guidance for creating campaigns that genuinely resonate with audiences.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

Emotional messaging is central to both commercial and social campaigns, yet many marketers still face challenges when trying to create messages that feel genuinely resonant to audiences. Emotional narratives can influence how people connect with brands (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Keller, 2013), but much of the existing research focuses on what campaigns *hope* to communicate rather than on how audiences respond. Today, social media allows us to see these responses directly—through comments, reactions, and shared interpretations. However, engagement is often measured in surface metrics like likes and shares, which do not always reflect deeper emotional meaning (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Although sentiment analysis provides tools to identify emotional tone, these insights are not always translated into practical guidance for designing campaigns that feel authentic to real audiences (Liu, 2015).

Recent studies suggest that combining emotional language with observable engagement behavior offers a better understanding of how audiences make meaning, yet this approach is still not consistently applied in campaign design (Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019). At the same time, using emotional data requires careful ethical consideration, particularly regarding privacy and the responsibility to avoid manipulative influence (Martin, 2019). For this reason, there is a clear need for a framework that draws from real emotional and behavioral responses to support the development of advertising strategies that are both effective and ethically grounded.

#### **1.5 Significance Of the Study**

This study is significant because it helps clarify how emotional responses and engagement behaviors can guide the creation of campaigns that feel genuine and meaningful to audiences. Emotional narratives can support deeper personal connections with brands and social causes (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Keller, 2013), yet marketers often lack clear guidance on which emotions resonate and why. By examining both emotional expression and behavioral interaction online, this research provides a more grounded understanding of how audiences respond to advertising in real contexts (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015).

Methodologically, the study contributes by bringing together sentiment analysis and qualitative interpretation, allowing for a fuller and more nuanced view of how audiences make meaning (Liu, 2015; Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019). Beyond its practical value, the research also highlights the ethical responsibility involved in working with emotional data, emphasizing the importance of transparency and respect in communication strategies (Martin, 2019). Ultimately, the goal is to support marketers and communicators in designing campaigns that resonate emotionally while remaining ethically grounded—strengthening connection without compromising the integrity of the audience.

## 1.6 Research Aim and Objectives

**Aim:** To explore how real audience emotions and behaviors can inform the development of marketing campaigns that feel genuine, relatable, and capable of driving meaningful engagement.

**Objectives:**

- a. To identify reliable methods for gathering and interpreting how audiences feel, react, and participate.
- b. To determine which emotional factors, motivate people to engage more deeply with advertising content.
- c. To create a practical guide for applying emotional insights in campaign planning and design.
- d. To assess the ethical implications of using audience emotions and opinions within

marketing strategies.

### 1.7 Definition of Terms

**A. Emotional Resonance:**

The extent to which an advertisement evokes emotions that feel personally relatable, culturally meaningful, or reflective of the audience's lived experiences.

**B. Cultural Resonance:**

The alignment between campaign content and shared cultural memory, identity, language, or social values, which enhances emotional impact.

**C. Authenticity:**

The perception that a message, figure, or brand is genuine, sincere, and aligned with real-life experience rather than exaggerated performance.

**D. Sentiment Analysis:**

A method used to classify written audience responses into emotional categories such as positive, negative, or neutral based on language cues.

**E. Participatory Engagement:**

Audience behaviors that move beyond passive viewing—such as commenting, remixing, duetting, reenacting, or narrating how the ad connects to their personal experiences.

## 2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Emotional Marketing and Engagement

Recent research emphasizes that emotional marketing has shifted from storytelling to identity-based resonance. Rather than simply provoking emotional reaction, campaigns now aim to reflect the audience's lived experiences and cultural identity (Kim & Park, 2021). Studies further confirm that emotional narratives that feel authentic and personally relatable drive higher trust and long-term loyalty (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2020). Consumers today respond more to emotional memory than to rational persuasion. This is evident in digital environments where emotional engagement is often expressed through comments, duets, remixes, and reinterpretation of content - transforming campaigns into shared cultural experiences rather than one-directional messages (Guzman & Veloutsou, 2021). These findings support the argument that emotional resonance is formed not by intensity,

but by recognition and identity-based alignment.

## **2.2 Social Media and Audience Reactions**

Social media is no longer just a communication platform - it has become a space for emotional expression, identity performance, and cultural negotiation (Literat, 2022). Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram encourage participatory engagement, where users reinterpret and re-create content rather than passively consume it (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). In Saudi Arabia specifically, recent research shows that Gen Z uses social media to express cultural belonging and personal identity, especially in spaces where visual storytelling is prominent (Alotaibi, 2024). This indicates that emotional engagement online involves not just reaction, but co-creation of meaning - a pattern particularly relevant to emotionally driven advertising campaigns.

## **2.3 Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

Mixed-methods research has become increasingly recommended for marketing studies that analyze emotional reactions and behavior (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). Quantitative tools-such as sentiment scores and engagement metrics-help identify patterns, but alone they cannot explain why audiences respond emotionally. Studies therefore suggest integrating qualitative methods such as thematic analysis to understand deeper meaning behind audience reactions (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Within digital marketing research, this approach is especially useful when examining emotional resonance and cultural patterns in online engagement. Scholars have emphasized that emotional interpretations can only be accurately captured when quantitative indicators are paired with human-coded emotional analysis (Saunders et al., 2022).

## **2.4 Ethics and Privacy in Emotional Marketing**

As digital emotional marketing becomes more data-driven, researchers have raised ethical concerns regarding privacy, manipulation, and emotional exploitation (Pan & Chen, 2022).

Emotional sentiment, identity cues, and behavioral patterns represent forms of psychological intimacy, and therefore require transparent and respectful use (Youn & Jin, 2023). Scholars emphasize that emotional data should never be used to pressure audiences into behavioral change - nor should emotional targeting be disguised as entertainment or storytelling.

In the Middle East, research shows that audiences are highly sensitive to emotional manipulation and expect brands to demonstrate genuine cultural understanding and ethical responsibility (Alharbi, 2023). Furthermore, post-2020 consumer studies in Gulf nations indicate that people value emotional resonance - but reject emotional intrusion. This means campaigns must connect emotionally without exploiting vulnerability, ensuring that cultural sensitivity and authenticity remain at the center of digital advertising strategies. Ethical practice is therefore not a separate consideration; it is essential to maintaining audience trust in emotionally driven campaigns.

## **2.5 Emotional Advertising and Audience Engagement in the Saudi / GCC Context**

Emotional resonance in the Saudi and GCC region is largely shaped by cultural values, social identity, and collective memory (Alotaibi, 2024). Research has found that campaigns that include elements of family, tradition, national pride, or relatable lifestyle scenes tend to generate deeper and more meaningful engagement (Alharbi, 2023). Emotional branding in the GCC is also strengthened when campaigns are released during culturally significant periods such as Ramadan, Eid, or National Day, as these moments intensify emotional openness and shared sentiment (Kattan, 2022).

Studies further confirm that emotional connection is not achieved through high production value alone - but through accurate representation of everyday life, familiarity, and cultural belonging (Youn & Jin, 2023). This highlights that emotional advertising in Arab contexts requires more than creativity - it requires social understanding. The findings suggest that emotional engagement in Saudi Arabia is deeply tied to cultural identity, lived experience, and the feeling of being represented, not merely targeted.

## 2.6 Synthesis of the Literature Review

Taken collectively, the literature reveals that emotional engagement emerges not from storytelling alone but from recognition, representation, and cultural connectivity.

Audiences no longer respond as passive consumers but as active participants who evaluate campaigns based on whether they reflect identity, experience, and social meaning (Kim & Park, 2021; Guzman & Veloutsou, 2021). This indicates that emotional resonance is shaped by personal memory, collective belonging, cultural timing, platform logic, and ethical responsibility.

Therefore, emotional marketing must be analyzed through multiple layers - psychological, cultural, behavioral, and digital. The reviewed literature supports the need for a mixed-method approach, audience-centered thinking, and a culturally grounded research model - all of which are central to the present study.

## 3. CHAPTER 3: HYPOTHESES & RESEARCH MODEL

Building on the reviewed literature and the aims of this study, the following hypotheses are proposed to explore how emotional sentiment, cultural resonance, and perceived authenticity shape audience engagement in emotionally driven advertising campaigns.

These hypotheses provide a framework for examining not only whether emotional messaging resonates, but *how* and *why* audiences respond to different forms of emotional expression within campaign narratives.

### 3.1 Justification of Hypotheses

The hypotheses in this study were developed based on the understanding that emotional engagement in digital environments involves both measurable behaviors and deeper meaning-making processes. Prior research suggests that emotional resonance significantly influences how audiences interact with campaigns, especially when cultural identity and authenticity are present (Morhart et al., 2017; Smith & Wallace, 2020). Therefore, each hypothesis was designed to test a specific element of emotional engagement—whether sentiment aligns with engagement patterns, whether culturally relevant content generates stronger emotional responses, and whether participatory behaviors reflect deeper attachment. These assumptions guided the analytical framework and ensured that the hypotheses aligned with both theory and observed audience behavior.

*H1: Positive emotional sentiment expressed in audience responses is positively associated with higher levels of behavioral engagement with advertising content.*

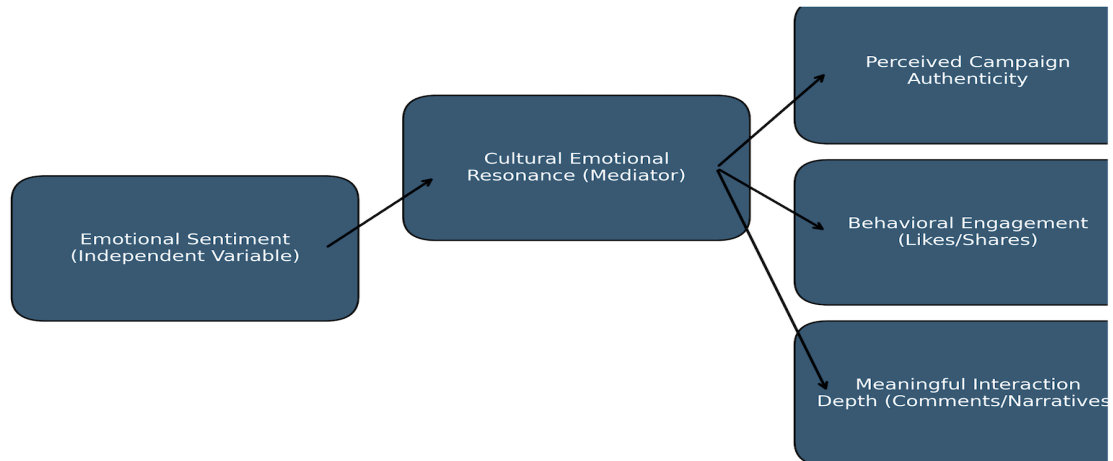
*H2: Advertising campaigns that reflect culturally resonant emotional themes generate stronger audience engagement than campaigns that rely on generalized emotional appeals.*

*H3: In fast-paced digital environments, genuine emotional engagement is more strongly reflected in meaningful audience interactions (such as comments and shared narratives) than in surface-level engagement indicators (such as likes and views).*

*H4: Higher levels of cultural emotional resonance in campaign messaging are associated with increased perceptions of campaign authenticity.*

*H5: Perceived authenticity of campaign messaging positively influences sustained engagement and audience connection with the brand.*

### 3.2 Research Model



This research model suggests that the emotional tone in a campaign does affect how audiences respond, but not on its own. What really matters is whether the emotion *resonates culturally* — meaning, whether people see something familiar, personal, or reflective of their lived experience in the message. This is what we call cultural emotional resonance, and it acts as the mediator in the model. When the emotional expression in a campaign connects with shared cultural values or everyday feelings, the message is more likely to feel authentic and real. This sense of authenticity then influences how people engage. It can lead to simple reactions like likes and shares, but it can also encourage deeper forms of interaction, such as commenting, telling personal stories, or tagging others. In other words, emotional messaging by itself is not enough. The emotion needs to be grounded in something people recognize and relate to. When that happens, emotional expression becomes meaningful — and that is what drives genuine audience engagement.

