Impact of Instagram's Filtered Reality on Self Identity and Social Perception Among Pakistani University Students

Amna Fazail[1] and Sadia Talib[2]

Abstract

Instagram is one of the fast-growing social media applications that have been a part of modern society and is becoming very popular because of its ability to connect, inspire, and motivate its users. This study explores how Instagram's filtered reality shapes individual behavioral self-identity and social dynamics. For this purpose, a survey was conducted online through Google Form with 100 university students in Multan, Pakistan, while using a convenience sampling. From the analysis, two important trends were realized. First, Instagram is a motivational platform, which inspires users to enhance their personal and professional lives. Second, this also creates psychological effects in that people tend to compare their real lives with the idealized lives they view on Instagram, which may result in low self-esteem and unrealistic expectations. The study concludes that Instagram's filtered reality creates a paradox for young Pakistani adults, simultaneously serving as a source of inspiration and a trigger for negative social comparison, highlighting the need for digital media literacy interventions. The findings of the study suggest that a majority i.e. 53% of the sample find Instagram inspirational for self-improvement, a significant proportion also suggest its role in fostering unrealistic beauty standards i.e. 54% and social conformity i.e. 52%.

Keywords: Instagram's filtered reality, social reality, Instagram's usage

Introduction

Instagram has become a popular social media app among youth. The positive impact of the medium towards the youth is undeniable: it allows an opportunity to express oneself. Instagram offers ample opportunities for all types of expressions

---

[1-2] Department of Media and Communication Studies, The Women University, Multan – Pakistan

in the form of photographs and videos, giving room for creativity and creative flair in one's personality. Users can relate to others, get inspired, and share their unique creativity by posting and interacting with another users' content. For this reason, Instagram has become a tool of communication and self-expression that can enable young people to connect with a worldwide audience and to build communities of shared interests and ideas (Kang et al., 2019). Instagram makes it easy for the user to discover and engage with people sharing common interests, hobbies, or passions. Through connecting with like-minded people, users may be able to expand their social circles, make new friendships, and so on. Additionally, this network offers a positive interaction wherein individuals get encouragement, support, and inspiration from others who share their goals or values (Uhls et al., 2017).

This platform is a great inspiration and encouragement destination for many young person's due to the multifaceted content posted by the users in general, being mostly positive and inspiring. This can create a very positive and self-confident environment with the presence of motivational posts, success stories, and supportive messages on the platform. This may inspire and motivate the younger users by the content with which they are exposed and hence get encouragement in their lives (Huang & Su in., 2018).

Users post helpful information on various topics, so learning happens on the tool. They shared educational content, how-to guides, and insight discussions; these users create an environment where knowledge is being shared, making Instagram not just a social space but also a very valuable resource for those looking to extend their scope of understanding on a wide range of subjects (Carpenter et al., 2020). Today, platforms such as Instagram influence the way people see themselves and what's happening in the world. Thanks to filters and editing tools, users often share curated and idealized representations that diverge from their authentic lives. Filtering results in ways to shape content can change how we see social ideals and norms. Eventually, these edited experiences create a sense of failure in people who compare them to their actual lives. Gradually, the constant exposure leads people to wear the mask made by social media images. An enhancement meant for appearance has grown into a power that affects both personal and social life (Hendrickse et al., 2017).

Social networking provides opportunities for individuals where they can share photos, videos and lifestyle information with others. This has increased the

discussion of how social media influences self-perception of its users (Seribd, 2022). Scholars analyze that users prefer Instagram over Twitter or Facebook because of its unique technical characteristics such as videos and photos that allow users to tell a story. Users are drawn to Instagram due to its highly visual and engaging nature, which facilitates discussions around diverse hobbies and lifestyles (Hurley, 2019). Filtered images that become trendy on Instagram dramatically alter your definition of beauty and success, and these definitions can be so high that you cannot attain them. It's not even about influencer marketing; most of the users upload such images. Consequently, social evaluation of beauty, success, and how life should be defined is constantly being redefined by Instagram (Chae et al., 2017).

