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RESEARCH PAPER

Bonding through Attitude Similarity: Quantifying Parasocial Interaction with Instagram Influencers in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examines the connection between Instagram beauty influencers and their Pakistani followers to evaluate the impact on aesthetic standards and psychological well-being. Specifically, the researchers are interested in how Pakistanis react to these influencers' content. Drawing on the Parasocial Interaction Theory and the Social Comparison Theory, the study investigates how followers connect with beauty influencers and how this relationship affects their beauty standards during interpersonal contact. The study also looks at how this relationship influences followers' perceptions of what constitutes attractiveness. Parasocial contact and attitude homophily are being explored as potential elements in the formation of beauty standards. Data were collected from a total of 250 individuals who took part in a survey that was conducted online. The findings indicate that beauty influencers affect the way their followers perceive beauty, while some respondents claimed to have psychological problems as a result.

| **KEYWORDS** | Attitude Homophily, Beauty Influencers, Instagram, Parasocial Interaction |

Introduction

Social media platforms have significantly transformed how individuals communicate, enabling them to interact with influential individuals who produce content within diverse domains. Instagram has become a prominent platform for influencers to establish connections with their followers. Research findings indicate that individuals who follow influencers frequently form intense emotional relationships and experience a perceived sense of closeness through the phenomenon known as parasocial interaction (Muzaffar, et. al. 2019; Horton & Wohl, 1956). This study investigates the significance of attitude likeness in fostering a sense of connection between Instagram influencers and their followers.

According to Chaffey (2016). a rising number of individuals are turning to social media instead of conventional media for guidance, suggestions, and insights. The photo-sharing website Instagram is trendy among people of all ages, especially adolescents and young adults. According to Murthy(2016), they receive quick rewards and disseminate their information by filtering or modifying it. According to Wong (2014), users take advantage of this service to seek the guidance of their friends and acquaintances, members of their families, celebrities, and other influential people. Instagram has seen a meteoric rise in usage among those in the fashion and cosmetics industries. Instagram has garnered a lot of attention among influential people. "Instagram Influencers" are social media platform users with a significant number of followers and a high degree of engagement. These individuals can influence others by the material they make, their

physical attractiveness, and the thoughts they share with others. According to De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders (2017), the success of an influencer depends on the influencer's reputation and the influencer's number of followers.

According to Burke(2017), influencers have experienced the negative repercussions of Instagram's exposure to their personal lives and businesses. These individuals are third-party endorsers who utilize online postings and blogs to influence people's actions and opinions. Individuals participate in parasocial relationships when they think they share anything in common with another person, as stated (Kirvesmies,2018). A person's level of influence may be determined by various characteristics, including credibility, reliability, physical appeal, and the number of people who adhere to their beliefs.

In recent years, social media has exploded for various purposes, including communication with friends and family, the dissemination of material and information, and the delivery of entertainment Jiang & Ngien(2020). According to a study carried out by Belanche, Cenjor & Pérez-Rueda (2019), the fact that Instagram users can upload photos and videos to the platform is one of the primary reasons why Instagram is now the most popular social networking site. According to research carried out by Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez(2020), the most significant engagement can be found on Instagram, and followers of the platform are considered to be the most influential thought leaders. According to Blasco-Lopez, Virto, Manzano, & Delgado (2019), just like any other opinion leader, they have an impact on the ideas and choices that are held by the people who follow them. Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017) People follow them as social media celebrities because they have a more substantial reputation and a sense of trustworthiness. In addition, their adherents have a high appreciation for the ideas and criticisms that they offer. According to Calderaro, Anthony & Clarke (2019). friendships between influencers and those who follow them are formed not via a shared passion for the influencer's cause but through trust and openness.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Instagram influencers portray beauty items and an affluent lifestyle, consequently contributing to the dissemination of an erroneous conception of attractiveness through parasocial contact and a homophobic worldview. As people spend more time on Instagram, they are more likely to engage in unhealthy self-criticism of their looks and constantly compare themselves to others around them. As a direct result, the standard of attractiveness that society upholds evolves. According to Perloff (2014). their fans are unsure of whether or not they are physically appealing and whether or not they have a healthy sense of their worth.