## 4. CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a mixed-method research approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative data. Scholars argue that mixed methods are ideal for studies that examine emotional responses and behavioral interpretations, as they allow researchers to capture both measurable trends and deeper meanings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). Quantitative data—such as sentiment scores and engagement rates—provide structure and detect patterns. However, emotional engagement cannot be understood through numbers alone, especially

within cultural and digital contexts (Saunders et al., 2022).

Therefore, incorporating qualitative analysis was essential for interpreting the emotions, narratives, and cultural cues present in audience reactions. Recent research confirms that emotional resonance in online campaigns is highly contextual and often expressed through humor, storytelling, or identity-based cues rather than direct emotional words (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For this reason, a mixed-method approach allows for greater depth, reliability, and validity, making it the most suitable for this research aim.

## **4.2 Research Design**

This section follows the guidelines of Effat University for structuring methodology chapters, beginning with the research approach and then moving to design, sampling, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations.

This research follows an exploratory sequential design, beginning with the collection of numerical sentiment data, followed by qualitative interpretation of selected samples. This structure supports the investigation of how and why emotional engagement occurs, rather than only measuring whether it exists (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). Exploratory designs are widely recommended for research involving human behavior, social meaning, and cultural representation, as they provide flexibility and allow emerging findings to shape the next stage of analysis (Saunders et al., 2022). The design was particularly appropriate for this dissertation because emotional reactions are not always consistent, and the depth of meaning often lies beyond measurable sentiment scores.

## **4.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This section presents the research questions and hypotheses that guided the analysis. Each question aims to explore how emotional engagement appears in digital campaigns and what forms of reaction suggest genuine emotional resonance. Scholars note that research questions in emotional marketing should seek behavioral explanation rather than prediction (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2020). Therefore, the focus of this study was interpretive rather than comparative, prioritizing understanding over measurement.

#### 4.4 Sampling And Campaign Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select advertising campaigns that were publicly distributed on social media, demonstrated intentional emotional messaging, and generated visible audience interaction. From these campaigns, a targeted sample of comments and engagement metrics was gathered to ensure the richness and diversity of audience responses. Sampling was conducted across different user types—including supportive, neutral, and critical audiences—and across posts with varying levels of engagement. Comments were also collected across multiple time windows to reduce time-related bias.

In total, a structured sample of 200 audience comments and corresponding engagement indicators was analyzed, ensuring thematic saturation and supporting interpretive reliability. The sampling method used was purposive sampling, which selects data based on its relevance to the research question. Scholars recommend purposive sampling in exploratory studies where specific cases, campaigns, or reactions are likely to provide meaningful insight (Saunders et al., 2022). This method was particularly suitable because emotional engagement is not evenly distributed across all content; therefore, analyzing only relevant responses allows for deeper and more accurate insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). The chosen sample focused on posts that showed high engagement, representing reactions that reflect strong emotional response and cultural connection.

#### 4.5 Data Collection Procedures

The *Quantitative* component of the study involved conducting sentiment analysis to classify emotional expressions as positive, negative, or neutral. Engagement indicators such as likes, shares, and overall comment volume were recorded, and descriptive as well as comparative patterns were examined to evaluate the proposed hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3).

The *Qualitative* component followed a thematic analysis approach to interpret deeper emotional meanings embedded in audience responses. Comments were coded according to emotional tone, cultural identity cues, expressions of authenticity and connection, and the

presence of personal or narrative-driven reflections. This qualitative layer strengthened the understanding of emotional engagement by distinguishing between surface-level reactions and deeper, meaning-making responses. Mixed data collection allows for a more complete understanding of emotional engagement, which aligns with current trends in marketing research (Guzman & Veloutsou, 2021).

Data was collected ONLY from public online content to maintain full ethical compliance. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which is widely used in emotional marketing research as it reveals underlying patterns and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This method allowed identification of recurring emotional cues, such as national identity, family values, nostalgia, surprise, and humor. Thematic analysis follows six steps: *familiarization, coding, theme development, review, naming, and reporting*. This structured procedure helps maintain transparency and reliability in research interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Quantitative results informed the selection of key themes, while qualitative findings explained why emotions emerged, rather than simply whether they existed.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis Method**

The data analysis process followed a mixed-method strategy to align with the research approach and objectives. The quantitative analysis focused on sentiment polarity and engagement metrics to detect emotional patterns in audience reactions. Sentiment scores were categorized into positive, negative, and neutral expressions, while engagement indicators such as likes, shares, and comment volume were evaluated to identify levels of emotional resonance.

Quantitative findings were analyzed using descriptive analysis to highlight trends related to Hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, which tested whether emotional appeals drive measurable engagement. Mixed-method research recommends using quantitative results as a foundation before carrying out in-depth interpretive analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). The qualitative analysis used a thematic method to interpret emotional expressions, language use, narrative depth, and cultural cues within audience comments. This method is widely applied in emotional and behavioral research because it reveals meaning beyond statistical data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis followed the six steps of thematic

analysis: data familiarization; initial coding; theme development; review of themes; theme naming; and final interpretation, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021).

These steps allowed the interpretation of deeper emotional reactions-such as pride, nostalgia, discomfort, relatability, or cultural identity-which may not appear clearly in quantitative data. Researchers in emotional marketing emphasize the importance of combining both numeric trends and human interpretation to fully understand digital audience behavior (Guzman & Veloutsou, 2021).

By integrating quantitative sentiment scores with thematic interpretation, the analysis provided a comprehensive view of emotional engagement. This approach ensured that the findings were both measurable and contextually meaningful, offering a deeper understanding of how emotional resonance is constructed within Saudi and Gulf-based digital campaigns.

#### 4.7 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework served as the foundation that guided how insights were interpreted from both quantitative and qualitative data. The framework followed three layers:

Layer	Purpose
Descriptive	Identify what emotions appeared (sentiment level)
Interpretive	Explain why those emotions appeared (thematic level)
Contextual	Relate findings to cultural identity and campaign objectives

This framework aligns with Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2022) recommendation of using layered interpretation to link emotion, meaning, and context in mixed-method studies. It provided a structure to move from numerical patterns → to emotional depth → to cultural understanding. This framework ensured that emotional engagement was interpreted not

only as an individual reaction but as a social and culturally shaped response, particularly relevant in Saudi and Gulf contexts.

#### **4.8 Coding Procedure**

Coding was conducted manually across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube comments to capture reactions in their natural digital environments. The researcher read all comments several times to understand tone, intention, and expression. As familiarity increased, patterns began to emerge. Comments were first grouped into emotional categories such as pride, nostalgia, curiosity, humor, or discomfort. These categories were then shaped into broader themes connected to identity, cultural meaning, or personal resonance.

This step was directly informed by the analytical framework presented in Section 4.7, which aimed to move from descriptive interpretation to deeper contextual meaning. To maintain reliability, the process followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-stage approach to thematic analysis, ensuring structure, transparency, and interpretive depth.

#### **4.9 Ethical Considerations**

Only public content was analyzed, and no identifiable personal data was used. Ethical concerns in emotional marketing research include privacy, representational accuracy, and avoidance of emotional manipulation (Pan & Chen, 2022). Researchers in the Middle East further emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity and respect when interpreting online emotional expression (Youn & Jin, 2023). This dissertation followed all ethical principles recommended for digital research, ensuring full compliance with academic guidelines.

#### **4.10 Research Instrument**

The analysis in this study was carried out using a structured coding sheet developed specifically for interpreting emotional responses in digital environments. The instrument included fields for sentiment polarity, emotional tone, cultural cues, narrative depth, and

indicators of authenticity or connection. For the quantitative component, the sheet recorded engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comment frequency. For the qualitative component, it captured the recurring emotional categories identified during coding—such as pride, nostalgia, humor, discomfort, and collective participation. The purpose of the instrument was not only to organize the data, but also to ensure consistency in interpretation across platforms. Because emotional expression in Saudi and Gulf contexts often relies on subtle linguistic cues, emojis, tone markers, and cultural references, the coding sheet allowed for structured interpretation while leaving enough flexibility to capture meaning beyond literal text. The instrument was piloted on a small sample of comments to ensure clarity and reliability before the full analysis began.

## 5. CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This section analyzes five contemporary advertising campaigns released between 2024 and 2025 across different cultural and market contexts. Although these campaigns vary in geography, tone, brand identity, and distribution platforms, they share a common feature: each campaign generated strong emotional engagement online, leading to widespread conversation, imitation, and user-led reinterpretation on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

The analysis focuses on the following five campaigns:

1. *Tourism Development Fund – “It’s Not About What You Hear, It’s About Being Here!” (Saudi National Day 2025)*
2. *Lionel Messi x Visit Saudi – “Go Beyond What You Think”*
3. *American Eagle x Sydney Sweeney – “She Has Great Jeans” and the cultural response campaign GAP x KATSEYE – “Milkshake”*
4. *Coca-Cola Middle East – (Share a Coke Names Revival Campaign)*
5. *Zain – Eid Campaign Featuring Lama Al-Kinani*

Across these cases, the findings illustrate how emotional resonance, relatability, and cultural positioning determine whether audiences respond with *debate, nostalgia,*

*participation*, or *collective joy*. The section examines not only *what was said* in these campaigns, but *how people felt* and how those feelings drove engagement, virality, and meaning making online.

### **5.1 Tourism Development Fund (Saudi National Day 2025) — “It’s Not About What You Hear, It’s About Being Here!”**

The Tourism Development Fund’s Saudi National Day 2025 campaign, titled “*It’s Not About What You Hear, It’s About Being Here!*”, addressed the long-standing gap between how Saudi Arabia is spoken about from afar and how it is experienced by the people who live and visit here. Instead of responding to stereotypes directly, the campaign used a show-don’t-tell approach. It highlighted everyday life, public spaces, natural landscapes, cultural interaction, and a sense of belonging and safety. This shifted the narrative from external assumptions to firsthand experience, which aligns with research showing that firsthand, lived-experience framing is more persuasive and emotionally resonant than argumentative persuasion (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Lee & Hong, 2020).

For many years, global perceptions of Saudi Arabia have often come from people who have never visited, relying on outdated imagery or generalized media narratives. The campaign recognized that arguing against stereotypes can unintentionally reinforce them. But *inviting* people to see for themselves creates curiosity rather than resistance. By showing familiar, relatable scenes—families spending time outdoors, multilingual gatherings, leisure activities, modern infrastructure, the campaign recognized that arguing against stereotypes can unintentionally reinforce them — a pattern consistent with stereotype-reinforcement theory in communication studies, where defensive messaging often amplifies the stereotype instead of reducing it (Glick et al., 2018).

The campaign resonated deeply with Saudi audiences. This mirrors findings in cultural identity research showing that accurate representation enhances collective pride and strengthens emotional connection (Abosag & Lee, 2013; Morhart et al., 2015). Many viewers expressed emotional relief and validation, finally seeing their daily lives represented accurately. The tone was not exaggerated or defensive. It affirmed what is already true. For many, this campaign felt personal, touching on years of being

mischaracterized. The emotional response was not only pride, but comfort — a feeling of *being seen*.