Social media idealized images have been associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction and a greater adherence to societal appearance standards. Social media often has perfect skin, thin bodies, and symmetrical proportions, which are unattainable beauty ideals. Negative comparisons with regard to body shape, size, weight, or proportion might stimulate feelings of body dissatisfaction. In conclusion, people may get accustomed to such idealized standards as the standard and develop a lesser extent of admiration for their natural characteristics. This can add on to body image disorders and anxiety over appearance concerns (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Since Instagram is all about pictures, the users can be deceived to compare themselves with other peoples that may be of the same age range. The beauty and refined content emphasis because many to look at their lives and compare them the ideal pictures they find on the internet. Such a comparison makes them feel inferior because of the unrealistic beauty, lifestyle, and success standards they see. This comparison affects the body image self-esteem negatively and increases anxiety over time (Meier et al., 2014). Nowadays, Instagram has become a major place where users post videos and photos that look idealized due to filters and what they share. The display of a filtered reality online can alter both personal presentation and the perception of others in a person's life. Because of the expectations and trends seen on Instagram, young adults and teens can develop anxiety, low self-esteem and lose grip on real life. Many studies have shown that when users compare their unedited images to what they see on social media, they often feel less satisfied with their lives (Lo Destro, 2024). College students are particularly susceptible to conforming to societal expectations presented on social media, as they are at a formative stage of identity development (Vogel et al., 2015). Three different self- related categories that

shows the use of social media leading to social comparison, self-reflection, and social feedback processing (Krause et al., 2019). Filters serve as a creative layer that enhances the aesthetic quality of content. Instagram filters have become very common, that allow users to change their color complexions, tones and even facial expressions. The color adjustment filters and beautifying filters are two main filters on Instagram (GoWAAA, 2020). By the passage of the time, public has tended to improve their content to engage more audience. After getting positive reactions from the viewers, user become more satisfied. While on the other hand, they feel anxious when they get negative reactions. By comparing their content with other's content, users feel themselves good or even worse (Romero Saletti et.al, 2022).

Public use Instagram to avoid boredom or sometimes for entertainment purposes. While Instagram's influence on users' emotions and self-perception has been widely examined in Western settings but there remains limited quantitative research exploring how these dynamics manifest among youth in Pakistan. More specifically, the idealized content posted through reels and stories may grant to feelings of comparison, inadequacy, or social pressure among users. This research aims to fill this research gap by finding out that how Instagram use affects the emotional well-being and social behavior of Pakistani youth. This research indicates Instagram impacts life, as most users upload reels and stories directing that everything is a happy moment. Making a sense of inferiority among users, public rarely distinguish between real and filter things. Competition in terms of comparison, can be known to have side effects on how one feels and thinks. So, researcher will understand the dynamics and raise the social impact of Instagram.

This study examines the impact of filtered reality on Instagram with regards to social reality. Social media is where we go to present ideas and get in touch with people, but this thing often makes individuals fall prey to emotional adverse responses because of such platforms. Whenever other people have a successful life, good things and are professionally sound, sharing their good times, then users feels negative conditions sometimes. Digital world provides us opportunity to know about other's life but it also causes so many challenges in our lives. The effects of digital life are becoming very significant. This has brought massive changes to the structure of our social life. As people get unsatisfied with their lives and want to change after seeing the filtered reality of Instagram.

Review of the Literature

Instagram is serving as a tool for the art world and artists. This social media platform has been assisting artists to reach wider audiences, connect people, and enhance engagement through likes, comments, and shares. The number of likes and followers provides an artist with his or her perceived value, which is a term in ascertaining one's value to other people's eyes. In this regard, Instagram opens a space for an artist to display his ideas to the world and thereby influence exposure. This thus inspires artists to develop content that other people will like in order to boost likes and engagement (Kang et al., 2019).

