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Social and Psychological Effects of Instagram Influencers on Young Women

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Abstract

Social media applications and other social networking sites are widely used by majority of users all over the world. These are used for the purpose of interaction and information gaining and sharing. Social media applications enable their users to interact with different people, for instance, friends and family members to learn new trends, explore interests, and to get themselves entertained. Furthermore, social media applications also help users to increase their knowledge in a specific field. Additionally, these are also helpful to develop their own network by getting in touch with people related to their fields across the globe. The current study is based on survey technique to investigate and explore the effects and popularity of Instagram on female students of Hazara University. The study used media effects theories, such as social learning theory and cultivation theory. The sample size comprised a total of 200 female students of Hazara University and data was collected by using close-ended questionnaire. The data tabulation and its subsequent analysis revealed that overall majority of the respondents use social media application, that is, Instagram. They frequently upload different content in the form of pictures and videos. The exclusive analysis of the data revealed that overall majority of the respondents follow Instagram influencers and they rarely copy the dresses worn by them. The empirical findings also revealed that majority of young women disagree that Instagram influencers create any psychological effects on them.

Keywords: effects, Instagram, influencers, popularity, psychological, social media, youth

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Introduction

Social media along with its various applications provide countless opportunities to its users. It highlights their skills and talents by using different applications to disseminate these on social media. Instagram, a widely used social media application, is one of the most commonly used applications among youth, specially among young women. This enables them to watch different influencers, their videos about trending dresses, as well as other forms of content to attract large number of people around the globe. Instagram, which is an image-based site, can affect women's anxieties and views about how they should present themselves. On social media, people often exhibit themselves in their best and most attractive ways. Moreover, they may modify their photos using Instagram filters and other applications before uploading them on the Internet.

Social media applications are very easy to download and friendly in usage. Messages, photo and video sharing, and interactive materials are the common features of social media applications. Social networking applications are categorized in several different ways. These include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat (Pilkington et al., 2016). The world of Instagram may overwhelm people with nasty comments and manipulation, particularly given cultural expectations and insufficient efforts to normalize "normal" bodies and "normal" lives. Despite its drawbacks, Instagram continues to be widely used no matter how it affects a person's life.

Statement of the Problem

Social media applications are widely used by young women for different purposes. They acquire knowledge about new trends pertaining to female brands and their uses. Instagram influencers use different techniques to attract people around the globe in order to shape their opinions. Furthermore, Instagram affects youth in many different ways including social and psychological effects. The current study investigated the social and psychological effects of Instagram influencers on female students of Hazara University.

Significance

Social media has gained immense fame among Pakistani youth in the current era. Specifically, students use social media applications for different purposes including chatting with friends, following celebrities, as well as

uploading videos and photos. Instagram is the world's most popular social media application which allows its users to like, share trends, and get information on various rising issues. Females, especially students use Instagram to stay updated regarding trending brands and follow different influencers. Previous studies revealed different effects of Instagram influencers on youth, however, no research has so far been conducted on the psychological and social effects of Instagram on young women. The current study is unique in nature because it aimed to explore the psychological and social effects of Instagram influencers on young Pakistani women

Objectives

The current study aimed to address the following research objectives:

- To explore the frequency of using social media applications by young women of Hazara University

- To investigate the purpose of using Instagram by female students of Hazara University

- To investigate the effects of Instagram on female students of Hazara University

- To explore the effects of Instagram influencers on young women.

Hypothesis

The following are the major hypothesis of the study:

H1. It is more likely that female students of Hazara University frequently use different social media applications.

H2. It is more likely that female students of Hazara University use Instagram for different purposes.

H3. It is more likely that female students of Hazara University copy dresses worn by Instagram influencers.

H4. It is more likely that female students of Hazara University think that Instagram influencers promote western culture in our society.

H5. It is more likely that the frequent use of Instagram effects the life of its user.

Literature Review

Research revealed that in general, women are more self-conscious than men and they place considerable value on their appearances. Moreover, women are more susceptible to the effects of self-comparison due to this, especially when they are exposed to images of ideal personality on social media (Jackson, 1992). Recent research revealed that Instagram has grown in popularity among teenagers and young adults, with more than half of users checking their accounts at least once every day (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

Research revealed that in contrast to men, women feel more nervous during their online interaction with strangers and frequently try to hide their identities. This is due to their traditional and societal responsibilities (Alzahrani, 2016; Mazman & Usluel, 2011).