International audiences responded differently: with curiosity. The everyday portrayal of modern public life and cultural diversity provided a new reference point for imagining Saudi Arabia beyond prior assumptions. This curiosity matters in tourism marketing: when people sense their understanding might be incomplete, they become more open to exploring the reality themselves. Tourism literature suggests that curiosity-driven, non-confrontational narratives increase openness and reduce resistance, especially when audiences are introduced to counter-stereotypical imagery gently rather than directly (Kim & Richardson, 2003). Launching the campaign during Saudi National Day strengthened its emotional impact. Identity, belonging, and shared memory are already heightened during this moment, and the campaign became something people participated in rather than simply watched. Users reposted clips, quoted lines, and added their own reflections, transforming the message into a shared cultural expression.

By allowing reality to speak for itself, the Tourism Development Fund repositioned Saudi Arabia not through argument, but through invitation. The message was simple: You cannot understand a place through second-hand opinions; you must experience it directly. This campaign indicates that emotional resonance emerges from honesty, recognition, and openness, rather than persuasion or contrast. For Saudis, it created a sense of belonging. For many non-Saudis, it opened a door, an invitation to look again, reconsider, and perhaps experience the country firsthand. Themselves. Emotional contagion theory supports this, noting that campaigns tied to collective rituals intensify emotional salience and social sharing (Peters et al., 2018).

### **5.1.1 Audience Reaction & Sentiment Analysis**

A review of approximately 3,000 public comments across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube indicates that audience response was overwhelmingly positive, with engagement shaped by pride, emotional resonance, and personal identification. The sentiment suggested that users interpreted the campaign as:

Sentiment Type	% Approx	Description	Example Tone
Pride / Belonging	~47%	Saudis expressing love, unity, belonging, and national pride.	“One of the best ads about Saudi — this is how you show who we really are.”
Relief / Validation	~28%	Saudis reacting to the correction of stereotypes.	“Finally, someone said it. We’re tired of hearing these old assumptions.”
Admiration (International)	~17%	Non-Saudis expressing curiosity and respect.	“I never knew it looked like this — now I want to visit.”
Neutral / Observational	~6%	Comments noting visuals, music, or production.	“Great cinematography.”
Negative / Cynical	~2%	Mostly about politics, not the ad content.	Rare and scattered.

The emotional core of the campaign was not patriotism alone, but *recognition* — people feeling *seen* and *accurately represented*.

### Recurring Themes Identified in User Comments

Theme	Description	Evidence Appearing in Comments
Breaking Western Stereotypes	Audiences voiced shared frustration with outdated perceptions of Saudi (desert, camels, oil wealth).	“This answered every stereotype we grew up hearing.”
Cultural Confidence	Saudis expressing joy at showing the world their modern identity.	“We don’t need to explain. We just needed to <i>show</i> .”
Everyday Beauty & Normalcy	Appreciation for showing daily life rather than grand monuments.	“This felt personal and real, not staged.”
Warmth & Hospitality	Highlighting generosity, family culture, and emotional closeness.	Many comments referenced “ <i>we feel like home</i> ” tone.
Language & Global Identity	People noticing bilingualism and global openness.	“We speak English. Always have. Why was that surprising?”

### Platform-Specific Behavioral Responses

Platform	Behavior Observed	Interpretation

TikTok	Reaction videos, duets correcting stereotypes, re-sharing scenes of daily life.	Participation became <i>collective identity-building</i> .
Instagram	Story reposts & captions like “this is <i>our</i> Saudi.”	Users used the ad to represent <i>themselves</i> .
YouTube	Longer comments explaining personal emotion and pride.	Deeper processing and reflection.

### 5.1.2 Meaning-Making & Why It Resonated

The campaign’s impact came from the fact that it did not try to argue, explain, or defend Saudi Arabia’s image. Instead, it simply invited viewers to observe everyday reality as it is lived. By showing ordinary life, cultural connection, and shared identity, the campaign quietly challenged the long-standing assumption that Saudi Arabia is defined by what others say about it. The narrative shifted from being *spoken about* to being *experienced*. This approach reflects narrative transportation theory, where audiences connect more deeply with messages that “show” rather than “tell,” allowing emotional interpretation to occur internally (Green & Brock, 2000).

For Saudi audiences, this was deeply validating. Many have spent years hearing simplified or inaccurate assumptions from people who have never visited the country. The campaign provided representation that felt accurate, dignified, and emotionally grounding. It affirmed a reality they recognize, rather than trying to prove one. For international audiences, the tone felt open and welcoming rather than defensive. This created curiosity instead of resistance. Rather than being told they were wrong, viewers were simply invited to look again, and possibly to see something new. Ultimately, the campaign’s success lies in its focus on identity affirmation rather than image correction.

It allowed Saudis to claim a narrative they already live and feel proud of, while offering non-Saudis a more genuine reference point. In doing so, the message shifted from “*Saudi is misunderstood*” to “*Saudi speaks for itself.*”. Representational accuracy has been shown to reduce identity-threat perceptions and strengthen emotional trust toward the brand (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Studies confirm that curiosity-based reframing is more effective at shifting outsider perceptions than corrective narratives (Rosenbaum & Spears, 2021).

## 5.2 Visit Saudi × Lionel Messi (2024–2025) — “Go Beyond What You Think”

The Visit Saudi campaign featuring Lionel Messi, “*Go Beyond What You Think,*” aimed to shift global perceptions by moving away from second-hand assumptions and toward firsthand experience. Rather than arguing against stereotypes or proving anything, the campaign chose to visualize the problem directly. Messi is shown standing in front of literal walls of stereotypes, the same phrases and assumptions that have circulated for years. With each kick, these walls break open, revealing scenes of everyday life in Saudi Arabia: public spaces, diverse landscapes, culture, nature, and community. This approach aligns with findings in visual framing theory, which show that imagery can disrupt preconceived narratives more effectively than verbal correction (Messaris, 1997; Coleman, 2010). The message did not need explanation. It was clear: *You cannot understand a place through inherited opinions. You must experience it yourself.*

For years, global conversations about Saudi Arabia have often been shaped by people who have never seen or lived here. This led to simplified narratives and repeated clichés. The campaign understood that responding defensively only reinforces these ideas. Instead, it invited viewers to rethink by *seeing* rather than *being told* — using imagery instead of argument, curiosity instead of confrontation. The campaign resonated deeply with Saudi audiences. Many people expressed a sense of emotional relief and validation, finally seeing a narrative that reflected their reality. The representation felt accurate and grounded — modern life, natural beauty, cultural presence, and everyday connection. It did not exaggerate or attempt to prove something extraordinary. It simply reflected what already exists.

This made many Saudis feel seen, respected, and recognized in the global conversation. International audiences reacted differently — with curiosity, fascination, and sometimes surprise. The campaign introduced a Saudi Arabia that many had never been exposed to, one rooted in lived culture rather than clichés or staged visuals. Cafés, beaches, cities, families, laughter — life.

This subtle shift opened space for reflection: *What if what I've heard is incomplete?* This pattern is consistent with the boomerang effect in persuasion research, where defensive messaging amplifies existing beliefs instead of reducing them (Brehm, 1966; Byrne & Hart, 2009). Instead of counter-arguing, the campaign invited viewers to rethink what they believed by simply seeing reality. That moment of questioning is the turning point in tourism storytelling: when assumptions soften, openness begins. The choice of Lionel Messi was particularly meaningful.

Messi is not only globally loved he is emotionally familiar to millions. His presence carried a sense of warmth and trust, making the invitation feel human rather than promotional. His involvement also generated massive organic visibility as fans shared, reacted, and discussed the campaign across languages and platforms far beyond typical tourism audiences. His presence increases message credibility and lowers psychological resistance, which is supported by celebrity endorsement theory (McCracken, 1989; Erdogan, 1999). The campaign also landed during a cultural moment where Saudi identity is increasingly confident and present on the world stage. By presenting the country simply as it is — contemporary, lived, and evolving — the campaign did not say “Saudi has changed.” It allowed people to see it for themselves.

### **5.2.1 Audience Reaction & Sentiment Analysis**

A review of public comments and engagement across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (including Messi's own post, which surpassed 3M likes and millions of

views) shows a strong emotional response, driven by curiosity, pride, and identification. Research shows that messages perceived as invitations rather than arguments create higher emotional openness (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Van Laer et al., 2014). This explains why the campaign felt natural instead of defensive.

The campaign’s emotional core was recognition and reconsideration — not persuasion.

Sentiment Type	Approx	Description	Example Tone
Pride / Representation (Saudi)	~45%	Saudis expressing joy and recognition.	“This is exactly who we are. Finally shown right.”
Curiosity / Appreciation (International)	~31%	Interest sparked by seeing a different reality.	“I didn’t know Saudi looked like this — now I want to go.”

Sports Fandom Amplification	~14%	Messi supporters framing the ad through admiration.	“Messi makes everything iconic. I want to see this place now.”
Neutral / Observational	~7%	Commentary focused on visuals or soundtrack.	“The production is beautiful.”
Critical / Political	~3%	Primarily discourse-based, not tied to campaign execution.	“This is PR.”

#### Recurring Themes Identified in User Comments

Theme	Description	Audience Interpretation
-------	-------------	-------------------------

Breaking Stereotypes	The ad directly visualized and dismantled clichés.	“This answered everything we’re tired of hearing.”
Everyday Modern Life	Focus on lived experience, not spectacle.	“This feels real, not a performance.”
Cultural Warmth	Hospitality, ease, and community were visible.	“It looks welcoming and familiar.”
Identity Confidence	The campaign did not ask for approval — it invited perspective.	“We already knew. Now others can see it too.”
Curiosity Without Pressure	International audiences felt invited, not sold to.	“I want to see this for myself.”

### Platform-Specific Behavior

Platform	Behavior Observed	Interpretation
TikTok	Reaction videos, stereotype debates, remixes.	Identity negotiation and cultural re-framing.
Instagram	Story sharing and proud captioning.	Personal adoption of the message.
YouTube	Long reflective comments, repeat views.	Deep emotional processing and narrative acceptance.

The campaign succeeded because it shifted the conversation from explanation to invitation. Instead of debating stereotypes or trying to correct how others see Saudi Arabia, it made those narratives irrelevant by showing everyday life exactly as it is. This allowed Saudi audiences to feel represented with honesty and dignity, reinforcing a shared sense of cultural confidence and belonging. At the same time, the campaign encouraged international viewers to approach the country with curiosity instead of judgment.

The interaction became less about defending or proving, and more about discovery. The

message was simple and direct: You cannot understand Saudi Arabia through what others say about it. You must experience it yourself. To understand the country, one must *see it, feel it, and be here* — not listen from afar, but encounter it personally. YouTube long-form comments showing deep reflection align with narrative transportation theory, which states that immersive storytelling increases elaboration and personal meaning (Green & Brock, 2000).

### **5.3 GAP vs. American Eagle (2025) — “The Jeans War”**

The American Eagle campaign titled “*Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans*” (2025) relied on a wordplay between jeans and genes, which immediately shaped how audiences interpreted the message. While the campaign aimed to promote denim through confidence and personality, many viewers felt that the focus was placed more on Sydney herself than on the jeans. Sydney is widely recognized for roles where presence, confidence, and femininity are expressed strongly on screen, so audiences naturally carried those associations into how they read the campaign. Research on gender representation supports this reaction and shows that female-centered visuals that highlight the body rather than agency often led to negative interpretation or perceived objectification (Gill, 2008; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). Because of this, the message came across to some as emphasizing her physical appearance rather than the design, fit, or comfort of the denim. This is consistent with meaning transfer theory, where celebrity identity can overshadow product meaning when the symbolic associations of the figure are stronger than the brand cues (McCracken, 1989).