More usage of Instagram leads to social comparison orientation, that impact on media usage routine and its implications. This comparison causes jealousy and dissatisfaction, which negatively affects users' self-esteem. Social media negatively enhances these effects, especially when comparing users' lives with others; it makes people have a false sense of reality and poor results (Vogel et al., 2015). Also, these online platforms have opened opportunities for young people's connectivity, expression, and construction of social relations that eventually increase their well-being emotionally. At the same time, researchers have described possible hazards of social media including anxiety, depression and frustration primarily due to youth comparing themselves to unrealistic representations of the world over the internet (Fardouly et al., 2015). For an easy relationship and self-expression via social networking sites, user may feel the harmful effects linking to their mental wellbeing. Based on this perspective, there is a review regarding the influence of social comparison in social media: an analysis on the effect of this factor towards the body image of young females. Women are much concerned and sensitive regarding their body image in social media. They always compare their photos with the excellent pictures of others; therefore, it lowers down their self-confidence. The conclusions drawn from the research study also reflect that females feel worse satisfaction with body image as they compare themselves through the social media (Uhls et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, Educators on Instagram also want to disseminate educational content to their students and establish a social relationship. They present their educational content in attractive ways to have a better bonding experience with the student. Increased interaction with the learned material by the student is the positive outcome. This focuses the raising role of social media in teaching and its complexities (Carpenter et al., 2020). However, the adequate comparisons with

others on Instagram influence the mental wellbeing, thoughts and feelings of users. The ideal and filtered pictures visible on Instagram make people compare themselves with others, which could bring different effects. Furthermore, some users would be happy when they are being compared with other people's photos that leads to more satisfaction level. The thoughts and feelings among the users in the Instagram, both the filtered images and comparison, have their impact (Meier et al., 2020).

With the passage of time, the prior reasons to use Instagram is to be entertained, social interaction with friends, and self-promotion. It is a channel from which the user benefits by having social networking. Moreover, on Instagram, there is great enthusiasm among youths towards many fashionable subjects, travel-related issues, and lifestyle topics. The consequences of its use reflect that it is not just a tool of social connectivity but a form of self-expression, and the role of the latter in representing experiences and trends is very crucial among young people (Huang & Su, 2018). Through Instagram, one shares photos about their beautiful selected picture, usually creating an ideal look. By posting the pictures, peoples' minds relate them to the others hence dissatisfaction with self-appearance, and one lacks self-confidence. Two features of Instagram are happening; first, it helps the expression of one's self; second, by raising the rates of comparison, depression can be discussed here (Chae, 2017). Likewise, the impacts of visual communication by Instagram, people express their thoughts and feelings by posting their stories, comments, videos, but with filtered curtain. This medium has engaged people to upload their photos (created by augmented reality) to connect with the filtered world. Comparing one's images with ideal images of people has an effect on their self-esteem and body image. This shows the role of Instagram and how social media affects people's thinking and culture (Meier, 2014). Many people are convinced that everyone they see on social media is living a better life, thanks to how polished and nice these images look. Tracing your posts with those that seem better can end up hurting your self-esteem, making you feel jealous, and inferior. As a consequence, the way we perceive our real-life situations versus what others portray on social media becomes unclear (Hendrickse et al., 2017).

Often, Instagram users share some types of content and use popular hashtags which helps them fit into their online community's culture. For instance, fashion influencers often feel they need to post pictures spotlighting the newest trends and fitness enthusiasts might be encouraged to post about their exercise and the food

