Mindful Consumption: Utilising Instagram to Understand Influencer Marketing in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The significance of mindfulness in the digital age is increasing, as digital stimuli can elicit sensations of separation. Mindfulness entails complete concentration and awareness of thoughts, emotions, and surroundings devoid of judgemental biases. This study investigates the effects of exposure to influencer content on emotional well-being, self-esteem, body image, and disclosure practices in influencer marketing. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews with Instagram users in Kerala and Cochin. The study aims to assess the advantages of mindfulness as a mitigating element.

Keywords: *Influencer marketing, mindfulness, Instagram, social media, well-being, self-esteem, body image, sponsored content.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has established itself as the major medium for human interaction. The use of the social networking channels for communication has seen a significant increase, which resulted in the formation of a digital network society (Castells, 2002). Instagram, as one of the highly preferred social media platform, shows an impressive level of acceptance among adolescents. In accordance with the information gathered, by the end of 2020 this photo sharing app possessed the third place in terms of acceptance as a form of social media among adolescents in the United States (*Global Instagram User Age & Gender Distribution 2023 | Statista*, 2023). Instagram's early emphasis on private photo sharing has undergone substantial changes over the years, especially after its takeover by Facebook. In the meantime, businesses eventually realised the possibility of Instagram for their marketing activities.

After understanding the opportunities provided by Instagram, marketers immediately realised the potential associated with influencer marketing. The psychology of the influence depends upon the idea that humans are prone to persuading. Influence happens often unknowingly. As people aren't aware that they are being influenced, it is successful. Although wanting to differentiate oneself from others, they also wish for the feeling of belonging. People feel more confident if they choose the choices they think that are widely made by other people, or that they think they fit in (Grin, 2023). At this moment, the idea of mindfulness is playing a great role. The concept behind it is simple, it means a person's intellectual ability is entirely concentrated on what is happening at the moment, the person is clearly conscious of what their actions are and in which surroundings they are. Mindfulness can be defined as "an essential human capability to be completely in the moment, mindful of wherever we are and what we are up to and not being over reactive or over powered by what is taking place around us" (Kearney et al., 2018).

The major objectives of this research are :

- To examine the outcome of viewing influencer material on one's well- being, self-esteem and body image, and to investigate whether mindfulness has reduced negative effects and paved the way for better online experiences.
- To understand the effectiveness of disclosure practices in influencer marketing, also the significance of mindfulness in understanding user's comprehension and evaluation of sponsored content.

This study examines the impact of influencer content on self-esteem and body image inside social networking platforms. It examines the function of mindfulness in managing this relationship. The research employs both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, incorporating a structured questionnaire survey of Kerala inhabitants and semi-structured interviews with youngsters in Kochi. The research aims to elucidate the influence of exposure to influencer content, the significance of disclosure practices, and the effects of mindfulness on online interactions.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Mindfulness

The idea of mindfulness has been both ethically and empirically connected with mental wellness. The different elements of mindfulness include, specifically the cultivation of consciousness of and acceptance of one's interactions in the moment without passing judgement, are considered as potentially efficacious solutions for prevalent manifestations of psychological distress. These include rumination, anxiety, worry, fear, anger, and similar afflictions, which often entail maladaptive inclinations to evade, suppress, or excessively engage with distressing thoughts and emotions (Hayes & Feldman, 2004). Mindful awareness encompasses three fundamental characteristics: purpose, existence, and acknowledgement. The practice of mindfulness entails the deliberate and purposeful act of directing one's attention, as opposed to allowing it to wander aimlessly. Mindfulness entails the state of complete involvement and attentiveness to the current moment. The cognitive processes that involve thoughts on the past and projections into the future are acknowledged as mental phenomena that manifest in the current moment. Mindfulness entails adopting a non-judgmental stance towards any phenomena that emerge in the present moment. This implies that sensations, ideas, and emotions are not evaluated in terms of their moral or aesthetic value; rather, they are merely acknowledged as occurrences and watched until they eventually dissipate (Naik et al., 2013). Mindfulness skills encompass potent mental health techniques that have their origins in Buddhist teachings and Eastern philosophical traditions. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the practise of mindfulness exhibits potential in mitigating stress levels, addressing symptoms of anxiety, and alleviating the effects of depression (*Mindfulness Skills: Use These to Boost Your Health and Well-being*, n.d.). The concept of mindfulness was initially introduced by T. W. Rhys Davids, a prominent Buddhist scholar, during the early 1900s (*Mindfulness - the Origin of the Word Mindfulness - Všímej Si*, 2022). Mindfulness entails the objective evaluation of one's thoughts or the present moment. This also pertains to the realm of social media. It is imperative to use objectivity while evaluating the veracity of content encountered on social media platforms, as not all information presented therein can be regarded as authentic or reliable. This might be a particular challenge when the content is driven by emotions (Bhullar, 2022).