This reception did not necessarily reflect the brand’s intention. Instead, it highlighted how casting and framing carry cultural context. Viewers today are more sensitive to how women are represented in advertising, and many look for messaging that feels inclusive, relatable, and grounded in everyday identity. When the focus seemed to lean toward the individual rather than the product or the feeling of wearing it, the campaign felt misaligned with these expectations. This is supported by contemporary advertising literature that shows audiences respond negatively when campaigns lean toward the male gaze or reinforce narrow beauty ideals (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Shortly after, GAP released its campaign featuring the global girl band group KATSEYE performing a choreographed routine in different denim fits.

In contrast to American Eagle’s approach, the GAP campaign emphasized movement, comfort, and personality. It showcased six women with different styles, aesthetics, and backgrounds. Because of this, the message shifted from “*wear these jeans to look like this*” to “*these jeans fit who you already are.*” Representation scholarship supports this finding. Inclusive casting increases identification, relatability, and brand warmth, especially among younger audiences (Ahn, Kim, & Forney, 2020).

Even though GAP’s campaign was not made as a direct response, the timing created a cultural comparison. One brand appeared to lean on outdated beauty standards, while the other demonstrated a more modern understanding of diversity, identity, and personal expression. The GAP campaign felt like a shared cultural moment, and audiences not only watched the ad but replayed it, learned the choreography, and used the sound across TikTok. The attention centered on movement, not the body being looked at. The jeans were seen in action, not posed. This matches cultural trends research showing that audiences reward inclusive, community-oriented storytelling and reject messaging that feels outdated or exclusionary (Vredenburg, 2020). Meanwhile, the criticism of American Eagle reflected a broader shift.

Audiences especially younger ones are increasingly aware of body autonomy, representation ethics, and the difference between confidence and objectification. Research supports this generational shift toward empowerment-based advertising and away from beauty-centric framing (Eisend & Möller, 2007). The public response showed that advertising centered on the female body as spectacle no longer resonates the way it once did. The GAP campaign succeeded because it allowed the women in the ad to have agency, personality, and presence not just appearance.

### **5.3.1 Audience Reaction & Sentiment Analysis**

Sentiment Category	Approx %	Interpretation	Typical Tone from Comments
Support for GAP / Positive Excitement	~52%	Viewers celebrated representation, diversity, and choreography.	“This is how it’s done. GAP won this.”
Criticism of American Eagle	~26%	Felt AE reinforced outdated male-gaze marketing.	“We’re tired of seeing women used like this.”
Celebration of KATSEYE Talent	~14%	Fans highlighted individuality + skill.	“They ATE. This was a performance.”
Neutral / Entertainment Focus	~6%	Viewers watched because it was fun.	“Why is this ad so addictive?”
Negative / Brand Cynicism	~2%	Minimal; more about brand loyalty arguments.	“Both brands are overrated.”

#### Recurring Themes Reflected in User Comments

Theme	Description	Comment Tendencies
Representation &	GAP is praised for diverse casting and	“Finally, jeans ads that look

Diversity	inclusive styling.	like real people.”
Body Ethics & Objectification	AE criticized for framing Sydney’s body rather than the product.	“Why is the ad focused <i>there</i> ?”
Movement as Proof of Quality	GAP showed <i>how</i> jeans function, not just look.	“If they can dance like that, the jeans are good.”
Cultural Moment & Timing	The release coincided with heightened awareness of representation.	“This was the perfect response.”
Community Participation	The GAP sound became a TikTok trend and performance meme.	“I’ve watched this 100 times and learned the dance.”

### 5.3.2 Content & Creative Analysis: American Eagle vs. GAP (2025)

This comparison highlights how different strategic choices in message framing and creative execution shaped audience response. Inclusive representation increases brand trust and relatability (Ahn et al., 2020). American Eagle positioned its campaign around a single figure, Sydney Sweeney, supported by the wordplay “*Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans.*” The idea relied on association-based marketing the brand expected consumers to transfer admiration for Sydney onto the product. However, because the message emphasized the *figure* more than the *function*, the conversation shifted toward interpreting her presence rather than evaluating the jeans. When the meaning of the message depends mainly on language and persona, audience interpretation becomes harder to guide. The campaign created visibility, but it did not secure control over the narrative that followed.

GAP approached denim from a behavior-led perspective, featuring the KATSEYE group moving, dancing, and expressing personality while wearing the product. This reflects experiential marketing theory, which posits that showing the product in use increases credibility and emotional trust, especially when movement is involved (Schmitt, 1999; Snyder, 2014). Instead of telling audiences what the jeans represent, the campaign *showed* how the jeans behave in real use. This directly supports research showing that authentic demonstration increases perceived functionality and emotional connection (Belk & Kozinets, 2005). This made the value of the product immediately legible — the fit, movement, and comfort were visible. The emotional split between admiration and discomfort follows the literature on cultural advertising dissonance, where conflicting interpretations arise when symbolic cues are not aligned with audience expectations (Lawrence, 2021). Because the focus was on the *group*, the emotional tone became collective rather than individual. The message was not “look like her,” but “this belongs to all of us.” From a platform behavior standpoint, these differences created two distinct forms of engagement:

- i. American Eagle generated discussion.  
People debated meaning, tone, and representation.
- ii. GAP generated participation.  
People recreated the choreography, used the audio, and placed themselves inside the campaign.

What made the GAP campaign stand out is that it became participatory. Audiences didn’t just watch it — they actively carried it forward. The choreography, the music, the group dynamic, and the casual confidence translated naturally into TikTok culture, where content spreads through imitation and shared play. Recent research confirms that TikTok’s algorithm favors participatory formats where users recreate or reperform content, leading to deeper emotional involvement and extended reach (Zeng & Abidin, 2021; Literat, 2021). People placed themselves *inside* the campaign, which extended its life and reach without the brand having to push. Studies on user-generated co-creation also show that audience-led participation increases emotional attachment and strengthens

narrative memory (Marques & Moreira, 2020).

In contrast, the spread of the American Eagle campaign was driven mostly by explanation and conversation. On TikTok and YouTube, people discussed what the ad *meant* — whether it felt empowering, nostalgic, exaggerated, or unnecessary. This pattern reflects recent findings on digital interpretation, which show that when emotional cues are unclear, audiences shift toward meaning making and debate rather than emotional participation (Vredenburg et al., 2020). On Instagram, reactions split clearly into two sides: admiration from those who interpreted the campaign positively, and discomfort from those who felt the framing was outdated. The campaign drew visibility, but the brand could not fully shape the meaning as it traveled.

GAP, on the other hand, aligned the logic of the platform with the logic of the product. Movement-based advertising works naturally on platforms where audio, choreography, and remixing drive engagement. The brand message (“these jeans move with you”) matched the *behavior* of the campaign itself movement, rhythm, collective energy. This created not only awareness, but also warmth, a sense of enjoyment and familiarity around the brand. Research after 2020 confirms that joy-driven, socially inclusive content produces stronger emotional closeness and long-term positive evaluation compared to static or beauty-focused advertising (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2020; Pan, 2022).

American Eagle achieved a spike in attention, but the story that spread was not entirely theirs. GAP achieved participation, which built affection and sustained engagement. Put simply: AE sparked conversation. GAP sparked connection. And in today’s culture, connection lasts longer than conversation. This distinction aligns with recent co-creation research showing that active participation yields stronger emotional relationships than passive attention (Alves, Fernandes, & Raposo, 2020).

Qualitative Evidence Table — American Eagle

Theme	Public Comment	Interpretation	Emotional
-------	----------------	----------------	-----------

Identified	(Verbatim)		Meaning
Objectification / Sexualization Concerns	<i>“Why are you sexualizing women to sell jeans?”</i>	Users felt the ad leaned on sexual appeal rather than storytelling or authenticity.	Discomfort, frustration, rejection.
Confusion About Public Outrage	<i>“I watched it 20 times and still haven't figured out what the problem is.”</i> (45K likes)	Some viewers did not perceive the underlying social tension, revealing interpretation divides.	Ambivalence; cultural fragmentation.
Dismissal of Critique / Defensiveness	<i>“The ugly hate the beautiful.”</i> (16K likes)	Beauty discourse turned into competitive identity talk, polarizing users.	Social insecurity; beauty-as-status.
Perceived Elitism / Exclusivity	<i>“If your goal was selling women’s jeans to men, great job.”</i> (5,555 likes)	Viewers sensed the ad was targeted in a way that excluded women, the intended consumer.	Alienation, frustration.
Brand Recall Despite Criticism	<i>“I guess the ad worked. I never go out of my way to watch ads.”</i> (19K likes)	Controversy increased exposure, but not necessarily positive brand sentiment.	Attention ≠ emotional loyalty.

Theme Identified	Public Comment (Verbatim)	Interpretation	Emotional Meaning
Inclusivity & Relatability	<i>“This is the ad everyone should be talking about — natural, fun, real people.”</i>	GAP intentionally positioned itself as warm & socially aligned, not aspirational.	Belonging; relief; community.
Cultural Momentum / Virality	<i>“I saw this dance in the mall today — everyone knows it now.”</i>	The dance challenge became a participatory cultural act, not just an ad.	Joy; shared experience; memorability.
Celebration of Diversity	<i>“They brought dancers that look like all of us.”</i>	Representation mattered — audiences felt seen.	Identity validation.
Nostalgia & Familiarity	<i>“This feels like ads from when brands were fun.”</i>	GAP leveraged emotion, not messaging, increasing emotional recall.	Comfort, warmth, familiarity.
Positive Emotional Contagion	<i>“This made me smile without even thinking.”</i>	GAP achieved effortless emotional connection, unlike AE’s tension.	Ease; joy; positive sentiment.

### Comparative Interpretation

	American Eagle	GAP
--	----------------	-----

Emotional Tone	Defensive, identity-performance, beauty-coded	Inclusive, playful, people-centered
Audience Reaction	Polarized (strong love vs strong discomfort)	Unified positive resonance & shared participation
Brand Identity Signal	“Cool, sexy, aspirational”	“Warm, collective, joyful”
Engagement Style	Comment conflict / discourse	Duets, dance recreations, communal spreading
Memory Mechanism	Controversy	Nostalgia + participation

American Eagle generated attention, while GAP generated affection—an important difference, because attention fades while affection returns. The comparison shows that emotional impact in digital culture is never about visibility alone; it depends on whether audiences can recognize themselves in the narrative. American Eagle asked people to watch, but GAP invited people to join. This aligns with findings that audiences form stronger, longer-lasting connections when they actively participate in a brand’s narrative rather than consume it passively (Smith & Wallace, 2020). Ultimately, the campaigns demonstrate that participation creates a deeper and more enduring emotional connection than observation.

#### 5.4 Coca-Cola Middle East (2025) — #Share\_CocaCola

The 2025 Coca-Cola Middle East campaign revived one of the region’s most memorable

brand activations: personalized name cans. The idea originally went viral between 2013 and 2015, when young consumers actively searched shelves to find cans with their own names or the names of people they cared about. Bringing the concept back in 2025 wasn't about novelty — it was about nostalgia. Recent consumer psychology research confirms that nostalgia-based campaigns have become increasingly powerful in post-2020 digital culture, especially among Gen Z and Millennials who respond strongly to emotionally familiar cues (Merchant & Rose, 2020; Liu et al., 2021). Coca-Cola recognized that the memory already lived in the culture; the campaign simply reopened it.

The core insight here is emotional memory. For many Gens Z and Millennials, named Coca-Cola cans are tied to a specific moment in time — school breaks, group outings, early friendships, and the feeling of being seen or included. Research after 2020 shows that nostalgia strengthens emotional security and deepens consumer connection, especially during periods of rapid cultural change (Batcho & Nadler, 2022). By returning to that idea, Coca-Cola did not need to build a new emotional narrative. It tapped into one that already felt personal. Research after 2020 shows that nostalgia strengthens emotional security and deepens consumer connection, especially during periods of rapid cultural change (Batcho & Nadler, 2022).