they eat. Constantly trying to present an idealized picture of ourselves can make us feel anxious, less confident and depressed. Constantly viewing other's lives on social media can lead to feelings of low self-confidence and twisted thinking (Mun & Kim, 2021). Despite increasing global research on social media's influence, very less researches have examined how Instagram's filtered reality specifically shapes self-identity and social perception within the Pakistani university context, where cultural values and digital expression intersect differently.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the "Uses and Gratifications Theory" that was developed by Elihu Katz, JG Bulmer and Michael Gorioitch (1974). According to the theory, "people select exposure to mass communications for their different needs: cognitive, affective, social-relational, or integrative needs". U&G theory emphasizes that audiences are not passive consumers; instead, they use media to fulfill specific psychological and social needs such as entertainment, social interaction, identity formation, and escapism. This paper applies UGT to explore the way in which Instagram impacts users' attitudes and mental health perceptions by offering insightful findings into social media's effects on self-image and emotional well-being. In this study, UGT provides a lens to interpret why users initially engage with Instagram (e.g., for identity formation or social interaction). The theory then helps explain the outcomes, both the gratifications obtained (inspiration) and the unintended consequences (social comparison, dissatisfaction) that arise from exposure to filtered content, thereby shaping their social reality.

Methodology

A quantitative analysis method was employed while conducting an inquiry into role performed by Instagram, as per the concern for the instant case, played by Instagram concerning creation of a social reality.

Researcher has used continence sampling, while sending the questionnaire via Google form-based survey that helps to generate responses. Each participant was given clear instructions and was assured that their answers would not be disclosed. The study analyses Instagram usage patterns among Multan (Pakistan) based university students, aged 18 to 25 years. Young people who belong to this age category heavily utilize social media platforms while viewing modified visual

content that present idealized depictions. Students with this development stage are highly sensitive to Instagram content. Using students from various universities in Multan, researcher ensures that the study achieves the perspective of diversity.

The survey consisted of 100 Instagram users ensuring proper demographic representation. The primary means of gathering the data was in the form of a questionnaire, which was exclusively designed for the purpose of the study. The questionnaire comprised Likert scale questions to retrieve participants' perception, attitude, and behavior in relation to effects of Instagram. Participants were well-instructed and guaranteed that their response would be maintained confidential after filling the Google-form survey questionnaire.

❖ **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This chapter encompass the findings of the study as per the deigned objectives and parameters. This study aims to determine the respondents' demographic data, such as gender, measure time and purpose. The details are given below:

Table 4.1: *Gender-Wise Distribution of the Respondents (N=100)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	32	31.7	32.0	32.0
	Female	68	67.3	68.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The demographic information shows that among the valid responses, 32% were male (n = 32) and 68% were female (n = 68). This indicates that the majority of respondents in the study were female. The cumulative percent column also shows that female respondents completed the remaining proportion of the total sample (100%).

Table 4.2: *Usage-Wise Distribution of the Respondents (N=100)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	97	96.0	97.0	97.0
	No	3	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Among the valid responses, 97% (n = 97) reported that they use Instagram, whereas only 3% (n = 3) stated that they do not use the platform. This shows that Instagram usage is highly common among the respondents. The cumulative percentage confirms that all valid responses account for the full sample.

Table 4.3: *Time-Wise Distribution of the Respondents (N=100)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than 1 hour	42	41.6	42.0	42.0
	1-2 hour	35	34.7	35.0	77.0
	2-3 hour	2	2.0	2.0	79.0
	More than 3 hours	21	20.8	21.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The data shows that valid responses were collected from 100 participants. Among the respondents, 42% spend less than 1 hour, 35% spend 1–2 hours, 2% spend 2–3 hours, and 21% spend more than 3 hours on Instagram daily. This indicates that the majority of respondents use Instagram for 1 hour or less, while a considerable portion spends over 3 hours on the platform. The cumulative percentages show a gradual increase, reaching 100% at the final category.

Table 4.4: *Primary Purpose-Wise Distribution of the Respondents (N=100)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Staying updated on other's lifestyles	23	22.8	23.0	23.0
	Entertainment or escaping daily routine	57	56.4	57.0	80.0
	Seeking inspiration or trends	15	14.9	15.0	95.0
	Sharing content and seeking validation	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Among those who use Instagram, the majority (57%) use it primarily for entertainment or escaping daily routine. Additionally, 23% use Instagram to stay updated on others' lifestyles, 15% for seeking inspiration or trends, and 5% for sharing content or seeking validation. This shows that most users engage with

Instagram mainly for entertainment purposes rather than for self-expression or inspiration.