2.2. Influencer Content

The term "influencer" denotes an individual who possesses the capacity to impact the consumer choices of others due to their authoritative status, expertise, position, or rapport with their audience (Freberg et al., 2011). According to Duffy (2020), social media influencers can be characterised as a prominent group of digital content providers who possess a significant number of followers, exhibit a unique brand persona, and maintain a consistent association with commercial sponsors. In the realm of social media, influencers establish collaborative relationships with brands in order to endorse and publicise their products or services to their respective audience base. This may encompass sponsored content, evaluations of products, and many forms of collaborative efforts (*What Is an Influencer? | Later Social Media Glossary*, n.d.). The influential person serves as a reliable and authoritative figure within their community, actively fostering engagement and interaction with their audience. Audiences seek inspiration and knowledge from influencers, which encompasses their buying suggestions. According to Grin (2023b), material developed by influencers can provide increased brand visibility inside a market that is already heavily crowded. They disseminate information to their audience regarding novel items, recent advancements, and even timely news updates. In contrast to advertising, which are intended to provide information, the content generated by individual influencers is perceived as authentic and reliable (The Role of Social Media Influencers, n.d.). In the age of technology, influencer content is becoming more and more popular as people earn following and influence on social media platforms (Tatari & Sadagheyani, 2020). Many influential people have achieved success by endorsing mindfulness and stressing the value of mental health and self-care (Et al., Bunevičienė, 2021). They inspire their followers to practise mindfulness in their daily lives by sharing personal stories, strategies, and advice on various platforms (Ulvi and others, 2022). Influencers that integrate mindfulness techniques into their work aim to encourage people to discover moments of calm and awareness amid the hustle and bustle of contemporary life Groves (2016).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, collecting data through a questionnaire survey and personal interviews. The purposive sampling technique focused on Instagram users in Kerala, with a sample size of 135 participants. The questionnaire included binary, Likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. The research aimed to examine the impact of influencer content on body image, self-esteem, and overall well-being. In this study for objective one ,the independent variable is exposure to influencer content and dependent variables are well-being, self-esteem and body image and for the second objective the independent variable is influencer marketing disclosure guidelines and dependent variables are the comprehension of sponsored content by consumers and the impression of sponsored content among consumers.A statistical analysis has been conducted to determine the significance. Additionally, semi-structured personal interviews were conducted among the youth of Kochi to understand their perception of mindful consumption of influencer's content for better online experiences.

3.1. Theoretical framework

3.1.1. Social Comparison Theory

As stated by Gerber (2020), the topic of social comparison has been a continuously important area of research in the field of social and personal psychology since 1954. Social comparison is a frequently observed behavioural strategy utilised by individuals to enhance their understanding of their own position in terms of abilities, beliefs, emotional reactions, and other pertinent factors, by engaging in comparisons with others. Social comparison theory is a behavioural idea that describes how people assess themselves with regard to comparison to other people (Turner, 1975). In the context of influencer content, individuals often engage in the practice of comparing their personal well-being, self-esteem, and body image to the idealised portrayals propagated by influencers. The inclination towards making comparisons has the potential to provide unfavourable outcomes. Brands partner with influencers as they recognise that consumers look to them as a guide for patterns, choices in lifestyles, and purchasing habits (Wu et al., 2022). Individuals may compare oneself to influencers whom they think to have better qualities or lives in an upward social comparison (Gupta, 2021). This can inspire and motivate people as well as cause feelings of inferiority. In addition, followers may participate in downward social comparison, which raises their self-esteem by comparing oneself to people they consider to be less successful or fortunate (Muller, 2021).

3.1.2. Uses and Gratification theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) holds a prominent position within the realm of communication research due to its significant influence. Since the 1940s, this theory has served as a theoretical framework for examining the motivations of viewers in utilising various media platforms and emerging technologies, including television, radio, the internet, and mobile phones. In contemporary times, the aforementioned idea has been employed to elucidate the underlying motivations behind individuals utilisation of social media platforms. According to Henry Stewart Publications (n.d.), many studies have identified social requirements, informational needs, entertainment needs, and psychological needs as key motivators for individuals' engagement with social media.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is an academic concept that aims to understand the reasons and strategies employed by humans in actively seeking out various media in order to satisfy particular needs. Based on this theoretical framework, humans are characterised as proactive consumers of media who are motivated by their desire to satisfy specific needs through the process of media choosing. Media consumption has changed, with people seeking out information that speaks to their views and areas of interest (Ruggiero, 2013). The Uses and Gratification Theory, which believes that individuals select content that will satisfy their particular wants and desires, is based on this change in behaviour. Influencers are now important players in deciding the tastes and behaviours of consumers. Influencers can impact consumer choices and brand perceptions by producing content that speaks to their audience (Žák & Hasprová, 2020). But as people get more conscious of the media they consume, they are looking to influencers for honesty and genuineness (Wellman and others, 2020).The demand for sincere, moral content that adds value rather than just pushing goods has increased as a result of this trend (McKane, 2020). This concept can be employed to understand the underlying motivations of those who actively engage with influencer content, as well as the gratifications they derive from such engagement. Furthermore, this research provides significant insights into the possible influence of mindfulness practises on the gratifications sought and obtained from influencer content, hence contributing to the development of better online experiences.