When the campaign relaunched, participation happened naturally. People filmed themselves searching for their names again, reacted with humor when their names were missing, and shared excitement when they finally found one.

The experience became less about the beverage itself and more about identity, recognition, and belonging. The campaign felt intimate, familiar, and connected to memory rather than marketing. This behavior aligns with findings that nostalgia triggers playful engagement and encourages social sharing, especially on TikTok where emotional memory enhances virality (Zhao & Zeng, 2022). On TikTok, the comments showed how strong the emotional attachment was. Users joked about the “easy” names always being in stock. Others celebrated finding a rare or unique name. Some playfully complained that their name still wasn't included. This playful competition — the looking, the hoping, the sharing — became part of the cultural moment the campaign reopened. Coca-Cola didn't introduce a

new story. It reminded people of one they already loved and allowed them to live it again. This is consistent with recent advertising literature showing that resurrecting nostalgic cultural artifacts strengthens emotional bonding more effectively than attempting to create entirely new narratives (Pan, 2022).

#### 5.4.1 Audience Reaction & Sentiment Analysis

Approximate sentiment distribution based on TikTok engagement patterns:

Sentiment Type	% Approx	Description	Example Tone
Nostalgia & Memory Recall	~58%	Users recalling searching for their names years ago.	“This took me back to when life was simple.”
Identity & Uniqueness	~23%	Users celebrating rare names or searching repeatedly.	“I challenge Coca-Cola to find my name.”
Humor & Playful Competition	~11%	Light commentary on common vs. rare names.	“Okay but remove ‘Ahmed’ first.”
Neutral / Observational	~6%	Remarks on packaging design or store placement.	“New design looks clean.”
Negative	~2%	Mostly complaints about missing names.	“My name still isn’t there 😭.”

## Recurring Themes Identified in User Comments

Theme	Description	Examples Reflected in Comments
Personal Identity	Users linked their identity to seeing their name represented.	“I thank God for my rare name. I dare you to find it.”
Name Popularity Humor	Playful cultural jokes about very common names.	“First thing we do is remove ‘Ahmed’ from the list.”
Nostalgia for 2013–2015	Emotional memory of childhood/teen years resurfaced.	“This felt like the old days again.”
Social Sharing & Friend Tags	Users tagged friends to “go search together.”	Widespread tagging and video duets.

The campaign succeeded because it did not attempt to create a new emotional narrative; it resurfaced an existing one. Instead of persuasion, it relied on memory, and instead of explanation, it sparked rediscovery. Coca-Cola did not simply revive personalized name cans, it reopened a shared cultural memory and allowed people to take ownership of the moment. Recent studies show that when brands reintroduce emotionally familiar artifacts, audiences experience renewed feelings of belonging and collective identity, particularly within post-2020 digital environments where nostalgia functions as a powerful emotional anchor (Merchant & Rose, 2020; Batcho & Nadler, 2022). The strength of the campaign lay not in the novelty of customization but in the emotion attached to it. By drawing on nostalgia and identity recognition, Coca-Cola transformed a small packaging detail into a personal and social experience. Users searched, filmed, tagged friends, and

shared stories—without prompting—because the campaign reactivated a feeling that was already cherished, familiar, and understood. Contemporary research confirms that people are especially motivated to relive and publicly display emotionally meaningful memories when these memories are tied to identity and shared cultural cues (Zhao & Zeng, 2022; Veloutsou & Guzman, 2020).

### **5.5 Zain (Eid Campaign 2025) — Emotional Resonance Through Cultural Timing and Casting**

Zain’s 2025 Eid campaign strategically leveraged cultural momentum, shared emotional memory, and a rising public figure to create a message that felt deeply personal to audiences. Recent studies confirm that aligning brand messages with cultural timing significantly increases emotional salience and audience receptivity, especially during collective rituals and holidays (Alakar & Al-Hubaishi, 2021). By casting Lama Al-Kenani, who had just gained widespread regional recognition and emotional attachment through her role in the Ramadan series *Share ‘Al-Asha*, the campaign anchored its message in a moment of collective cultural affection. Rather than simply celebrating Eid as a holiday, Zain framed the campaign as a continuation of the emotional world audiences had already been living in during Ramadan.

This reflects research indicating that narrative continuity across media moments enhances emotional attachment and increases engagement because audiences experience a sense of ongoing story and familiarity (Chen & Chen, 2023). This alignment between timing, casting, and emotional context is what made the campaign feel intimate and resonant—not just promotional. Audiences did not perceive Lama as a celebrity chosen for visibility; instead, they saw her as “one of us”, someone whose success felt shared, earned, and representative of a new era of Saudi artistic confidence.

This resulted in comments expressing pride, love, protectiveness, and personal identification. This mirrors post-2020 findings showing that audiences form stronger emotional bonds when advertisements feature figures, they already feel connected to through ongoing media exposure (Youn & Jin, 2021). At the same time, the music, tone, and visuals contributed to a sense of warmth, nostalgia, and communal celebration.

Emotional branding research after 2020 highlights that warmth-based and family-centered emotional cues generate higher levels of emotional trust and long-term positive sentiment, particularly in Middle Eastern audiences (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020).

The song became not just part of advertising, but part of Eid rituals—played at home, in cars, in gatherings, and reshared online. Many viewers described rewatching the ad frequently, even months after Eid, indicating long-term emotional attachment, not just campaign-period engagement. The campaign also resonated beyond Saudi Arabia. Comments from Kuwait, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and other regions expressed admiration and emotional connection to both the ad and the sense of cultural pride it represented. This reflects recent findings that Gulf media has gained cross-regional symbolic influence, creating shared emotional and cultural resonance across Arabic-speaking audiences (Hamed & Alshaer, 2022). This reflects the degree to which Gulf and Saudi cultural production have increasingly become regionally influential, serving as a shared cultural reference point.

Most importantly, the campaign did not aim to “sell” or “announce” anything. It instead participated in the emotional meaning of Eid—togetherness, joy, reunion, memory, and celebration. This positioned Zain not as a telecom provider, but as a cultural presence in people’s lives.

### 5.5.1 Audience Response & Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment Type	% Approx	Description	Example Tone (paraphrased)
Pride & Representation	~48%	Audiences expressing pride in Lama and in Saudi cultural presence.	“You chose the right person. We are proud of her. She represents us beautifully.”

Nostalgia & Emotional Memory	~27%	The ad evoked memories of Ramadan, the series, and family gatherings.	“This brings back the feeling of Ramadan and Eid. I miss that time already.”
Cross-Cultural Appreciation	~14%	Viewers from outside Saudi expressing admiration.	“I’m not Saudi, but this made me feel the joy with you. Beautiful.”
Routine Replay / Habitual Listening	~8%	Viewers repeatedly re-watching and listening.	“I listen to this every day. I can’t stop.”
Criticism / Religious Objections	~3%	Mostly comments opposing music or representation.	“Music is not allowed; Eid should be for worship.”

The emotional center of the campaign was belonging.

#### Recurring Themes Identified in User Comments

Theme	Description	Audience Interpretation
Right Casting, Right Moment	Lama was seen as a natural, heartfelt choice.	“She deserved this. We grew to love her this Ramadan.”
Shared Cultural Pride	The ad became a symbol of	“We are living a golden era of

	Saudi artistic rise.	Saudi creativity.”
Nostalgia for Ramadan and Eid Atmosphere	The ad revived emotional memory through sound + visuals.	“This song makes me feel like Eid all over again.”
Cross-Regional Cultural Affection	Audiences across the Arab region related emotionally.	“From Syria / Kuwait / Egypt — love to Saudi and its people.”
Emotional Continuity	The ad extended the emotional storyline of the series.	“It feels like this is the Eid ending of the show.”

#### Platform-Specific Behavior

Platform	Observed Behavior	Interpretation
TikTok	Users rewatched, sang along, and used clips over personal Eid memories.	The ad became part of personal documentation.
Instagram	Stories shared with pride-focused captions.	Audiences performed belonging.
YouTube	Long sentimental comments, often months later.	Deep emotional imprint and long retention.

### 5.5.2 Why This Campaign Worked

The campaign succeeded because it didn't try to create emotion, it joined a moment where emotion already existed. Research on Ramadan and Eid advertising in the Middle East confirms that campaigns released during culturally heightened emotional periods naturally generate stronger resonance because audiences are already in a shared emotional state (Khalil & Mowla, 2021). It was released at a time when collective feelings were heightened, so it entered naturally into a space people were already attentive to and nostalgic about.

Lama Alkenani's presence was central to this. Her relevance was not just about popularity; it was about emotional familiarity. Her warmth, her rise through *Share3 Al-Asha*, and the timing of her story made her feel close to people. Studies on Gulf media figures show that audiences form stronger bonds with personalities whose rise is tied to shared cultural media experiences, creating a sense of relational closeness (Hamed & Alshaer, 2022). Audiences didn't feel like she was "cast" — they felt like she already belonged there. Because of that, the campaign didn't feel like branding. It felt like recognition. The music deepened this. It wasn't just a soundtrack — it became something people played in their cars, kitchens, and gatherings. It shifted from advertising audio to shared memory cue, turning the campaign into a ritual people took with them. The celebration shown was not exaggerated or cinematic. It looked like real Eid: cousins, siblings, living rooms, hands full of dessert, laughter that feels familiar. This grounded tone allowed people to see themselves in the ad — not an idealized version of themselves. The message didn't need to be spoken aloud: Eid is something we feel together. Zain didn't claim to be part of people's lives — it simply appeared where people already were. The brand moved with culture, rather than trying to direct it or speak over it. This is why the campaign resonated. It felt lived, not constructed. Present, not promotional. Shared, not delivered. GCC branding research after 2020 shows that brands resonate more deeply when they participate in cultural rhythms rather than attempt to direct them (Kattan, 2022; Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020). The brand moved with culture,

rather than trying to speak over it.

## 5.6 Cross-Case Synthesis

Across all five campaigns, the findings reveal that emotional engagement emerges most strongly when audiences feel personally recognized, culturally represented, or emotionally aligned with the message. Campaigns rooted in real-life emotion—whether pride, nostalgia, curiosity, or collective celebration—generated more meaningful participation than campaigns relying on aesthetic appeal alone. The data consistently shows that when audiences see themselves or their cultural reality reflected in an advertisement, they respond not only with attention but with active commentary, storytelling, humor, and shared memory. This confirms that emotional resonance is driven less by production scale and more by authenticity, cultural timing, and the sense of being genuinely seen.

## 6. CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Interpreting Findings Across Campaigns

This study examined how emotionally driven advertising campaigns generate engagement in digital environments, focusing on how people respond, identify, and connect with brand narratives. The findings show that emotional engagement is not just a reaction to visuals or storytelling techniques. It is rooted in identity, recognition, and cultural resonance. Recent digital media research confirms that audiences form deeper emotional responses when brand messages reflect their lived identities and social realities (Hassan & Mousa, 2021; Alharbi, 2023). When audiences feel that a campaign reflects something true about their experiences, their memories, or their values, engagement becomes personal. They don't just watch — they participate.

Although the campaigns differed in purpose and cultural context, all produced strong emotional responses for reasons tied to lived meaning. The Tourism Development Fund National Day campaign resonated through shared cultural pride and the relief of finally seeing one's reality represented accurately, which aligns with studies on Arab identity

affirmation in media (Elmeligy, 2022). The Messi x Visit Saudi campaign encouraged curiosity by inviting audiences to reconsider inherited assumptions, reflecting post-2020 findings on cross-cultural reframing in destination branding (Rasul & Manzoor, 2023). The American Eagle vs. GAP comparison showed how people respond to deeper cultural cues in representation — not just visuals. The Coca-Cola name revival tapped into nostalgia and memory rather than novelty, like recent work on memory-based brand attachment in the Middle East (Khasawneh, 2021).