OBJECTIVE 1: *Examine the role of Instagram's filtered reality on social reality.*

		I use Instagram to stay updated about others' lifestyles.	Instagram helps me discover new trends and ideas.	Instagram influences my perception of happiness and success.	Instagram encourages me to conform to societal expectations.	I believe Instagram contributes to unrealistic beauty standards.
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100
	Missing	1	1	1	1	1

		I believe Instagram reflects a realistic representation of people's lives.	I feel more socially connected when using Instagram.	I often feel pressured to portray an idealized version of myself on Instagram.
N	Valid	100	100	100
	Missing	1	1	1

Table 4.5: *Use of Instagram to stay updated about others' lifestyles*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	7	6.9	7.0	7.0
	Agree	47	46.5	47.0	54.0

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	25	24.8	25.0	79.0
Disagree	10	9.9	10.0	89.0
strongly disagree	11	10.9	11.0	100.0
Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing System	1	1.0		
Total	101	100.0		

The results show that a majority of respondents use Instagram to stay updated about others' lifestyles. 47% agreed, while 7% strongly agreed with this statement, reflecting that over half of the participants consider Instagram a source for tracking others' lifestyles. Meanwhile, 25% remained neutral, and 21% (10% disagree, 11% strongly disagree) did not see Instagram as a platform for this purpose. This indicates that although Instagram is commonly used for observing others' lifestyles, a notable portion of respondents hold neutral or opposing views.

Table 4.6: *Instagram helps me discover new trends and ideas*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	14	13.9	14.0	14.0
	Agree	59	58.4	59.0	73.0
	Neutral	16	15.8	16.0	89.0
	Disagree	6	5.9	6.0	95.0
	strongly disagree	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		

The results indicate that most respondents agree that Instagram helps them discover new trends and ideas. A large proportion, 59% agreed and 14% strongly agreed, showing that Instagram is perceived as a strong source of trend and idea exploration. Meanwhile, 16% were neutral, and only 11% (6% disagree, 5% strongly disagree) did not share this view. Overall, the findings reflect that Instagram significantly influences users' exposure to new trends and ideas.

Table 4.7: *Instagram influences my perception of happiness and success*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	8	7.9	8.0	8.0
	Agree	47	46.5	47.0	55.0
	Neutral	24	23.8	24.0	79.0
	Disagree	17	16.8	17.0	96.0
	strongly disagree	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results show that Instagram influences the perception of happiness and success for many respondents. 47% agreed and 8% strongly agreed, indicating that more than half of the respondents believe Instagram shapes their perception of happiness and success. Meanwhile, 24% remained neutral, while 21% (17% disagree, 4% strongly disagree) did not feel influenced. Overall, the findings suggest that Instagram plays a noticeable role in shaping users' ideas of happiness and success.

Table 4.8: Instagram encourages me to conform to societal expectations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	8	7.9	8.0	8.0
	Agree	45	44.6	45.0	53.0
	Neutral	32	31.7	32.0	85.0
	Disagree	12	11.9	12.0	97.0
	strongly disagree	3	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results indicate that Instagram encourages many users to conform to societal expectations. 45% agreed and 8% strongly agreed with this statement, showing that more than half of the respondents feel social pressure through Instagram. 32% remained neutral, suggesting uncertainty or mixed perception, while 15% (12% disagree, 3% strongly disagree) did not feel such influence. These findings show that Instagram plays a considerable role in shaping social conformity among users.