Few researches conducted in the past argue that Instagram enables the users for interpersonal interaction. This leads towards positive psychological outcomes, such as positive feelings, thoughts, emotions, enhanced sense of relationship and understanding that could mold and develop a vast view to attain life satisfaction (Burke et al., 2010; Hampton et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2011).

According to a study, online prosocial behaviour encourages the development of positive, healthy social norms and values. This may lead towards best possible positive relationships, meaningful connections with others, improved cognitive abilities, as well as happiness and emotional content (Jang et al., 2016; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

According to a study, Instagram was discovered to be the most influential social media platform. Due to its visual element, it may have an impact on impulsive purchases, especially in the fashion industry (Sihombing et al., 2020). Celebrities gained fame through their work in the media, such as sports, movies, or music. They use social networking sites as an additional channel to connect with their followers.

On the contrary, social media influencers have a greater ability to improve businesses than traditional celebrities since they create their own online content (Koay et al., 2021; Paxton et al., 2006). With having a framework that is impartial, Instagram reports that 68% of its users are women and 32% are men (Smith, 2014). According to research, over 70% of Instagram users are between the ages of 12 and 24, which makes it one of the most well-liked networking sites to date. Instagram is a visual-based

platform (Huang & Su 2018; Knowles et al., 2022). In past, most of the researches on health-related issues were conducted using Facebook. However, there are limited studies available on the psychological effects of Instagram. A study revealed that the frequent use of Instagram results in greater psychological issues (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Instagram has a great impact on its users as it allows them to compare their lives with others by following Instagram influencers and their trends. This study further revealed that psychological effects, for instance, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction greatly depend upon the extensive use of Instagram by the young women (Jabłońska & Zajdel, 2020). Young women easily get impressed through the number of likes on Instagram influencers' posts. Furthermore, they want to follow these influencers by noticing the number of likes and positive comments on their photos or fashion features (Tiggemann et al., 2018).

Along with adults, youngsters too use online social media sports to pass their leisure time and combat loneliness (Joo & Teng, 2017). Research argued that Instagram's overall effects have shown a connection with mental health. When Instagram users face a stressful situation or begin comparing themselves with others in society; it is strongly associated with poorer mental impacts. The current study contributed to raising awareness regarding the potential psychological effects that Instagram usage may have on its users (Mackson et al., 2019). According to a researcher, 88% of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 own smartphones and can access social media (Sense, 2019).

According to a study, women in Saudi Arabia were more likely to use social networking sites for shopping purposes than men, with a rate of (62.2%) for ads exposure on social networking sites, permanently placing Saudi women on the top spot (Trouillot, 2001).

A researcher stated that there were no statistically significant differences in the ages of men and women, and that 49% of respondents were influenced in their purchasing decisions by what influencers had to say. It was also found that influencer marketing increases brand awareness and that consumers are more likely to purchase after hearing from an influencer about a specific item (da Costa, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

The definition of social learning theory by Albert Bandura led opinion leaders and academicians to formally understand the role of observation in learning different attitudes and behaviors.

Albert Bandura first proposed ideas behind his social learning theory while conducting research based on the work of B.F. Skinner and other theorists. Bandura's social learning theory posited that people learn through a process of observation and modeling. He believed that there were social variables involved in the learning process that current social and behavioral theories did not address. Resultantly, he created the first version of his social learning theory in 1963. Around that same time, Bandura conducted experiments using popular toys of the time, known as Bobo dolls, to show that social variables could affect the act of aggression.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory, developed by George Gerbner, posits that consistent and prolonged exposure to media content gradually influences viewers' perceptions of reality. When applied to Instagram, this theory offers insight into how constant interaction with influencer content—often portraying ideal beauty, wealth, and lifestyle—can shape the beliefs and attitudes of young females. Over time, such exposure may lead them to internalize these portrayals as normal or desirable, potentially affecting their self-image and social behavior. Cultivation thus serves as a lens to understand how digital media environments subtly mold psychological and social frameworks in youth audiences (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Theories Relevancy

Social Learning Theory. Social learning theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, suggests that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and molding of behaviors exhibited by others. When applied to the impact of Instagram on young women, this theory suggests that young women may learn and adopt certain behaviors, attitudes, and body image ideals by observing and imitating influencers, celebrities, and peers on Instagram.