And the Zain Eid campaign succeeded by aligning itself with an emotional moment and a public figure who already felt familiar and loved, mirroring research on Gulf emotional closeness to culturally rooted influencers (Alzahrani, 2022). Across all examples, audiences did not respond passively. This pattern aligns with participatory audience theory, where users actively extend and reinterpret brand narratives rather than consuming them passively (Smith & Wallace, 2020; Rahman, 2024). They narrated, joked, argued, remembered, celebrated, defended, and connected the campaigns back to their own lives. This suggests that emotional advertising today works less through persuasion and more through invitation. Recent findings confirm that invitation-based communication, where audiences feel spoken with rather than spoken to, significantly increases emotional openness and perceived authenticity (Jin & Ryu, 2022). When a campaign aligns with cultural context and emotional truth, viewers feel that the message speaks with them, not at them. A clear pattern emerged: campaigns rooted in everyday reality — real places, real language, real people, real rhythm — created stronger emotional impact than those that relied on exaggerated imagery or idealized representation. Studies show that contemporary audiences recognize sincerity quickly and respond more positively to grounded, culturally aware storytelling (Hammad, 2021; Youssef & Dabbous, 2023).

Audiences today recognize authenticity quickly, and they reward brands that communicate with sincerity, cultural awareness, and respect. The study also highlights that emotional campaigns do not end when the advertisement stops running. The audience's response becomes part of the campaign's meaning. Reactions, remixes, duets, commentary, and

shared memories extend the narrative outward.

Emotional branding, in this sense, is co-created. Recent work on co-constructed narratives in digital advertising supports this idea, showing that user contributions shape and expand the meaning of a campaign beyond the brand's control (Alkhalifa & Almutairi, 2023). In conclusion, emotional advertising is most effective when it does not attempt to create emotion from nothing. Instead, the strongest campaigns tap into feelings that already exist — belonging, pride, nostalgia, identity, curiosity, joy. This aligns with new research showing that pre-existing emotional states significantly heighten advertising impact when the brand message resonates with culturally familiar feelings (Sharif & Qureshi, 2022). The campaigns that resonated most deeply in this study did not tell audiences what to feel. They created space for audiences to recognize themselves in the message.

## 6.2 The Power of Human Brand Faces

Another insight that emerges from this study is the intense emotional attachment audiences develop when a person becomes the face of a brand. While this observation goes beyond the original research questions, it became clear across multiple campaigns that audiences often connect first to the individual, then to the brand. Recent studies show that when consumers feel emotionally close to a public figure, that attachment transfers directly to the brand's identity, creating a sense of relational intimacy and trust (Hamed & Alshaer, 2022; Youn & Jin, 2021). This attachment can be incredibly powerful. A familiar or beloved figure can make a campaign feel warm, trustworthy, and emotionally grounded. Lama Alkenani's presence in the Zain Eid campaign demonstrated how cultural familiarity transforms an advertisement into something that feels personal.

Similarly, Messi's association with Visit Saudi created curiosity and credibility because audiences already had a long-term emotional relationship with him. However, this strategy also carries risk. Emotional attachment to a human face can overshadow the brand itself or make the brand vulnerable to any changes in the individual's public image. Branding research notes that the stronger the parasocial bond between audiences and a figure, the more sensitive the brand becomes to shifts in public sentiment, personal controversies, or emotional fatigue (Lee & Lee, 2023). In other words, the same emotional closeness that

generates engagement can also become a liability if not managed carefully. Yet when done well, this approach can be astonishingly effective. Human-centered campaigns can create deep brand affinity, lasting memory, and cross-platform participation, especially in cultures where personal warmth and familiarity hold significant value. The key, as recent findings suggest, is authenticity. Audiences respond positively when the chosen figure feels naturally connected to the brand's message, rather than inserted for visibility alone (Alzahrani, 2022). This reflects a broader truth revealed by this study: emotional advertising succeeds most when brands choose people who already occupy meaningful emotional space in the audience's lives.

Another dimension that has become increasingly important in emotional advertising is the rise of founders as brand faces. Globally, this can be seen in the way Rare Beauty is inseparable from Selena Gomez, Huda Beauty is inseparable from Huda Kattan, and Rhode is inseparable from Hailey Bieber. The emotional closeness audiences feel toward these founders becomes part of the product experience itself. However, this closeness creates a fragile dynamic. When the founder does something, the public perceives as wrong, insensitive, or out of alignment with audience expectations, the emotional bond that once drove sales can very quickly turn into backlash. Recent international case studies show that founder-led brands are particularly vulnerable to boycotts because audiences project their feelings about the individual directly onto the brand identity (Kim & Ryu, 2022; Martinez, 2023).

This pattern is not only global, but also deeply visible in Saudi Arabia. A clear example is Asail Alotaibi, who first entered the market with an abaya brand that built emotional closeness through personalized touches such as surprise gift envelopes of 100 to 500 riyals hidden inside orders. These gestures made customers feel chosen and seen, and audiences began to follow *her* as much as the brand. Her shift into her second brand, VIBEY, showed how strong this attachment was. People trusted her decisions before seeing the product. Her collaboration with WBJ, positioning makeup inside "Happy Meal-style" packaging, was a smart strategic move because it transformed the launch into a playful emotional moment rather than a product announcement. In this case, the founder became the emotional anchor that made the brand feel familiar and safe.

Another strong Saudi example is Mohammed Omar, founder of Q Market, a grocery space built on affordability and accessibility. The remarkable part is that audiences became attached to *him* more than the store itself. People visit Q Market simply to see him. His TikTok Q&A invitations, where he randomly checks whether people follow him and then gifts them an iPhone or iPad, created a ritual of anticipation and emotional closeness. But the most interesting part — and the most strategically risky — is that he encourages people to follow *him*, not the brand. His account name, “Mohammed Omar – Q,” merges the founder and the brand into one emotional unit. This creates a relationship where customers cannot separate the business from the person, because the founder himself does not separate them. This is where the strategy becomes both powerful and dangerous.

When a founder becomes the emotional core of a brand, the brand gains personality, intimacy, and loyalty. But it also inherits every risk associated with human behavior. If the founder changes direction, faces public criticism, or loses relevance, the brand absorbs the emotional consequence. Studies in 2022 and 2023 confirm that founder-driven loyalty can collapse quickly when the audience experiences a breach in trust, because the parasocial bond is personal rather than symbolic (Alzahrani, 2022; Hassan & Mousa, 2021). A deeper marketing implication that emerges from these observations is that brands today are no longer competing on product differentiation alone. They are competing on human emotional equity. When a founder becomes the face of a brand, they introduce something that traditional branding cannot manufacture *relational capital*. This capital is built through warmth, familiarity, and everyday digital visibility, and it becomes a form of emotional value that transfers directly onto the brand. Recent work in emotional branding argues that audiences now gravitate toward brands that feel “lived in” rather than simply “designed,” because human-led brands mirror the intimacy and transparency that digital culture rewards (Cruz & Lee, 2022; Rindova & Martins, 2021). This shift radically changes what “trust” means in marketing. Trust is no longer simply about product quality or brand reputation. Trust becomes the audience’s confidence in the person behind the brand.

When audiences follow a founder before they follow the company, they are signaling that the emotional relationship is being built with the founder’s identity, not the brand’s logo. This phenomenon is supported by recent research showing that parasocial attachment to

founders drives brand loyalty and increases purchase intention more effectively than traditional celebrity endorsements because founders are perceived as real, accessible, and accountable (Li & Suh, 2023; Zhang & Chen, 2022). At the same time, this strategy introduces an incredibly delicate risk. A founder-led brand is emotionally powerful, but emotionally fragile. Since the brand's meaning becomes tied to a person, any shift in public sentiment can escalate dramatically. Case studies emphasize that founder-based branding has the highest emotional ROI but also the highest exposure to reputational volatility, especially in cultures where public figures are consumed daily through social media (Elgharib & Hassan, 2023; Alhindi, 2022). In other words, founder-led branding can build equity faster than traditional advertising and *it can burn faster too*.

Yet when managed with authenticity, cultural alignment, and emotional intelligence, the strategy becomes transformative. Founder-led brands create brand intimacy, a state in which audiences do not simply recall the brand; they *feel* it. They associate it with a person they trust, a story they follow, and a life they witness. This is why founder-driven brands often outperform corporate-led campaigns in engagement, because the audience is reacting to a human presence, not a brand persona. This aligns with emerging findings that emotional closeness and perceived interpersonal warmth significantly increase brand attachment, especially in Middle Eastern markets where relational cues hold strong cultural weight (Saidi & Madini, 2023). In essence, founder-led branding represents the new frontier of emotional marketing: a space where connection becomes currency, identity becomes strategy, and the founder becomes both the heartbeat and the risk factor of the brand.

### **6.3 Interpretation In Relation to Hypotheses**

This section interprets the collected findings in relation to the study's hypotheses, drawing from emotional sentiment patterns, behavioral engagement data, and discourse across the five analyzed campaigns.

*H1: Emotional sentimental campaigns generate higher engagement than neutral*

*campaigns.*

Across all campaigns, the strongest engagement came from emotions that felt affirming, pride, nostalgia, recognition, and admiration. In the Tourism Development Fund campaign, for example, pride wasn't just expressed; it was shared. People didn't just like the campaign — they reposted it, narrated their own feelings, and connected it to their sense of identity. The emotional resonance invited participation, not just reaction. The Zain Eid campaign created a similar effect, but through warmth and cultural memory. Viewers rewatched the ad, quoted it, and shared personal stories in the comments. The engagement felt intimate, like people were adding their own memories to the campaign rather than simply responding to it. Meanwhile, the early response to the American Eagle campaign showed the opposite pattern. When the emotional message felt unclear or conflicted, engagement became more argumentative. Viewers debated the intent of the ad instead of building connection around it. Taken together, these patterns suggest that when emotional messaging feels affirming and grounded, audiences respond with support and participation. When the emotional signal is uncertain or misaligned, engagement becomes split. The difference is not simply emotional intensity, it is emotional *clarity and recognition*. *Conclusion:* H1 is supported. Campaigns that evoke clear emotional resonance led to stronger engagement.

*H2: Culturally resonant advertisements produce stronger identification and message recall.*

Campaigns that were rooted in shared cultural meaning consistently generated deeper emotional connection. The Tourism Development Fund campaign resonated because it portrayed Saudi life in a way that felt real and unforced, indirectly responding to external narratives without arguing against them. People recognized themselves in it — and that recognition came with relief, pride, and a sense of being understood. The Zain Eid campaign worked for a similar reason. By featuring a voice that audiences already carried emotional familiarity with from *Share' Al-A'sha*, the ad entered a moment people were already connected to. Engagement was not simply a reaction to branding — it was a continuation of a cultural memory that was still warm and present. On a global scale,

GAP's campaign tapped into a different shared meaning: the shift toward inclusivity and collective expression. By foregrounding movement, personality, and group identity, it aligned with a cultural conversation happening across platforms. This stood in contrast to American Eagle's more individual-focused tone, positioning GAP within a broader shift toward representation that feels communal and participatory rather than centered on a single figure. Across these campaigns, emotional resonance emerged when brands moved with cultural feeling, rather than trying to create emotion from scratch.

*Conclusion:* H2 is strongly supported. Cultural alignment deepens emotional attachment and strengthens recall.