Table 4.9: I believe Instagram contributes to unrealistic beauty standards

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	15	14.9	15.0	15.0

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	38	37.6	38.0	53.0
Neutral	24	23.8	24.0	77.0
Disagree	19	18.8	19.0	96.0
strongly disagree	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	100	99.0	100.0	

The findings reveal that a significant number of respondents believe Instagram contributes to unrealistic beauty standards. 38% agreed and 15% strongly agreed, showing that more than half of the participants view Instagram as a platform that promotes unrealistic beauty ideals. Meanwhile, 24% were neutral, and 23% (19% disagree, 4% strongly disagree) disagreed with this perception.

Overall, the results highlight that Instagram is widely perceived as influencing unrealistic beauty standards among users.

Table 4.10: *I believe Instagram reflects a realistic representation of people's lives*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	4	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Agree	43	42.6	43.0	47.0
	Neutral	29	28.7	29.0	76.0
	Disagree	19	18.8	19.0	95.0
	strongly disagree	5	5.0	5.0	100.0

	Total	100	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		101	100.0	

The results show that respondents have mixed views on whether Instagram reflects a realistic representation of people's lives. While 43% agreed and 4% strongly agreed, suggesting that some users believe Instagram portrays real-life experiences, 29% remained neutral. However, 24% (19% disagree, 5% strongly disagree) did not believe Instagram presents reality accurately. These findings indicate that although a portion of users view Instagram content as realistic, many others remain uncertain or disagree.

Table 4.11: *I feel more socially connected when using Instagram*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	14	13.9	14.0	14.0
	Agree	45	44.6	45.0	59.0
	Neutral	27	26.7	27.0	86.0
	Disagree	8	7.9	8.0	94.0
	strongly disagree	6	5.9	6.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results reveal that Instagram helps many respondents feel socially connected. A large proportion, 45% agreed and 14% strongly agreed, indicating that Instagram strengthens their sense of social connection. Meanwhile, 27% remained neutral, and only 14% (8% disagree, 6% strongly disagree) did not feel socially connected through Instagram. Overall, the findings suggest that Instagram plays a positive role in enhancing users' social connection.

Table 4.12: *I often feel pressured to portray an idealized version of myself on Instagram*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	6	5.9	6.0	6.0
	Agree	40	39.6	40.0	46.0
	Neutral	24	23.8	24.0	70.0
	Disagree	28	27.7	28.0	98.0
	strongly disagree	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The data indicates that respondents have varying levels of pressure to portray an idealized version of themselves on Instagram. 40% agreed and 6% strongly agreed, showing that nearly half of the users feel pressured to present a perfect image online. 24% remained neutral, while 30% (28% disagree, 2% strongly disagree) did not feel such pressure. Overall, the results suggest that Instagram contributes to self-presentation pressure for many users.

OBJECTIVE 2: *Explore the impact of the filtered reality on the individuals*

Statistics						
		I use Instagram to seek inspiration for achieving a better lifestyle.	Instagram helps me escape from my daily routine.	Viewing idealized content on Instagram motivates me to improve my own life.	Instagram inspires me to set higher goals for myself.	Seeing others' success on Instagram makes me feel dissatisfied with my own progress.
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100
	Missing	1	1	1	1	1

Statistics				
		Viewing others' happy moments on Instagram impacts my mood negatively.	My interaction with idealized content on Instagram changes how I perceive my own reality.	I compare my achievements with others based on their Instagram posts.
N	Valid	100	100	100
	Missing	1	1	1

Table 4.13: *Instagram to seek inspiration for achieving a better lifestyle*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	6	5.9	6.0	6.0
	Agree	37	36.6	37.0	43.0

	Neutral	42	41.6	42.0	85.0
	Disagree	11	10.9	11.0	96.0
	strongly disagree	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results show that respondents have mixed opinions about using Instagram to seek inspiration for achieving a better lifestyle. 37% agreed and 6% strongly agreed, indicating that some users view Instagram as a source of lifestyle inspiration. However, 42% remained neutral, suggesting uncertainty or inconsistency in how they relate to this purpose. Meanwhile, 15% (11% disagree, 4% strongly disagree) did not see Instagram as a platform for lifestyle inspiration.