Instagram provides a platform for individuals to showcase their lives including their appearances, fashion sense, and lifestyle choices. Young women who frequently use Instagram may be exposed to a variety of images

and content that promote specific beauty standards, body ideals, and lifestyles. By observing and molding the behaviors and appearances of popular figures on Instagram, young women may internalize these standards and attempt to replicate them in their own lives.

Cultivation Theory. Cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner, posits that prolonged exposure to media may shape individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the world. When applied to the impact of Instagram on young women, this theory suggests that repeated exposure to idealized representations of beauty, success, and lifestyles on Instagram could shape their perceptions and expectations.

Instagram often presents a curated version of reality, showcasing the highlights and idealized aspects of people's lives. Young women who spend significant time on Instagram may develop distorted perceptions of beauty, success, and happiness. This is because they are constantly exposed to highly edited and filtered images that portray an unrealistic standard. This could potentially lead towards dissatisfaction with their own appearance and lives, as they compare themselves to the carefully constructed images they see on Instagram.

In summary, social learning theory highlights the potential for observational learning and modelling of behaviors on Instagram. On the other hand, cultivation theory emphasizes the long-term effects of exposure to idealized representations on perceptions and attitudes. Both theories are helpful in understanding the impact of Instagram on young women and the potential influence it may have on their self-perception, body image, and aspirations.

Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic and logical approach used to conduct research and collect data to answer research questions or test hypotheses. It involves the selection of appropriate methods, techniques, and procedures to gather and analyze information in a reliable and valid manner. Research methodology enables the researchers to study the phenomena systematically (Priest, 1996).

Research design involves determining the plan and structure of the study. It includes decisions regarding the research approach (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), research setting, selection of participants, and the overall framework for data collection and analysis. This research

was quantitative in nature therefore, the researcher used survey research design to investigate and explore the effects of Instagram on young female students of Hazara University. The population for this study comprised the students of Hazara University. For the current study, female students of Hazara University comprised the unit of analysis. Furthermore, the researcher used probability sampling technique for sample selection. The sample size for this study comprised 200 female students studying in different disciplines of Hazara University. Simple random sampling technique was used for data collection. Due to time strain and availability of the respondents, it was quite difficult to conduct interviews in order to obtain information. A Likert scale questions were added in the questionnaire to get the responses from the respondents and easy for them to fill the questionnaire. Data was collected through standardized close ended questionnaire for the convenience of respondents.

Results

This study was based on survey to investigate the impact and effect of Instagram on the behaviors and habits of female students of Hazara University. Data was collected according to the objectives of the study. Quantitative data was analyzed based on descriptive statistics.

Table 1
Demographics

Categories	Values	Responses	%
Gender	Men	0	0
	Women	183	100
Age	18 to less than 20	62	33.9
	20 to less than 22	77	42.1
	22 to less than 24	28	15.3
	More than 24	16	8.7
Discipline	Arts	42	23
	Social Science	68	37.2
	Science	73	39.9
Semester	1st	26	14.2
	2nd	25	13.7
	3rd	22	12
	4th	38	20.8

Categories	Values	Responses	%
	5th	10	5.5
	6th	31	16.9
	7th	13	7.1
	8th	18	9.8

Table 1 illustrates the demographic information of the respondents. All the respondents were women. Moreover, it also revealed that 42.1% were in the age group 20 to less than 22 and 39.9% were in the age group 18 to less than 20, 15.3% were in the age group 22 to less than 24, while 8.7% were more than 24 years old. Table 1 also indicates that 39.9% respondents were studying in science discipline followed by 37.2% social science respondents, while 23% respondents were studying in arts discipline. Additionally, Table 1 indicates that 20.8% respondents were studying in 4th semester, 16.9% were studying in 6th semester, 14.2% were studying in 1st semester, 13.7% were studying in 2nd semester, 12% were studying in 3rd semester, 9.8% were studying in 8th semester, while 7.1% were studying in 7th semester and lastly 5.5% respondents were studying in 5th semester, respectively.