The public's understanding of what constitutes beauty and a healthy body image has been shifted as a direct result of the photographs posted by Instagram influencers. It encourages followers, especially young women, to expend considerable physical and emotional effort to reach the desired body image. As a result, followers have behavioural and psychological disorders as a result of their actions. When followers have steadfast confidence in influencers, this drive to adhere to idealized beauty norms is amplified.

Literature Review

The proliferation of individuals capable of influencing others through their blogs, tweets, images, and videos has experienced a significant surge within social media. Freberg, McGaughey, & Freberg (2011) state these individuals have established themselves as brands, and their followers perceive them as authoritative figures within their respective domains. Horton & Wohl (1956) posit that mass media fosters Parasocial

interaction, fostering solid connections between prominent individuals and their devoted followers. Individuals' emotional attachment and interpersonal relationships with influencers on social media intensify over time due to the continuous enhancements that facilitate user engagement.

In contemporary marketing practices, there is a prevailing trend among marketers to seek out influencers who possess a substantial following. This strategic approach is adopted to expeditiously achieve marketing objectives, as the magnitude of an influencer's follower count has emerged as a symbolic indicator of their credibility and popularity. According to Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi (2010), A potential disparity exists between the number of followers an influencer possesses and their actual level of influence and audience engagement. Instead of emphasizing the numerical count of individuals who follow an influencer, numerous studies have examined the level of engagement these individuals have toward the influencer's content.

Moreover, traditional notions of beauty have historically revolved around a Caucasian woman with an established collection of physical attributes (Levine & Harrison, 2009). Nevertheless, influential people have played a significant role in challenging these societal norms by cultivating a devoted following within a specific community

Abidin(2015) Notably, social media influencers encompass a diverse age demographic, with 40% falling within the category of teenagers and young adults. Extensive research has been conducted on the persuasive capabilities of the subject in question (Kirvesmies, 2018).

In conclusion, the influence exerted by social media influencers may not align with the perception created by their expanding follower base. The ability of individuals to exercise power and establish connections with their dedicated audience is significantly dependent on their authenticity, active engagement, and specialized expertise.

Theoretical Framework

The Parasocial interaction theory suggests that individuals who consume media form emotional connections with one-sided media personalities that still hold significance (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Within the realm of Instagram influencers, this theoretical Framework posits that followers perceive these individuals as symbolic entities, cultivating a sense of familial connection and emotional attachment through consistent exposure to their content. Our hypothesis posits that the level of attitude similarity followers perceive will impact their engagement and sentiment toward influencers.

The concept of Social Comparison Theory was first proposed by Festinger in 1954. This theory elucidates the process through which individuals assess their attitudes and abilities by engaging in comparisons with others. Social media platforms like Instagram allow individuals who follow influencers to engage in upward social comparisons. In this context, followers may emulate the attitudes and behaviors of these influencers, perceiving them as desirable. The level of congruity in attitudes between individuals who follow influencers and the influencers themselves will determine the strength of social comparisons and the extent to which bonding occurs through parasocial interaction.

Material and Methods

The study used a quantitative approach to assess Bonding through Attitude Similarity and Quantifying Parasocial Interaction with Instagram Influencers. The researchers employed a nonprobability sampling approach to gather data from 250 students enrolled at universities in Rawalpindi. However, the researcher's primary focus was analyzing the feedback provided by female participants who are enrolled in universities and belong to the younger demographic. The young ladies were selected based on their status as active users of the Instagram platform.

Variables

Each research has various variables that the researcher defines. These variables' values continuously change but may be measured using a survey. The variables employed in this study are described as follows:

Instagram influencers

An Instagram influencer refers to an individual who has amassed a considerable number of followers on the popular social media platform Instagram and can exert substantial impact and influence over their audience. These individuals who hold power in the digital realm commonly generate and disseminate content about distinct areas of interest, including but not limited to fashion, beauty, fitness, travel, food, and lifestyle. The content produced by individuals on social media platforms often includes a variety of media formats, such as photographs, videos, narratives, and accompanying text that elicit strong responses from their audience. This heightened engagement fosters a loyal and committed group of followers (Lin& Kim,2018).