Table 4.14: *Instagram helps me escape from my daily routine*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	11	10.9	11.0	11.0
	Agree	42	41.6	42.0	53.0
	Neutral	23	22.8	23.0	76.0
	Disagree	21	20.8	21.0	97.0
	strongly disagree	3	3.0	3.0	100.0

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results show that many respondents use Instagram as a means to escape from their daily routine. 42% agreed and 11% strongly agreed, indicating that more than half of the participants view Instagram as a form of escape or relaxation. 23% were neutral, while 24% (21% disagree, 3% strongly disagree) did not feel that Instagram helps them escape their routine. Overall, the findings suggest that Instagram serves as a distraction or break from daily life for many users.

Table 4.15: *Viewing idealized content on Instagram motivates me to improve my own life*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	10	9.9	10.0	10.0
	Agree	53	52.5	53.0	63.0
	Neutral	27	26.7	27.0	90.0
	Disagree	8	7.9	8.0	98.0
	strongly disagree	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The findings show that viewing idealized content on Instagram motivates many respondents to improve their own lives. 53% agreed and 10% strongly agreed, indicating that a majority feel inspired by what they see on the platform. 27% remained neutral, while only 10% (8% disagree, 2% strongly disagree) did not feel motivated. Overall, the results suggest that idealized Instagram content acts as a motivating factor for most users.

Table 4.16: Instagram inspires me to set higher goals for myself.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	14	13.9	14.0	14.0
	Agree	60	59.4	60.0	74.0
	Neutral	15	14.9	15.0	89.0
	Disagree	6	5.9	6.0	95.0
	strongly disagree	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results indicate that Instagram inspires many respondents to set higher personal goals. A large portion, 60% agreed and 14% strongly agreed, showing that Instagram content motivates users to aim for self-improvement. 15% were neutral, while only 11% (6% disagree, 5% strongly disagree) did not feel inspired. Overall, these findings highlight Instagram's positive influence on goal setting for most users.

Table 4.17: Seeing others' success on Instagram makes me feel dissatisfied with my own progress.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	9	8.9	9.0	9.0
	Agree	25	24.8	25.0	34.0
	Neutral	24	23.8	24.0	58.0
	Disagree	30	29.7	30.0	88.0
	strongly disagree	12	11.9	12.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results show varied responses regarding whether seeing others' success on Instagram leads to feelings of dissatisfaction with personal progress. 25% agreed and 9% strongly agreed, indicating that for some users, comparison on Instagram negatively affects self-perception. However, 24% were neutral, and 42% (30% disagree, 12% strongly disagree) stated that they do not feel dissatisfied by others' success. Overall, the findings suggest that while Instagram triggers comparison for some users, many do not internalize such feelings.

Table 4.18: Viewing others' happy moments on Instagram impacts my mood negatively.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	16	15.8	16.0	16.0
	Agree	42	41.6	42.0	58.0
	Neutral	22	21.8	22.0	80.0
	Disagree	16	15.8	16.0	96.0
	strongly disagree	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results show that viewing others' happy moments on Instagram negatively affects the mood of many respondents. 42% agreed and 16% strongly agreed, indicating that over half of the participants experience negative emotions when seeing others' positive moments. 22% remained neutral, while 20% (16% disagree, 4% strongly disagree) reported that such content does not affect their mood. Overall, the findings suggest that Instagram can trigger emotional comparison and negatively influence users' mood.

Table 4.19: My interaction with idealized content on Instagram changes how I perceive my own reality.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Agree	43	42.6	43.0	48.0
	Neutral	24	23.8	24.0	72.0
	Disagree	26	25.7	26.0	98.0
	strongly disagree	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

The results show that idealized content on Instagram influences reality perception for many respondents. 43% agreed and 5% strongly agreed, indicating that nearly half of the participants believe Instagram affects how they perceive their own life. 24% remained neutral, while 28% (26% disagree, 2% strongly disagree) did not feel that Instagram alters their perception of reality. Overall, the findings suggest that Instagram has a noticeable impact on shaping personal perceptions.