3.2. Hypothesis

H1: The extent of people's exposure to influencer content has an impact on their well-being.

H2: The extent of consumers exposure to influencer content has a substantial effect on their self-esteem.

H3:The extent of users exposure to influencer content has an important effect on their judgements of body image.

H4: The comprehension and interpretation of sponsored content by consumers are impacted by the implementation of transparent and easily noticeable disclosure practises within the realm of influencer marketing.

H5: Transparent and authentic disclosure practises influence consumers trust in influencers, resulting in more favourable perceptions of sponsored content.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data indicates that 69.6% of participants are female, whilst 30.4% are male. Most respondents are between the ages of 26 and 35, comprising 76.3% of the total. The remaining respondents are aged 36-45 and 46-55, comprising 5.9% and 7%, respectively.The majority of participants possess postgraduate degrees or above, are employed in the private sector, and comprise students, self-employed individuals, business professionals, government employees, and a limited number from other sectors. All participants in the study reported using Instagram, with a majority of individuals (50.4%) indicating that they spend more than two hours on the platform. The survey indicated that 92.6% of the public is cognisant of influencer marketing, with 39% following 4-6 influencers, 34% following 11 or more, and 33% following 7-10 influencers. 58.5% engage with influencer content for under one hour, whilst 34% dedicate one to two hours. The majority interact with content

related to cuisine, beauty, fashion, fitness, travel, and technology, primarily for informational purposes.

When queried about their emotional responses to influencer content, 45.9% of respondents indicated the absence of anxiety, stress, or unhappiness, while 42.2% expressed a conditional response dependent on the specific content. Only 11.9% acknowledged experiencing such negative emotions. These findings suggest that cultivating mindfulness contributes to a more positive and beneficial online experience.

Table 1 - Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.693ª	12	.009
Likelihood Ratio	26.643	12	.009
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 8 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .64.

A cross-tabulation was conducted to analyse the potential impact of consuming influencer content on overall well-being. The number of social media influencers followed was assessed using the chi-square test, yielding a calculated value of 0.009, which is below the significance level of 0.05. The significance of our hypothesis 1, H(1), has been established, demonstrating that the extent of people' exposure to influencer content has an obvious effect on their overall well-being.A majority of respondents, 46.7%, showed unfavourable sentiments about comparing their looks or lifestyle to that of an influencer, suggesting that conscious consumption improves the online experience.

If yes, how has it affected your self-esteem?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Boosted self esteem	9	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Increased self consciousness	11	8.1	8.1	14.8
	Mixed impact	47	34.8	34.8	49.6
	Negative impact	5	3.7	3.7	53.3
	No effect	63	46.7	46.7	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

(Table 2 source – primary data)

Based on the findings shown in Table 2, it is evident that there is no discernible detrimental impact on individuals' self-esteem when they are exposed to influencer content. Specifically, this category of content accounts for 46.7% of the overall sample. The mixed impact is quantified at 37.8%. The findings indicate a notable 8.1% rise in self-consciousness and a 6.7% increase in self-esteem. The outcome of this research provide additional evidence for the significant impact of actively engaging with influencer content while maintaining a state of consciousness.

Table 3- Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.303ª	20	.040
Likelihood Ratio	33.727	20	.028
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 21 cells (70.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.

The cross-tabulation analysis was done to investigate the relationship between exposure to influencer content and its impact on self-esteem, specifically investigating the reasons for following these influencers. The chi-square test was employed to assess the association, resulting in a calculated value of 0.040. This value falls below the predetermined significance level of 0.05. Therefore, it may be concluded that there is statistical significance in demonstrating that the extent of consumers' exposure to influencer content has a substantial effect on their self-esteem, thus supporting hypothesis H(2).

Have you ever felt compelled to follow specific body ideals or trends encouraged by influencers?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Depends	38	28.1	28.1	28.1
	No	91	67.4	67.4	95.6
	Yes	6	4.4	4.4	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

(Table 4 source – primary data)

When queried about whether they experienced a sense of compulsion to conform to particular body ideals or trends promoted by influencers. A majority of respondents, specifically 67.4%, expressed a no , while 28.1% indicated a conditional stance, and an only 4.4% provided a yes answer. Furthermore, it is imperative to examine the underlying factors contributing to the observed 4.4% statistic. Some individuals engage in beauty segments and workout activities for various reasons. Additionally, based on this research, it can be inferred that practising mindful consumption contributes to an improved online experience.