Instagram usage

The concept of usage of Instagram pertains to the frequency and modality through which people engage with the social media platform known as Instagram. Instagram involves various activities, such as uploading visual media, interacting with other users' content through actions like liking, commenting, and sharing, exploring the Explore page, following other users, utilizing Instagram Stories, and interacting with the platform's messaging functionalities, among other features. (Zhang, Luo, & Nie,2018).

Parasocial interaction

Through parasocial interaction, individuals form a unidirectional psychological bond with media personalities, celebrities, or fictional characters. The phenomenon under consideration occurs when a person develops an emotional attachment and personal investment in someone they have only encountered through media platforms such as television, movies, social media, and other forms of entertainment. The term "parasocial" derives from the prefix "para," which denotes a state of being alongside or one-sided, in contrast to "social" interactions, which involve the participation of two or more people.(Horton, & Wohl ,1956).

Beauty image

The phrase "beauty image" refers to the visual or verbal depiction or portrayal of beauty in various media and circumstances. This can be done in either a visual or verbal manner. It entails depicting physical beauty, aesthetics, or attributes judged attractive by cultural or societal conventions in a way that appeals to the viewer's sense of aesthetics.

Everyone who filled out our survey and was asked why they follow a beauty influencer on Instagram gave us an answer. The variable needed to answer this RQ has been visualized as a bar chart with values derived using a nominal measurement scale.
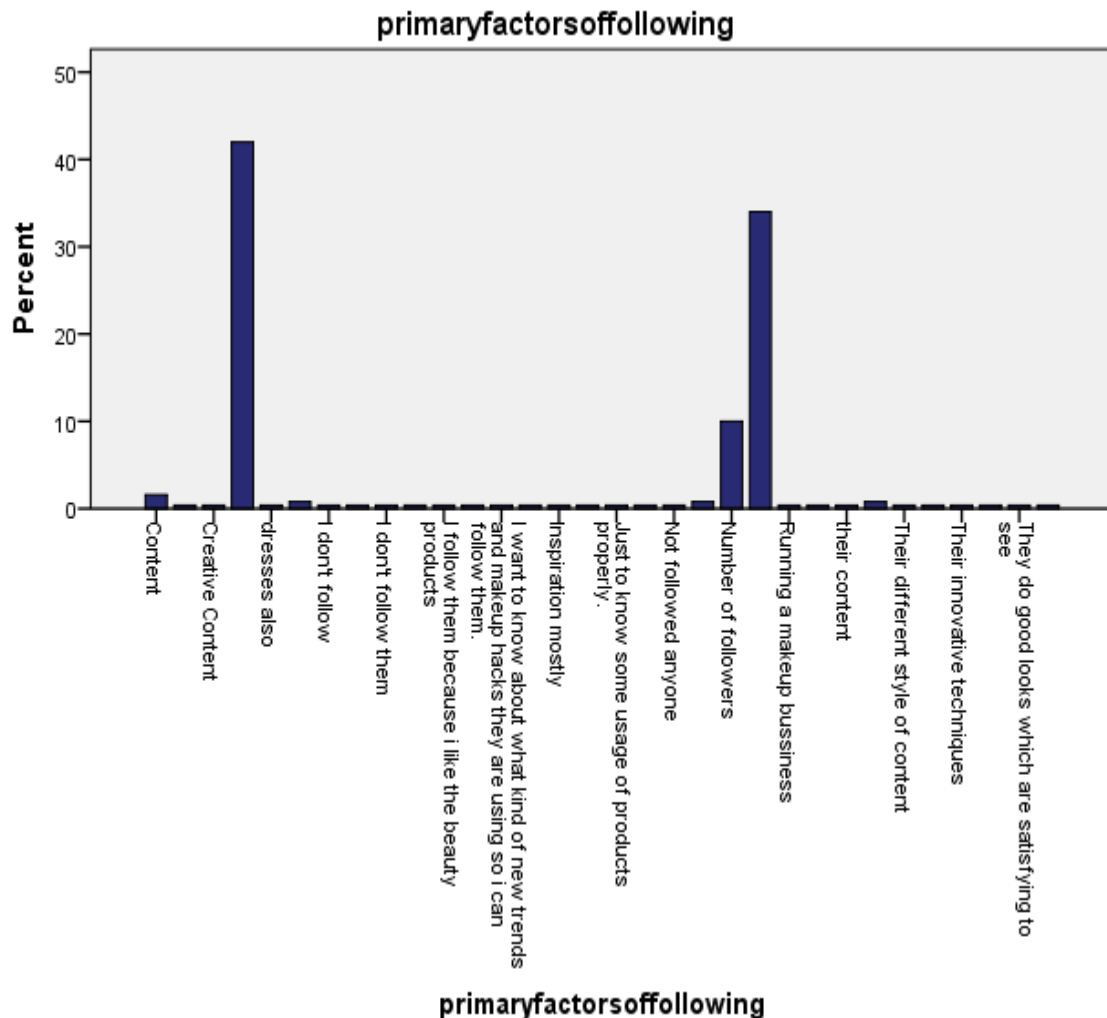

