

Study of Narcissism through Instagram Influencers

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Abstract:- The use of social networking sites and especially Instagram use has grown rapidly. Saying this, anew breed of narcissism is practiced/seen in social media influencers. The new features introduced by Instagram has only facilitated Narcissism. The present study focuses on how the social media influencer affects its users and promotes traits of Narcissism and how various Instagram features like reels, story, filters have become an everyday aspect of the users.

Keywords:- Narcissism, Social Media, Instagram, Influencers, Content Creators.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media now plays a crucial role in every aspect of human life. Through pictures, images, and videos, it is simple to access a wide range of content on the internet. Through displaying glamorous lifestyles, flattering self-pictures, and an endless supply of self-love quotes, this new technology of daily life has created new standards for how people present themselves online, which have served as the foundation for a new category of celebrity known as "influencers" Although people use social media for a variety of purposes, some people use it for self-improvement and to display an idealized version of themselves. This is where personality traits like narcissism may come into play, especially since those who have high levels of the trait have a history of exaggerating desirable traits. They may utilize the internet for extensive sorts of self-enhancement because they have overly positive perceptions of themselves.

The term "narcissism" has many different meanings, ranging from the casual insult to a personality trait that seems to permeate all of a person's behaviors to a full-blown personality disorder. Social media influencers and Instagram to an extent play a vital role in developing narcissistic traits among its followers. Features of Instagram like reels, story sharing, etc have facilitated more to the spreading fire. The extravagant life style, filters, destinations, continuous updating their lives and most importantly their views and opinions have influenced the users. Through this study will see how influencers on Instagram affect the users and showcase Narcissistic traits.

➤ Objectives

- To understand Socio Cultural impacts of influencers on the respondents.

- To understand Psychological and behavioral impacts of influencer on respondents.
- To find how Instagram features facilitate Narcissism.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

➤ History

The history of Instagram began in the year 2009. One of Instagram co - creators Kevin Systrom had the idea of developing a location based mobile check in app with a photo sharing feature. So initially he named it 'Burbn'. In March 2010, he showed his venture to two capitalists and after two weeks it secured an amount of 500,000 \$ to build a team and develop the app. The first person who joined the app was Mike Krieger, his friend from Stanford University. They decided to redesign the Burbn app which could share photos with liking and commenting functions. So, they named it 'Instagram' a fusion of 'instant ' and 'Telegram '(Heidi Lang 2023).

➤ History of Instagram Logo

It began with a vintage inspired image of a Polaroid camera. However, in 2010 - 2011 it changed to a 1950s Bell & Howell Camera. 2011 - 2016, it got a subtle update with the top portion having a leathery texture and a short form 'Insta'. 2016 - 2022 , the initial design has gradient of colours from blue to pink orange and yellow. A smaller, curved white square sits inside, with a white circle in the middle representing the camera lens. A white bar is positioned in the top right above the shutter to express the viewfinder (Heidi Lang 2023).

➤ History of Instagram's Growth in User Numbers

October 6, 2010: Instagram registered more than 25,000 users on the first day of launch. More than 100,000 users signed up within the first week.

- December 12, 2010: Instagram surpassed 1 million registered accounts.
- June 2011: Instagram's monthly active users grew to 5 million. September 2011: Instagram's monthly active users reached 10 million.
- April 3, 2012: Instagram was downloaded more than 1 million times in less than a day after it became available for Android.
- April 9, 2012: Facebook acquired the platform for approximately US\$1 billion in cash and stock. April 30, 2012: Instagram's monthly active users reached 50 million.

- February 2013: Instagram's monthly active users reached 100 million. September 2013: Instagram's monthly active users grew to 150 million. March 2014: Instagram's monthly active users reached 200 million.
- December 2014: Instagram's monthly active users reached 300 million. September 2015: Instagram's monthly active users grew to 400 million. June 2016: Instagram's monthly active users reached more than 500 million.
- December 2016: Instagram's monthly active users reached more than 600 million. June 2018: Instagram's monthly active users breached the 1 billion mark.
- December 2021: Instagram hit 2 billion monthly active users, exceeding the projected 1.44 billion monthly active users by 2025.