Table 2

Following Instagram Influencers

Categories	Values	Responses	%
Influencers	Not at all	65	35.5
	Rarely	54	29.5
	Frequently	50	27.3
	Very Frequently	14	7.7
Follow	1 to less than 2	64	35
	2 to less than 3	19	10.4
	3 to less than 4	42	23
	4 to less than 5	14	7.7
	More than 5	44	24

Table 2 shows that 35.5% respondents did not follow any Instagram influencers, 29.5% rarely followed, 27.3% frequently followed, and 7.7% very frequently followed the influencers. While, 35% respondents followed 1 to less than 2 Instagram influencers, 24% followed more than 5, 23% followed 3 to less than 4, 10.4% followed 2 to less than 3, and 7.7% followed 4 to less than 5 Instagram influencers.

Table 3

Dresses and Makeup

Categories	Values	Responses	%
Dresses	Not at all	42	22.2
	Rarely	58	30.7
	Frequently	25	13.2
	Very Frequently	12	6.3
Makeup	Not at all	66	36.1
	Rarely	56	30.6
	Frequently	40	21.9
	Very Frequently	21	11.5

Table 3 illustrates that 30.7% respondents rarely copied the dresses of Instagram influencers, 22.2% did not copy at all, 13.2% frequently copied, while, 6.3% very frequently copied the dresses of Instagram influencers, 36.1% rarely used makeup products used by Instagram influencers, 30.6% rarely used, 21.9% frequently used, while 11.5% very frequently used makeup products used by Instagram influencers.

Table 4

Do You Agree that Instagram Influencers Follow Western Culture and Promote It?

Values	Responses	%
Strongly Disagree	18	9.8
Disagree	33	18
To Some Extent Agree	70	38.3
Agree	40	21.9
Strongly Agree	22	12

Table 4 illustrates that 38.3% respondents agreed to some extent that Instagram influencers follow western culture and promote it, 21.9% agreed with the statement, 18% disagreed, 12% respondents strongly agreed, while 9.8% respondents strongly disagreed with the above-mentioned statement.

Table 5

Do You Agree that Instagram Effects the Social Structure of Pakistan?

Values	Responses	%
Strongly Disagree	19	10.4

Values	Responses	%
Disagree	38	20.8
To Some Extent Agree	56	30.6
Agree	45	24.6
Strongly Agree	25	13.7

Table 5 illustrates that 30.6% respondents agreed to some extent that social media applications effect the social structure of Pakistan, 24.6% respondents agreed, 20.8% disagreed to the statement, while 13.7% respondents strongly agreed, and 10.4% respondents strongly disagreed with the above-mentioned statement.

Table 6

Do You Agree that Instagram Influencers Use Content Which Creates Anxiety?

Values	Responses	%
Strongly Disagree	9	4.9
Disagree	53	29
To some extent Agree	74	40.4
Agree	28	15.3
Strongly Agree	19	10.4

Table 6 illustrates that 40.4% respondents agreed to some extent that Instagram influencers use content which creates anxiety, 29% respondents disagreed to the statement, 15.3% respondents agreed, while 10.4% strongly agreed and 4.9% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 7

Do You Agree that Instagram Influencers Upload Content Which Creates Loneliness?

Values	Responses	%
Strongly Disagree	13	7.1
Disagree	58	31.7
To Some Extent Agree	67	36.6
Agree	32	17.5
Strongly Agree	13	7.1

Table 7 illustrates that 36.6% respondents agreed to some extent that Instagram influencers upload content that creates loneliness, 31.7%

respondents disagreed, 17.5% agreed, while 7.1 % strongly disagreed with the statement and same goes for the respondents who strongly agreed with the above-mentioned statement.

Table 8

Do You Agree that Using Instagram and Following Instagram Influencers Lead Towards Depression?

Values	Responses	%
Strongly Disagree	15	7.9
Disagree	74	39.2
To some extent Agree	54	28.6
Agree	25	13.2
Strongly Agree	15	7.9

Table 8 illustrates that 39.2% respondents disagreed with the statement that Instagram influencers create depression t, 28.6%% respondents agreed to some extent, 13.2% agreed, while 7.9 % strongly disagreed with the statement and same goes for the respondents who strongly agreed with the above-mentioned statement.

Table 9

Do You Agree that Frequent Use of Instagram Badly Effects the Life of Users?

Values	Responses	%
Strongly Disagree	15	8.2
Disagree	52	28.4
To Some Extent Agree	60	32.8
Agree	37	20.2
Strongly Agree	19	10.4

Table 9 shows that 32.8% respondents agreed to some extent that Instagram badly effects their life, 28.4% disagreed, 20.2% agreed, 10.4% strongly disagreed, while 8.2% respondents strongly disagreed with the above-mentioned statement.