Figure 1: Bar chart of primary factors to Follow Beauty Influencers

The chart displays three bars representing the subject's credibility, number of followers, and physical attractiveness. Consumers follow beauty influencers on Instagram due to their perceived credibility, the magnitude of their follower base, and physical appeal. Upon analyzing the gathered data, it becomes evident that credibility holds paramount significance, constituting over 40% of the overall composition. The selection of candidates was primarily determined by their physical attractiveness, accounting for over 30% of the criteria, while their capacity to adhere to guidelines constituted nearly 10% of the selection process.

Both customers and influencers highly value credibility. The individual in question has gained significant recognition and reputation for their unwavering commitment to honesty and integrity, resulting in widespread familiarity with their name, among others. For individuals creating content, it represents the initial stride toward achieving success. Based on the bar chart, it can be observed that individuals who engage in online purchases and those who actively follow beauty influencers are motivated by a sense of trust towards them. Individuals are actively searching for reliable sources to provide precise and dependable information. The degree of persuasion in a

message is directly correlated with the influencer's credibility level. The persuasiveness of a beauty influencer's content is contingent upon the perception of authenticity by her audience. The attribute of physical attractiveness, which holds the second position in terms of popularity, is also associated with influencers' credibility. When individuals express admiration for the physical attributes of an influencer, they tend to exhibit a greater propensity to embrace the message that she is endeavouring to convey. In social media, individuals tend to place a higher value on aesthetics and charisma rather than on the credibility of the presented content. The primary motivation for individuals to follow Instagram beauty influencers is their physical attractiveness, constituting 9.1% of the total follower base. Ultimately, the extent of an individual's follower count is accountable for 9.9% of the motivations behind individuals choosing to follow beauty influencers. Their number of followers can gauge the efficacy of content producers on social networking platforms. Consequently, followers' perceptions of authenticity and sincerity are modified concerning influencers.

The three dependent variables in our study are found to be associated with the two independent variables, namely attitude homophily and parasocial interaction. Customers who choose to follow Instagram beauty influencers based on their perceived dependability, physical attractiveness, or follower count develop a sense of trust in the content and reviews disseminated by these influencers, as they believe that the information provided by these individuals is reliable and accurate. The characteristics mentioned earlier exemplify how attitude homophily contributes to parasocial interaction, subsequently resulting in consumer body dissatisfaction. Consumers who possess homophilic perspectives are more prone to experiencing dissatisfaction with their physical appearance.

Table 1
Parasocial Interaction and Perceived Physical Attractiveness(beauty standards): A Non-parametric Analysis

			BS	Parasocial
Spearman's rho	BS	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.387**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	250	250
	Parasocial	Correlation Coefficient	.387**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	250	250

**. The correlation exhibits statistical significance at the 0.01 level with a two-tailed test.

There exists a statistically significant correlation between beauty standards and parasocial relationships. The phenomenon of parasocial relationships exerts an influence on the beauty standards embraced by the followers of beauty influencers. The correlation value rho (ρ), or rs, is .387. This value indicates that there is a 39 % relationship between beauty standards and parasocial interaction.