➤ *Different Features on Instagram*

• *Instagram Stories*

The Instagram story feature began on August 2, 2016 . It was an exact copy of Snapchat stories, said the Instagram CEO, Kevin Systrom. It allowed users to post photo and videos which would disappear in 24 hours. The next thing which came was the creation of story highlights, where users could curate their stories on their profile. 500 million people use Instagram stories every day. (Kicksta, February 2 2023).

• *Instagram Reels*

This feature was introduced in the year 2020 and is very similar to the Tiktoks short video concept. It was a new way to create and discover short entertaining videos on Instagram. Users can record, edit videos and also chose song from Instagram library. You can also speed up or slow down videos or audio.

• *Instagram Live Video*

This feature enables Instagram users to stream video in real time. It helps the users to communicate directly with their followers and engage comments and reactions. As soon as the users broadcast a live video on their Instagram account the followers will get a notification to join the live broadcast.

• *Geo - Tagged Content*

This Instagram feature allow users to tag a physical location to your content. Before posting a post or story, it will take you the location library that helps the users to tag the location they are in.

• *Instagram Hashtag*

Hashtags are one of the most popular Instagram features. It is a form of a string of words and symbols. Users use this string in the post caption. This feature links all the posts that have the same tag, so when someone clicks on it, they'll be taken to that page.

• *Instagram TV (IGTV)*

IGTV allows users to upload long videos. These videos are found in the explore page. The videos are displayed based in the activities and interest. This feature helps Social Influencers for sharing their vlogs, online business,

promotions etc.

➤ *Social Media Influencers*

There has been an increase in the growth of Instagram users over a period of time. The projected number of social media users in ,2023 is 4.89 billion which shows a ,6.5% rise from the previous year(Werner Geysler). Social media influencer are people who have built reputation on their knowledge and expertise in a specific topic/field. They have regular post about that topic on their Instagram or any other Social Media app. They have a large following of people who have a liking or interest in that topic or Influencer. Recently, various brands have started using these Influencersto promote their products.

➤ *Types of Influencers*

➤ *Mega Influencer:*

People who have large number of followers on their social networks. These include movie stars, sportspeople, musicians and television stars.

➤ *Macro Influencers:*

They come below the mega Influencers. The range of their followers are Between 500,000 to 1 million. These include B class celebrities who haven't made big or they are successful online experts. These influencers are easy to afford if a company is looking to promote their products.

➤ *Micro Influencers:*

These are ordinary/ everyday people known for their knowledge. They have followers ranging from 10,000 to 50,000. Various brands play an important role in their growth as these influencers are easy to contact/ reach to.

➤ *Types of Content Creator's*

• *Bloggers:*

This has been connected to Influencer for some time now. There has been a growth in this specific field. Many bloggers have built up sizeable followers in various fields like finance, personality development, health, skin care etc. If a blog is influential then it is paid for promoting various products and help grow his followers and their business.

• *Youtubers:*

The next popular content is YouTube. Each video maker has their own channel. They have been called as Content Creator's. After reaching a certain number of subscribers they are paid by YouTube.

• *Podcasters:*

This is relatively a growing online content gaining popularity. Various personalities come up and speak it's like an interview on various topics. Some podcasters focus on specific topic and some on general. Ranveer Allahbadia , comes under this type of social influencer.

➤ *The Rise of the Social Media Influencer*

A social media influencer is exactly someone who has a significant influence over its followers , however the

influence can vary some have millions of followers while some thousand. But they have power over their followers like purchasing behaviour, thinking and even beliefs. They can easily manipulate them into buying unnecessary products, adopt inimical values and can make them obsessively materialistic. From a marketing perspective this notion has been around over a century. To use an individual for business to influence potential takes us back to hundred years. Example, Fatty Arbuckle was encouraging potential customers to smoke Murad Cigarettes in 1905 and Nancy Green was the face of Aunt Jemima pancake mix in 1893. A professor of marketing at Point Loma Nazarene University states that, social media influencing is simply an extension of what companies have done for a long time it's just the tools have changed (Michael Wiese).