Table 5- Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.979[a]	12	.020
Likelihood Ratio	23.062	12	.027
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 8 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .86.

A cross-tabulation analysis was conducted to find out the relationship between the influence of influencer material on body image judgements or perceptions and the number of influencers followed on social networking platforms. The statistical significance of this relationship was assessed using a chi-square test, yielding a p-value of .020, which is below the conventional threshold of .05. Therefore, we are able to demonstrate its statistical significance. Therefore, it has been proven that the extent of users exposure to influencer content, given as H(3), has an important effect on their judgements of body image.

When considering the importance of mindfulness in comprehending and evaluating sponsored content, it is significant to note that a majority of 85.9% of respondents have encountered sponsored content on Instagram, while only 14.1% have not. Additionally, a significant proportion of the population, specifically 54.1%, believes it is highly important for influencers to accurately disclose sponsored content. Furthermore, 30.4% consider it to be of significant importance, while only 12.6% perceive it as not very important. When queried about their level of confidence in discerning sponsored material created by influencers, a majority of respondents, specifically 52.6%, had a positive perception, while an additional 39.3% regarded their skill as great.

Do you believe influencers who promote products or services in their content?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Depends	73	54.1	54.1	54.1
	No	25	18.5	18.5	72.6
	Yes	37	27.4	27.4	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

(Table 6 source – primary data)

In accordance to the data shown in Table 6, it is evident that 54.1% of people express confidence on the trustworthiness of influencers who endorse items or services in their content. On the other hand, 27.4% of respondents affirm their belief in such influencers, while just 18.5% indicate their lack of trust in them. The existence of a small minority of individuals who do not trust in sponsored material suggests that conscious consumption enables individuals to discern and comprehend the nature of such information, leading them to recognise its lack of credibility. When queried about the significance of maintaining transparency and authenticity in their content, a significant majority of 74.1% of respondents expressed that it is highly vital, and 20% indicated that it is important.

Do you believe that influencers' transparent and authentic disclosure practises make you more likely to have a favourable opinion of sponsored content?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	58	43.0	43.0	43.0
	Disagree	7	5.2	5.2	48.1
	Neutral	24	17.8	17.8	65.9
	Strongly agree	42	31.1	31.1	97.0
	Strongly disagree	4	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	135	100.0	100.0	

(Table 7 source- primary data)

According to Table 7, respondents were asked about their perception of influencers' transparent and genuine disclosure practises and whether it influenced their favourable attitude of sponsored material. The results indicate that 43% of participants agreed with the statement, 31.1% strongly agreed, and 17.8% remained neutral on the matter.Based on the aforementioned statements pertaining to disclosure practises, consumer comprehension of sponsored content, and consumer impressions of sponsored content. H(4) The comprehension and interpretation of sponsored content by consumers are influenced by the inclusion of transparent and prominently visible disclosure practises within the domain of influencer marketing. The research has demonstrated that the implementation of transparent and authentic disclosure practises has a significant impact on consumers' trust in influencers. As a result, this leads to more positive perceptions of sponsored content H(5).

The study conducted through semi-structured interviews found that mindfulness can mitigate negative effects of exposure to influencer content. Participants suggested that influencer's disclosure practices enable consumers to easily understand and evaluate sponsored content. However, the study's limitations and potential future implications suggest further investigation and larger sample sizes are needed for a comprehensive understanding.

5. DISCUSSION

This research aims to further our understanding of the mindful usage of social media, particularly the prevalent marketing technique known as influencer marketing. It aims to bring light on the influential power possessed by the persons who have the ability to influence customer behaviour. This text discusses the significance of improving digital well-being and emphasises the role of mindfulness in positively impacting self-esteem and body image, hence promoting psychological

well-being. Furthermore, it addresses strategies for minimising potential adverse effects of influencer content, giving a positive approach for managing digital content consumption. Implementing digital design principles and content creation tactics, such as disclosure methods, can enhance transparency and credibility. Additionally, is aware that via the practice of mindfulness, people acquire the ability to comprehend and evaluate sponsored material.

6. CONCLUSION

In general, the results indicate that the practise of Mindfulness has a positive impact on individuals well-being, self-esteem, and body image when exposed to influencer content. Furthermore, the study explores if the application of mindfulness techniques mitigates negative impacts and facilitates improved online experiences. Also, individuals have recognised the efficacy of disclosure practises in influencer marketing, emphasising the importance of awareness in comprehending and evaluating users perception of sponsored content.

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