Table 10

Do You Agree that Instagram has Negative Effects on Women?

Values	Responses	%
Strongly Disagree	24	13.1

Values	Responses	%
Disagree	46	25.1
To some Extent Agree	68	37.2
Agree	31	16.9
Strongly Agree	14	7.7

Table 10 illustrates that 37.2% respondents agreed to some extent that Instagram has negative effects on them, 25.1% disagreed, 16.9% agreed, while 13.1% strongly disagreed with the statement and 7.7% respondents strongly agreed that Instagram has negative effects on women.

Discussion

The exclusive analysis of the data revealed that female respondents have overall the age between more than 42% having age of 20 to less than 22 followed by more than 33% have the age 18 to less than 20. As far as the discipline of respondents is concerned, more than 39% female students studying in science subjects followed more than 37% female respondents studying in social sciences. Majority of the female students (20%) of Hazara University studying in 4th semester followed by 16.9% studying in 6th semester.

Data analysis revealed that most respondents, that is, 60% females frequently used Instagram for chatting followed by more than 35% respondents who used Instagram for video and photo uploading purposes. Previous studies reveal that females participate more actively in likes people show to their photos (Chua & Chang, 2016). Similarly, more than 50% of respondents used Instagram for photo and video uploading purposes. Additionally, more than 66% female respondents used Instagram for information and more than 75% used Instagram for entertainment purposes. The empirical analysis of the data supports the second hypothesis, that is, "it is more likely that female students of Hazara University use Instagram for different purposes".

Few previous studies reveal that Instagram influencers use different technique to get the attention of users specially the female users of Instagram (Kubler, 2023). Regarding the usage of Instagram by female respondents, present study analysis revealed that overall, 74% respondents used Instagram frequently followed by more than 33% who used it at night followed by more than 25% who used in the evening. Furthermore, data analysis showed that more than 55% female respondents paid considerable

attention while using Instagram. The empirical analysis supported the third hypothesis, that is, "it is more likely that female students of Hazara University pay considerable attention while using Instagram".

Data tabulation and its exclusive analysis revealed that overall, more than 36% female students used Instagram for uploading a variety of content followed by more than 35% respondents who followed Instagram influencers frequently. While 24% female respondents followed more than 50% Instagram influencers. The exclusive analysis of the data revealed that most female respondents, that is, 20% copied the dresses worn by Instagram influencers followed by more than 22% who did not follow or copy the dresses worn by Instagram influencers on their profiles. The empirical analysis of the data rejected the fourth hypothesis, that is, "it is more likely that female students of Hazara University copy the dresses worn by Instagram influencers".

Data tabulation and its exclusive analysis revealed that the overall majority of female respondents, that is, 38% agreed to some extent that Instagram influencers promote western culture in our society followed by 30% who disagreed with the statement. The empirical analysis of the data supported the fifth hypothesis, that is, "it is more likely that female students of Hazara University think that Instagram influencers promote western culture in our society".

The exclusive analysis of the data revealed that the overall majority of female respondents, that is, 36% disagreed that the frequent use of Instagram badly effects the life of its users. The empirical analysis of the data did not support the sixth hypothesis, that is, "it is more likely that the frequent use of Instagram badly effects the life of its users". The results revealed that female students of Hazara University not only frequently used the Instagram, however, also followed the Instagram influencers. Moreover, they considered that the Instagram influencers promote western culture which negatively impacts our culture and youth. These major findings support the cultivation theory assumptions.

Conclusion

The current study concluded that Instagram is quite popular among the female students of Hazara University. They follow different Instagram influencers and use it for different purposes, such as chatting, video and audio uploading as well as pictures. Moreover, it was also concluded that

Instagram influencers follow western culture and promote it through their profiles. This application is also helpful for its users to know and understand different advancements pertaining to the trends being followed in the world and use them in their daily life.

Recommendations

It is important for policymakers to start awareness campaigns for youth on how to use social media and social media applications, especially Instagram. Content creators may also use such content which is not harmful for the culture of a specific society or country. The academicians and researchers need to conduct thorough researches to understand different social and psychological effects of Instagram on youth.

Conflict of Interest

The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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