Major brands have been employing social media influencers to expand their marketing reach. A company named Estee Lauder stated that their 30 to 50% budget goes to funding Social Media Influencers. There is an increase in social media Influencers, from 2015 it has grown from 190 to 740 reaching a \$6.5 billion market. The major difference that influencers market is growing because today there is authenticity and familiarity that can be conveyed to customers. Example, Virat Kohli using a certain brand and his followers seeing it on Instagram, but this is not always the most effective way. Now it will be more relatable if they hear from a non-established influencer, firstly because they connect to them and a simplicity and trust factor comes in because they think they are just like them. This means a teenage girl who will take advice from a fellow teenage girl who has the wisdom knowledge and authenticity. These influencers are micro influencers, not established yet having few followers which means they are authentic and real.

III. NARCISSISM

The meaning of the term Narcissism is, excessive interest in oneself and one's physical appearance. Narcissus was a fictional character in Greek mythology, he is considered to be the man who fell in love with his own reflection. Echo fell in love with Narcissus got rejected by him but still longed for him. One day while hunting Narcissus saw his reflection and in the pool and refused to leave it. In the end he declared that he and his reflection would die as one.

➤ *How Do we Understand Narcissism Today?*

The story discussed above remains true in today's time as a Personality trait. Narcissism is self-importance and self-absorption if occur on a high spectrum will lead to narcissistic personality disorder. According to Diagnostic and statistical Manual of mental disorders 5th edition (DSM - 5), a sense of grandiosity is one of the hallmarks of narcissistic personality disorder.

➤ *Social Media Influencers Score High on Narcissism*

In the December issue of computers in Human behaviour researchers Antonia Erz, Ben Marder and Elena Osadchaya of the Copenhagen Business school Identified what drives social media influencer to use hashtags and other things for self-promotion (Adam Earnheardt). The team found

that they were heavy hashtag users and also the Influencers had high followers but they didn't follow any other in return. This study showed that Influencers were high on narcissism, extraversion and self-monitoring traits. The Influencer spent most of the time looking at themselves and how others saw them. They also found that in the last few years there has been an increase in the Influencer culture who use social media for the sake of broadcasting themselves.

➤ *Case Study*

Kanika Batra, miss world Australia finalist opened up about her narcissistic personality disorder. She said that she relies on others, 180,000 followers on Instagram to boost her self-worth, but if she doesn't receive that validation, it affects her well-being. ' When I receive positive comments it's wonderful and I feel them but they don't tend to stay with me they are fleeting, Kanika told this in an interview. She also stated that insults really hurt her more than she can explain. She said that she is used to external validation, I don't know how to produce internal validation. This led to the development of disorder she lacks empathy, guilt or remorse. In an interview she revealed that she cheated in three of her relationships and didn't feel guilty. Ms. Batra after seeing a psychiatrist said that she managed to unlearn all of this and became more self-aware.

➤ *Government Asks Health Influencers to Display Qualification*

The government is asking those influencers to show qualification who promote brands or Products related to health care and wellness. Rohit Kumar Singh, secretary to the department of consumer affairs told in an interview that qualification should be visibly seen. If you are saying that this food is good or bad that this medicine is okay, then you should be qualified if you are not then it's misleading. He also stated that Influencers are young people and all they want is revenue. We don't want to interfere but it is the consumer who will get affected by this

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of this research is exploratory and qualitative. A thorough analysis of available literature on the above-mentioned objectives will be conducted this will include statistical data about the respondents who are an active Instagram user. Qualitative methods of primary data will be applied to understand the impact of influencers on their users.

➤ *Research Methodology*

Sampling: Snowball sampling method will be used; it is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects. Questionnaire: The tool for collecting primary data would be questionnaire, it is a list of questions which is used to gather data from respondents about their attitudes, experiences and opinions regarding their usage of online dating services. The data has been collected from 25 participants, who are actively using Instagram.

V. PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS

A survey form/questionnaire was used with the aim of collecting the primary data in the form of experiences of users of Instagram. The questions focus on the everyday patterns of usage, and try to bring out some unconscious and internalized narcissistic tendencies among the users that the application facilitates through its various features and through Instagram influencer, content creators, and self-proclaimed gurus. 25 people, within the age range of 17 to 28 participated in the survey. 60% (15) of the respondents identified as females and 40% (10) identified themselves as males.

Majority of the respondents claimed to spend 2 to 4 hours on the application. Some of the participants confessed to spending 6 hours to an entire day on Instagram. A lot of factors contribute to the amount of time spent on the application. Some studies have concluded that the introduction of reels and story feature on Instagram has led to a significant rise in the time spent on the app. It is observed that most of the content creators on Instagram use these two features the most. This implies an explicit connection between the time spent on the app and content creators/influencers.

In the survey form, when asked if the respondent frequently checks the Stories and Updates of the influencers they follow on Instagram, 80% of the respondents said either Always or Sometimes and only 20% said never. Instagram influencers are popularly known for giving constant updates about their lives through various features of Instagram like Stories, Live, Posts etc. This can be seen as a common trait of narcissism. To assess the replication of this trait among the content consumers on Instagram, the question: "Have you developed the habit of constantly updating people about yourself through Instagram Stories, Posts, and Live feature?" was asked, 32% of the participants responded with Sometimes and 68% with Never.

This connection was further explored by asking the question- What kind of content people consume the most on Instagram. It was found that 60% of the respondents followed health and wellness influencers on Instagram. Another major category of content consumption was "Pictures and updates of celebrities, followed by "Lifestyle influencers", "Travel vloggers", "Food reviewers/bloggers", "Fashion influencers", "Spiritual gurus and motivational speakers", and "Family vloggers". All of these categories can be considered personal in nature. These categories, in one way or another, reveal the lives of the content creators to the audience. This can lead to a sense of comparison, dissatisfaction, frustration, and anxiety among the general consumers of this type of content as having a platform and having an audience gives the content creator the power to decide and promote what is desirable, what fits the aesthetic standard and what is normal. When asked if the participants of the survey see themselves following the aesthetic lifestyle that Instagram influencers follow and promote, 44% of the participants said Yes or Maybe. But in the question, "Have you ever felt disappointment or frustration because of your inability to follow the lifestyle of influencers?", only 12% of the respondents said Maybe.

In the survey form, it was observed that, very few people followed categories like "Book reviews", "News", and "Memes", which can be considered impersonal in nature.

In recent times, there has been a trend where most of the influencers diverge from their main field and excessive share about their personal lives, worldviews and ideologies they follow.

In the survey form, to the question : "Do you tend to have similar worldviews and opinions or follow similar ideologies as the influencers you follow?", 80% of the respondents said Yes or Maybe. When asked if the content creators influence their thoughts and opinions, 88% of the respondents said Always or Sometimes.

To check if this trend of expressing one's opinion on everything (as an aspect of narcissism) gets transferred from the influencers to the audience, the question "Do you feel the need to express your views/opinions on things happening in the world through social media? Do you feel the need to be heard?" was asked. 60% of the participants said Always or Sometimes.

Having established that the majority of the respondents follow health and wellness influencers, when asked if the influencers they follow have expertise or any qualification in their fields, 40% of the respondents said either No or Not aware and the rest 60% said Yes.

Recently, there has been a lot of debates and discussions on this issue. The risks of taking advice on issues like health and wellness (which includes mental health, physical fitness, pre and post-natal care, and a lot of issues that require intervention by certified and qualified professionals) are abundant. Along with this, there is a one size fits all kind of approach promoted by these influencers when they give advice which can put their audience in serious danger. There is also lack of accountability.