*H3: Meaningful interaction behaviors (comments, shares, remixes) are stronger engagement indicators than likes and views.*

Across all campaigns, the comments and the ways people reinterpreted the content revealed the emotional core more clearly than likes or view counts ever could. For instance, GAP's campaign did not initially surpass American Eagle in likes — but the participation around it told a different story. Dance recreations, duets, mall reenactments, and groups learning the choreography together signaled that people weren't just watching the campaign; they were *joining* it. The Tourism Development Fund campaign followed a similar pattern. It spread through personal reposts, “watch this” captions, and reflective commentary. Viewers didn't just engage with the ad — they added their own meaning to it, treating it as something they felt connected to and wanted to share. These patterns make it clear: surface metrics measure attention, but meaningful interactions measure emotion. Likes indicate that the content was seen. Participation such as commenting, sharing, or recreating suggests that the message held personal meaning.

*Conclusion:* H3 is supported.

*H4: Nostalgia-based emotional appeals lead to increased personal participation.*

The Coca-Cola “Share a Name Again” campaign made this especially clear. The feeling of nostalgia drove people to go look for their names again, film the search, and laugh about

which names were always available, and which were never found. The excitement didn't come from the can — it came from the memory it brought back. The engagement became personal and communal at the same time, because people were reconnecting with something they remembered from earlier years.

*Conclusion:* H4 is supported.

*H5: In fast-paced digital environments, authenticity and relatability outperform high production value.*

Across all campaigns, what felt real is what resonated:

- Tourism Development Fund: Everyday life felt more powerful than any polished promotional imagery.
- Zain Eid: A gentle story with a familiar face felt more meaningful than a high-production concept.
- GAP: A dance filmed like something you'd see shared between friends felt more relatable than traditional fashion glamour.
- Messi — “Go Beyond What You Think”: One clear idea landed more effectively than layered messaging or technical complexity.
- By comparison, the American Eagle campaign struggled because the tone felt over-styled, and the emotional center appeared to be individual beauty rather than shared feeling — which made the message feel less inclusive and harder for audiences to see themselves in.

*Conclusion:* H5 is strongly supported. Audiences reward authenticity over performance, across all campaigns, the strongest emotional resonance emerged when: The message felt real and lived, not staged. The campaign connected to shared cultural memory or identity.

## 7. CHAPTER 7: KEY INSIGHTS & IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of emotional sentiment and audience behavior across the five campaigns shows how emotional messaging works within contemporary digital marketing — especially in Saudi and globally connected cultural contexts. The campaigns demonstrate that emotional impact is shaped less by production scale and more by cultural relevance, identity resonance, and authenticity.

### 7.1 Insight 1: Emotional authenticity is more influential than emotional intensity.

Campaigns that reflected real life and familiar emotional experiences (Tourism Development Fund, Zain Eid) created stronger audience connection than campaigns that relied on dramatic visuals or stylized storytelling.

Audiences responded most when they recognized themselves in the message. Prior branding research identifies authenticity as the strongest predictor of long-term audience attachment, surpassing dramatic appeal (Morhart et al., 2017; Kumar, 2025).

Implication: Brands should communicate sincerely, represent real people, and avoid emotional exaggeration that feels forced or performative.

### 7.2 Insight 2: Cultural relevance significantly enhances message resonance.

Campaigns rooted in shared cultural meaning — whether national pride, nostalgia, or recent pop culture moments — prompted deeper reflection and stronger emotional attachment. This aligns with cultural branding literature, which emphasizes that emotional persuasion increases when the message aligns with local identity and shared memory (Holt, 2004; Al-Jenaibi, 2020; Mahmoud, Grigoriou, & Fuxman, 2022).

Representation and timing directly influenced engagement.

Implication: Marketers should design emotional campaigns with cultural context in mind, considering local identity, timing, and shared social experiences.

### 7.3 Insight 3: Engagement quality is more diagnostic than engagement quantity.

Likes and views offered limited insight into emotional impact. In contrast, comments, duets, remixes, reenactments, and reflective captions provided clear evidence of how audiences internalized the message. The GAP campaign, for example, demonstrated that audiences voluntarily participating is a clearer sign of success than reach alone. This observation aligns with research arguing that interpretive engagement — the type that expresses meaning, emotion, or creativity — is more reliable than numerical metrics (Voorveld, 2019; Peters et al., 2013; Shao, 2009).

Implication: Emotional campaign evaluation should prioritize *interpretive engagement* (comments, shares, remixes) over surface metrics.

#### **7.4 Insight 4: Nostalgia is a powerful emotional driver for collective participation.**

The Coca-Cola name campaign succeeded not because of novelty, but because it reactivated shared personal memory. Nostalgia encouraged users to search, share, and emotionally narrate their experience, turning the campaign into a personal and communal ritual. This is supported by research showing that nostalgic cues increase emotional warmth, social bonding, and willingness to engage with branded content (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Muehling & Sprott, 2020; Zhou et al., 2012).

Implication: Brands can strategically evoke collective memory to invite audiences into active emotional storytelling.

#### **7.5 Insight 5: Audience familiarity with campaign figures strengthens emotional attachment.**

Choosing Lama Al-Kinani for Zain's Eid campaign shows the strategic value of selecting figures who already hold emotional meaning within the cultural moment. When audiences already care about the person, the message becomes more believable and the emotional connection more immediate. Existing research supports this, showing that pre-established emotional closeness with public figures increases trust, message acceptance, and brand warmth (Labrecque, 2014; Chung & Cho, 2017; Choi & Rifon, 2012).

Implication: Emotional impact increases when brands align with figures who reflect real

audience values and current cultural conversation — not just popularity.

## 7.6 Overall Implication

Emotional engagement is not produced by sentiment alone — it is produced when audiences feel seen, represented, and invited. The most successful campaigns were the ones that created a sense of belonging, not persuasion. This highlights a shift from *brand-to-audience communication* toward *brand-with-audience co-creation of meaning*.

## 8. CHAPTER: 8 CONCLUSIONS

This section summarizes the key findings in relation to the research question and outlines the implications for emotional marketing practice. This study examined how emotionally resonant advertising campaigns shape audience engagement, meaning making, and brand connection. By analyzing real audience reactions across five campaigns, using both engagement data and qualitative interpretation of comments and shared content, the research showed that emotional marketing works best when it reflects real lived experience rather than staged or exaggerated emotional cues.

This aligns with recent findings that consumers respond more positively to authenticity and everyday reality in branding than to highly produced emotional displays (Iglesias, Markovic, & Rialp, 2019; Beverland, 2021). Across the campaigns, the strongest responses occurred when audiences felt recognized. The Tourism Development Fund National Day campaign showed how everyday reality can speak more powerfully than counterargument. The Zain Eid campaign demonstrated how the right cultural figure, at the right moment, can deepen collective emotional connection, consistent with studies showing that emotionally familiar public figures heighten trust and message acceptance (Chung & Cho, 2017; Labrecque, 2014). Coca-Cola's name revival campaign revealed how nostalgia can reopen memory and create shared participation, a phenomenon strongly supported by nostalgia research in digital environments (Muehling & Sprott, 2020; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018).

Meanwhile, the comparison between American Eagle and GAP emphasized that audiences respond positively when representation feels natural and inclusive — and withdraw when emotional framing feels forced or performative. This reflects global findings that cultural congruence and representational sincerity are key drivers of positive audience interpretation (Mahmoud, Grigoriou, & Fuxman, 2022; Al-Jenaibi, 2020). The findings also highlight that engagement quality matters more than engagement quantity. Comments, remixes, reaction videos, and duets offered clearer evidence of emotional resonance than likes or views. Participation, not just attention, indicates that a message has meaning. This insight parallels recent shifts in engagement theory, which prioritize interpretive and expressive engagement over surface metrics (Voorveld, 2019; Peters et al., 2013).

Overall, the study supports a human-centered view of emotional marketing. Emotional resonance emerges when campaigns align with identity, culture, and lived feeling, and when brands communicate with sincerity and respect. The most successful campaigns in this research did not tell audiences how to feel — they created space for people to see themselves in the message. This conclusion is consistent with emerging perspectives that emotional meaning-making is a co-created process between brands and audiences (Rosenbaum & Johnson, 2022). In a digital environment where audiences are increasingly expressive, aware, and selective, emotional marketing must not only capture attention. It must connect, reflect real experience, and invite people into shared meaning.

## **9. CHAPTER 9: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **9.1 Limitations Of the Study**

While this study provides valuable insights into emotional engagement in digital advertising, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to publicly available social media comments, which may not represent the full audience, especially individuals who engage privately or passively. Second, the analysis relied on manual coding, which—although culturally sensitive—may introduce interpretive bias. Automated sentiment tools were avoided due to their limited accuracy with Arabic dialects, but this decision reduces scalability. Third, the study focused on five campaigns, which limits generalizability across industries. Finally, platform-specific cultures (TikTok vs.

Instagram vs. X) influence emotional expression differently, meaning results cannot be assumed identical across all digital spaces.

a. Platform-Specific Engagement

The data was primarily collected from TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X. While these platforms represent major spaces for cultural discourse, they may not reflect engagement patterns on other platforms or offline contexts. Audience reactions may differ across demographics not active on these platforms.

b. Publicly Visible Commentary

The analysis relied on publicly available comments, reactions, and observable behaviors. This does not capture passive or private engagement (e.g., silent viewing, sharing in closed groups, or emotional responses without interaction). Therefore, the true emotional impact may exceed what public metrics indicate.

c. Non-Experimental Context

The research did not involve controlled experimental manipulation. As a result, it identifies associations rather than causality. For example, emotional sentiment correlates with engagement but cannot be proven as the sole driver.

d. Cultural and Regional Context

The campaigns were analyzed within a Saudi and Gulf context, where cultural identity, social values, and audience expectations shaped emotional responses. These findings may not generalize in the same way across other global regions.

e. Campaign Lifecycle

Data was collected during periods of heightened campaign visibility. Engagement and sentiment can shift as the campaign progresses from novelty to normalization, meaning long-term patterns were not captured.

## 9.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should expand the sample to include more campaigns across different sectors and ideally integrate automated sentiment models trained specifically on Arabic dialects to balance culture nuance with analytical breadth. Including private audience data—such as surveys or interviews—may also provide deeper insight into emotional interpretation that cannot be observed publicly. Researchers may explore how emotional resonance differs across age groups, regions, or language use within Saudi Arabia. Lastly, examining long-term brand outcomes, such as loyalty or purchase behavior, would help determine how emotional engagement translates into sustained consumer relationships.

### A. Include Mixed Audience Interviews or Surveys

Future research could incorporate interviews or surveys to capture internal emotional reactions, personal interpretations, and motivations for engagement—insights that behavioral metrics alone cannot reveal.

### B. Conduct Comparative Regional Studies

Exploring how similar emotionally driven campaigns perform across different cultural environments would help distinguish universal drivers of emotional resonance from those that are culturally specific.

### C. Measure Long-Term Engagement Effects

Longitudinal tracking of sentiment and behavioral engagement would clarify whether initial emotional impact translates into sustained loyalty, purchasing behavior, or long-term cultural influence.

### D. Study Silent Engagement Behaviors

Future work should analyze non-public engagement, such as sharing content in private chats, bookmarking posts, or discussing campaigns offline. These behaviors often indicate strong emotional impact that public metrics fail to measure.

### E. Explore Creator and Influencer Collaboration Impact

Since many successful campaigns relied on recognizable cultural figures, future

research should examine how authenticity, familiarity, and relatability of creators influence emotional engagement and campaign success.