Discussion

Numerous research have examined the effects of social networking on users' physiological, psychological, and social well-being. The researchers set out to learn more about the connections between Instagram beauty influencers and their fans, as well as how those fans are affected by the community's beauty-oriented norms. People's views on beauty are shaped by their constant connection to beauty influencers, even when they know the truth and facts underlying beauty influencers' distorted and filtered

information. We used a non-random, selective selection strategy (250 people) to gather data for this study. Talk about the answers to RQ 1 and understand why people look to Instagram for beauty advice. Research by Romero, Galuba, Asur, & Huberman (2011) Nd Yoganarasimhan (2012) suggests that an influencer's popularity and influence grow in proportion to the size of their fan base. People believe the material posted by Instagram influencers who have a large following. Based on our findings, beauty influencers have considerable credibility among Instagram users. The larger an influencer's audience, the more authority their words carry and the more likely their audience is to embrace their point of view. McGinnis,& Ward (1980) define credibility as the good attributes of a communicator that impact the acceptance of the message being communicated. As previous studies show, credibility increases with the number of people who believe in it. People are more likely to think of an influencer and their work when that person has a sizable fan base. Our research found that the physical attractiveness of beauty influencers was an additional factor in their popularity.it is found that a leader's physical appeal was a significant factor in attracting followers. (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon,2000). People will research an influencer's credentials before they listen to them. The source attractiveness model postulates that a message's efficacy is proportional to the degree to which the intended audience appreciates or is acquainted with the source. These research results show that an influential person with charm is more likely to get their message heard by their followers. The second inquiry concerned the impact of parasocial behaviour on the beauty norms of its participants.

The findings suggest that some followers believe that parasocial interaction affects how they evaluate their attractiveness. The vast majority would disagree. Parasocial contact happens when followers of famous people on social media or in traditional media look up to them as friends or acquaintances, as stated by (Rubin, Perse & Powell,1985). Their connection to the highly regarded internet influencer network has aided their collaboration. Time's parasocial connection has a one-way impact on its devotees. They grow more attractive and assured as their involvement increases. This one-way information exchange, nonetheless, can potentially affect the attitudes and expectations of its target audiences.

Instagram users with many engaged followers are considered influential in the beauty industry. When comparing the impact of our research to the effect of parasocial contact on beauty standards, we find that most people do not feel that the latter has any bearing on their beauty standards. This goes against the findings of Western studies on Pakistan's population. Having friends with similar interests, worldviews, and educational backgrounds makes it easier to strike up conversations(Eyal, & Te'eni-Harari,2013). Instagram celebrities and their fans tend to behave in the same way. People tend to stick with beauty influencers that promote ideas, brands, and services they agree with. If you have a significant following and high credibility, you can more easily persuade your followers to adopt your point of view. Our findings suggest that followers are more interested in beauty influencers' opinions and ideas than their social standing. They might influence the beauty standards of those who follow influential users on Instagram. Beauty influencers on social media may edit and change their photos and videos to promote an inflated self-image (Fardouly, Pinkus, & Vartanian , 2017). The beauty standards of a group of people may be influenced by their exposure to idealized images of those people regularly. According to our findings, the aesthetic standards of Instagram users in Pakistan affected by beauty influencers are changing. Influencers' inflated appearances have led them to believe that only those with flawless skin and proportionate bodies are lovely.

Conclusion

The link between Instagram beauty influencers and the impact on their followers' perceptions of beauty is the focus of this study. The purpose of the study was to identify any relationship between the emotional investment that followers have in the influencers they follow and the development of body dissatisfaction and, by extension, mental health issues. To sum up, the research has shown that people do feel a connection to the beauty influencers they follow, according to the data collected from participants. Even if the content of beauty influencers does not directly lead to body dissatisfaction or mental health issues, it nevertheless has an impact on people's perceptions of beauty, values, and beliefs. The study's authors concluded that the Instagram influencer network significantly affects cultural norms and attitudes. Instagram changes people's views and standards of real beauty because it mostly consists of visual and video content. Our findings indicate that these individuals' perceptions of true beauty have been significantly impacted by the beauty influencers they follow, even if these influencers have not directly led them to feel unhappy with their bodies or develop psychiatric issues.

Recommendations

The recommendation for future research is to Incorporate comprehensive qualitative analysis to supplement quantitative data. To enhance comprehension of the subjective experiences and motives that drive individuals to establish parasocial ties, it is recommended to carry out interviews or focus groups with Instagram users residing in Pakistan.

Examine the influence of socioeconomic variables on parasocial contacts and attitude similarity. Examine the ways in which urbanization, income, education, and education affect the characteristics and intensity of these ties.

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