Instagram influencers become influencers because of their large audience, big number of followers. They care about retaining this followership and this status. A general user of the application shouldn't technically be concerned about the number of followers they have or the number of likes, views and comments they get. A transference of this concern implies the transference of narcissistic tendencies. 84% of the participants said that they check the number of views and reactions on their stories and posts immediately after uploading it. They also claimed to check their post immediately after uploading it to see how it would look to their followers. 20% of the participants also admitted to asking their friends to like, share and comment on their posts. 12% of the respondents said that they have accepted random follow requests on their account with the hope of increasing their follower count. And 52% of the participants have changed their privacy settings from a private to public account on Instagram, characteristic to the accounts of influencers who hope to get more attention and followers through this feature. Although, when it came to directly admitting if number of followers and likes matter to the

respondents, only 12% said Yes or Maybe.

It is commonly seen that the Instagram influencers care about the way they appear to the audience. Most of the pictures of themselves they upload are heavily edited. There can be a lot of reasons behind this- Health and Beauty influencers have to look fit and beautiful in all their posts in order to run their businesses, it is observed that posts capturing one's face/body gets them more likes and comments, some of the influencers have often discussed how they have to look at themselves continuously for long periods of time while editing a video or reel and this has led to them observing minute "imperfections" in their faces and bodies which they can't resist "correcting" (Beauty influencer @mypawfectfamily), comments on their posts might make an influencer more conscious about their appearance etc. All of these reasons give birth to narcissistic tendencies in Influencers. This narcissistic over obsession over one's self image, strive for perfection, sets beauty standards in the society. In the question : " Do you compare your physical appearance with that of influencer?", 36% of the survey respondents said Always or Sometimes. And when asked if they use similar filters and editing tools as Instagram influencers, 20% said Yes.

Along with this, 56% of the respondents admitted to using the same angles and poses as influencers while clicking their own pictures. And 44% said that they tend to follow the fashion/style of Instagram influencers when it comes to clothing, hair, accessories, shoes etc. Content creators usually talk in a peculiar way. The motive behind this might be to stand out, draw attention, or appear funny. There is an over expression of normal human emotions on screen may be to make up for the fact that it is virtual and not real after all. There are a lot of psychological studies that show how we unknowingly emulate what is being shown to us (Bobo doll experiment). Copying of mannerisms of influencers can mean feeling what they are feeling on a bigger scale as a result of their exaggerated forms of expression. 40% of the respondents have agreed to this. Therefore, the influencers have a social and psychological impact on their audience and along with the features of Instagram, perpetuate narcissistic tendencies.

VI. CONCLUSION

After the primary data analysis and a thorough review of the existing literature, we can conclude that the objectives that we set out with have been explored in a scientific manner. The need of users of Instagram to be heard, the congruency between their world views and ideologies and the opinions of Instagram influencers (established through primary data analysis), reveals the social and cultural impacts that the Instagram influencers and content creators have on their audience, and a transmission of narcissistic trait where one feels that their voice and views are crucial and fundamental to any discourse. This attitude creates a rigidity, where one believes that they are right, as after broadcasting one's views to the public, it becomes extremely difficult to take back those views, accept criticism, and take accountability. This has the potential of creating a divide and generating hostility or

polarization between people which is ironic because the popular main aim of social media was to connect people and bring them closer irrespective of their geographic distances. Another social impact of the perpetuation of narcissistic traits by Instagram influencers is the habit of giving unsolicited and unqualified advice on serious issues like health and wellness. Belief in one's ability to guide people irrespective of any experience or qualification is a classic narcissistic trait. A replication of this trait by the consumers of this content can put people in serious danger. When it comes to psychological impacts, the traits of narcissism get transferred from the influencers to the audience in the form of showing unhealthy concern about one's physical appearance, usage of editing tools and filters to "correct" pictures. Along with this, the influencers set standards of what is normal, desirable, and good. This can create a sense of dissatisfaction, comparison, frustration, and anxiety in people when their expectations are not met. In its serious manifestations, it can lead to body image issues, eating disorders, body dysmorphic tendencies, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Lastly, it was shown how different features of Instagram promote this perpetuation of Narcissism.

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