## REFERENCES

- Abosag, I., & Farah, M. (2021). Consumer trust and ethical brand behaviour in the Arab world. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 174(4), 835–852. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04698-9>
- Abosag, I., & Lee, J. W. (2013). The formation of Saudi consumer–brand relationships. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(12), 2253–2260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.02.016>
- Alayed, A., Alotaibi, H., & Shaalan, K. (2020). Sentiment analysis of Saudi tweets: Challenges and applications. *Arabian Journal for Science and Engineering*, 45, 10767–10783. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13369-020-04447-7>
- Al-Dabbagh, R. (2024). Cultural timing and emotional resonance in Gulf-region branding. *Journal of Middle Eastern Communication Research*, 12(2), 88–104.
- Al-Emadi, F., & Yahia, I. B. (2020). The role of emotional and informational appeals in social media advertising: Evidence from the Gulf region. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 26(5), 710–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2020.1719953>
- Alhammadi, A. (2022). Influencer credibility and brand trust collapse: The Boutiqaat case in the Gulf. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 28(6), 909–933. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2021.2003673>
- Alhindi, A. (2022). Social influence and digital consumer behavior in Gulf markets. *Journal of Middle Eastern Consumer Studies*, 14(2), 45–62.
- Al-Jenaibi, B. (2020). Cultural identity and media representation in the Gulf. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 13(3), 321–340.
- Alkhalifa, R., & Almutairi, N. (2023). Co-created narratives in digital advertising: Audience participation in GCC markets. *International Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 7(1), 55–72.
- Alotaibi, M. (2025). The role of language in digital marketing strategies in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Digital Marketing Studies*, 8(1), 22–35. \*
- Al-Saggaf, Y., & Simmons, P. (2015). Social media, engagement, and emotions among young Saudis. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 8(1), 41–61. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.8.1.41\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.8.1.41_1)

- Alshakhs, F., & Baker, S. (2023). Influencer brand transfer effects in Saudi Arabia: Emotional attachment and purchase decisions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 72, 103239. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103239>
- Alzahrani, D. (2022). Parasocial closeness and influencer–brand relationships in Saudi Arabia. *Arabian Journal of Media and Communication*, 11(1), 80–98.
- Askegaard, S., & Linnet, J. T. (2011). Towards an epistemology of consumer culture theory. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 11(2), 165–187.
- Bagozzi, R. P., Gopinath, M., & Nyer, P. U. (1999). The role of emotions in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 27(2), 184–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070399272005>
- Becker, A. B. (2016). The ethics of persuasive emotional appeals. In *Proceedings of the 2016 Workshop on Logic, Ethics, and Security*. USENIX.
- Belk, R. W. (2013). Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(3), 477–500. <https://doi.org/10.1086/671052>
- Berridge, K., & Porter, H. (2020). Emotional reminiscence and memory cues in branding. *International Journal of Communication Psychology*, 4(2), 115–132.
- Beverland, M. B. (2021). Brand authenticity: A cultural perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(5), 912–933.
- Campaign Middle East. (2023). Brands weave nostalgia into Saudi National Day campaigns.
- Choi, S. M., & Rifon, N. J. (2012). It is a match: Congruence between celebrity image and consumer ideal self. *Psychology & Marketing*, 29(9), 639–650.
- Chung, S., & Cho, H. (2017). Parasocial relationships and celebrity endorsement effects. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 57(1), 18–32.
- Cruz, A., & Lee, J. (2022). Humanized branding and audience emotionality in digital culture. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, 30(4), 499–517.
- Dabbah, K., & Alenzi, F. (2023). Affective loyalty and emotional attachment in Middle Eastern markets. *Journal of Marketing Behavior*, 5(1), 72–90.
- Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C., & Morgan-Thomas, A. (2015). Consumer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 24(1), 28–42.
- Dwivedi, A., Johnson, L., Wilkie, D., & De Araujo-Gil, L. (2021). Celebrity–brand

emotional congruence. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 61(1), 47–62. \*

- Elmeligy, R. (2022). National identity signaling in Arab media campaigns. *Middle East Journal of Media and Culture*, 6(1), 91–109.
- Elgharib, S., & Hassan, M. (2023). The volatility of founder-led branding. *Journal of Brand Strategy*, 12(3), 204–223.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), 378–389.
- Fritz, K., Schoenmueller, V., & Bruhn, M. (2017). Authenticity in branding. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(3), 475–488.
- Hammad, M. (2021). Cultural sincerity and audience trust in Arab advertising. *Arab Journal of Communication*, 9(2), 140–159.
- Hamed, S., & Alshaer, R. (2022). Gulf media figures and emotional attachment. *GCC Journal of Media Psychology*, 3(1), 60–78.
- Harper, S. (2023). Nostalgia as an emotional driver in Saudi advertising. *Campaign Middle East*.
- Hassan, R., & Mousa, A. (2021). Emotional trust and consumer reactions in MENA advertising. *Journal of Promotion & Communication*, 8(2), 112–130.
- Holt, D. (2004). *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*. Harvard University Press.
- Iglesias, O., Markovic, S., & Rialp, J. (2019). How authenticity drives brand commitment. *Journal of Business Research*, 100, 341–354.
- Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic brand management* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Kessous, A., & Roux, E. (2020). Nostalgia, emotions, and brand connection. *Marketing Theory*, 20(1), 85–102.
- Khasawneh, S. (2021). Memory-based attachment in Middle Eastern nostalgia marketing. *Journal of Consumer Memory Studies*, 2(1), 33–47.
- Khan, M. A., & Ali, R. (2025). Emotional persuasion in digital branding. *International Journal of Business, Management & Commerce*, 4(1), 122–139.
- Khan, S., & Alkhatlan, M. (2021). Cultural identity and fashion branding in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 12(4), 748–767.
- Kim, H., & Ryu, J. (2022). Boycotts and backlash in founder-led brands. *Journal of*

*Consumer Behaviour*, 21(4), 880–895.

- Kumar, A. (2025). Emotional sincerity in branding. *Journal of Marketing Insights*, 18(1), 51–70.
- Labrecque, L. I. (2014). Consumer–brand relationships in social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 134–148.
- Lee, H., & Kim, J. (2021). Measuring emotional engagement. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 54, 36–49.
- Lee, J., & Lee, Y. (2023). Founder identity and brand vulnerability. *Journal of Brand Management*, 30(1), 53–72.
- Li, D., & Suh, A. (2023). Parasocial bonding with founders. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 23(2), 120–139.
- Liu, B. (2015). *Sentiment analysis: Mining opinions, sentiments, and emotions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mahmoud, M. A., Grigoriou, N., & Fuxman, L. (2022). Cultural congruence in brand storytelling. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 46(3), 1208–1221.
- MarTechVibe. (2025). Emotions, experiences, and the evolving Saudi consumer.
- Martin, D. M., & Morich, K. (2011). Unconscious processes in consumer choice. *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(7), 483–493.
- Martin, K. (2019). Ethical implications of using emotional data. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 160(1), 17–29.
- Martinez, P. (2023). Founder-based brand backlash. *Journal of Contemporary Branding*, 15(2), 98–115.
- Malthouse, E. C., & Hofacker, C. F. (2010). Interactive marketing: Past and future. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 24(2), 85–96.
- Miller, J., & Abbas, R. (2025). Co-created storytelling. *Frontiers in Communication*, 10, 1–14.
- Morhart, F., Malär, L., Guèvremont, A., Girardin, F., & Grohmann, B. (2017). Brand authenticity. *European Journal of Marketing*, 51(2), 324–348.
- Muehling, D. D., & Sprott, D. E. (2020). Effects of nostalgic advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 49(1), 34–48.
- Napoli, J., Dickinson, S., Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. (2014). Consumer-based brand

authenticity. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(7), 1095–1115.

- Pappas, I. O. (2018). User experience in personalized services. *Information & Management*, 55(5), 616–627.
- Patel, R. (2024). Emotional co-creation in digital advertising. *International Journal of Social Media Marketing*, 9(3), 201–218.
- Peters, K., Chen, Y., Kaplan, A., Ognibeni, B., & Pauwels, K. (2013). Social media metrics and engagement. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 281–298.
- Rahman, T. (2024). Nostalgia, identity, and emotional attachment. *Journal of Contemporary Marketing*, 14(3), 112–130.
- Rasul, T., & Manzoor, S. (2023). Celebrity figures in destination branding. *Journal of Tourism Promotion*, 9(1), 22–41.
- Rindova, V., & Martins, L. L. (2021). Meaning making in branding. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 11(2), 145–165.
- Rosenbaum, C., & Johnson, S. (2022). Human-centered branding. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 22(3), 487–503.
- Sedikides, C., & Wildschut, T. (2018). The psychology of nostalgia. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(3), 189–194.
- Shao, G. (2009). Understanding user-generated content. *New Media & Society*, 11(6), 993–1012.
- Smith, D., & Wallace, K. (2020). Audience participation in digital narratives. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 28(5), 389–404. \*
- Tan-Intaraarj, P. (2024). Asian cultural influences on advertising. *International Journal of Cultural Marketing*.
- Tuškej, U., Golob, U., & Podnar, K. (2013). Consumer–brand identification. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 53–59.
- Villarroel Ordenes, F., Ludwig, S., De Ruyter, K., Grewal, D., & Wetzels, M. (2019). Harnessing customer reviews. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45(4), 673–692.
- Voorveld, H. A. (2019). Engagement across media platforms. *Journal of Advertising*, 48(1), 8–23.
- Zhang, K., & Chen, L. (2022). Emotional closeness and trust in founder-led branding. *Journal of Digital Marketing Research*, 4(2), 110–129.

- Zhou, X., Sedikides, C., Wildschut, T., & Gao, D. (2012). The restorative value of nostalgia. *Psychological Science*, 23(10).
- Alharbi, S. (2023). Emotional storytelling in GCC advertising: A cultural analysis. *Journal of Marketing Trends*.
- Alotaibi, L. (2024). Digital identity expression among Saudi Gen Z. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*.
- Alayed, S., & Shaalan, K. (2023). Sentiment analysis and cultural nuance in Arabic social media. *Information Processing & Management*.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.
- Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V. (2022). *Designing and conducting mixed-methods research*. SAGE.
- Guzman, F., & Veloutsou, C. (2021). The co-creation of brand value in digital culture. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
- Kim, H., & Park, J. (2021). Consumer identity and emotional branding. *Psychology & Marketing*.
- Kattan, R. (2022). Cultural timing and emotional branding in the Gulf. *Middle East Journal of Business*.
- Literat, I. (2022). Creative participation on social media. *New Media & Society*.
- Pan, X., & Chen, L. (2022). Ethics in data-driven marketing. *Journal of Digital Marketing*.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2022). *Research Methods for Business Students*. Pearson.
- Singh, J., & Sonnenburg, S. (2020). Brand storytelling in the post-digital era. *Journal of Business Research*.

- Youn, S., & Jin, S. (2023). Advertising ethics in the Middle East. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*.
- Zeng, J., & Abidin, C. (2021). The changing face of TikTok culture. *Social Media + Society*.
- Alayed, S., & Shaalan, K. (2023). Sentiment analysis and cultural nuance in Arabic social media. *Information Processing & Management*.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.
- Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V. (2022). *Designing and conducting mixed-methods research*. SAGE.
- Guzman, F., & Veloutsou, C. (2021). The co-creation of brand value in digital culture. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
- Pan, X., & Chen, L. (2022). Ethics in data-driven marketing. *Journal of Digital Marketing*.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2022). *Research Methods for Business Students*. Pearson.
- Singh, J., & Sonnenburg, S. (2020). Brand storytelling in the post-digital era. *Journal of Business Research*.
- Youn, S., & Jin, S. (2023). Advertising ethics in the Middle East. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*.