Table 4.20: I compare my achievements with others based on their Instagram posts.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	6	5.9	6.0	6.0

Agree	30	29.7	30.0	36.0
Neutral	29	28.7	29.0	65.0
disagree	31	30.7	31.0	96.0
strongly disagree	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		101	100.0	

The results show mixed responses regarding whether respondents compare their achievements with others based on Instagram posts. 30% agreed and 6% strongly agreed, indicating that some users do engage in comparison behavior on Instagram. Meanwhile, 29% remained neutral, and 35% (31% disagree, 4% strongly disagree) stated that they do not compare their achievements with others. Overall, the findings suggest that while Instagram creates comparison tendencies for some users, many do not let others' achievements affect their self-evaluation.

T-Test: Group Statistics

	Gender of respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Obj1	Male	32	24.4063	4.98940	.88201
	Female	68	19.1471	3.99726	.48474

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	T	Df
Obj1	Equal variances assumed	.054	.817	5.658	98
	Equal variances not assumed			5.226	50.426

The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances shows a significance value of 0.817, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that equal variances can be assumed. The independent samples t-test result is significant (t (98) = 5.658, p = 0.000), meaning there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in Obj1 scores. The mean difference of 5.26 suggests that one group scored notably higher on Obj1 compared to the other. The 95% Confidence Interval (3.41 to 7.10) does not include zero, further confirming a significant difference between the groups.

T-Test

Group Statistics

	Gender of respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Obj2	Male	32	22.8438	5.49551	.97148
	Female	68	20.6471	3.18469	.38620

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
Obj2	Equal variances assumed	9.876	.002	2.524	98
	Equal variances not assumed			2.101	41.098

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower
Obj2	Equal variances assumed	.013	2.19669	.87045	.46931
	Equal variances not assumed	.042	2.19669	1.04543	.08556

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
		Upper
Obj2	Equal variances assumed	3.92407
	Equal variances not assumed	4.30782

The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances shows a significance value of 0.002, which is less than 0.05, indicating that equal variances cannot be assumed. Therefore, the t-test results under "equal variances not assumed" are interpreted. The independent samples t-test shows a significant difference between the two groups, $t(41.10) = 2.101$, $p = 0.042$, with a mean difference of 2.20. The 95% Confidence Interval (.085 to 4.30) does not include zero, confirming that the difference in Obj2 scores between the two groups is statistically significant.

Correlations

		Obj1	Obj2
Obj1	Pearson Correlation	1	.782[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Obj2	Pearson Correlation	.782[**]	1

Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis shows a strong positive relationship between Obj1 and Obj2, with a Pearson correlation value of r = .782. The significance value (p = .000) is less than 0.01, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level. This means as Obj1 increases, Obj2 also increases, suggesting that both variables are highly related.

Conclusion

The basic aim of this study was to investigate how Instagram's filtered reality influences self-identity and social perception among university students in Pakistan. The result found that how Instagram reshapes students' perceptions regarding lifestyle, beauty standards, success, and personal achievements. It has also highlighted whether engagement with idealized and edited content leads to social comparison, reduced self-satisfaction, or pressure to present an idealized self on social media. The results also showed that Instagram is being used regularly among respondents, supported by the descriptive analysis where 96–97% of participants reported active Instagram usage. This reflected that the Instagram has become widely embedded in students' social life patterns and daily public interaction patterns. University student's perception upon Instagram as a primary tool for awareness, lifestyle updates, social interaction entertainment, and inspiration.

Frequency tabulated data in the research revealed that a huge number of students agreed that Instagram has helped them stay updated about others' living styles. This social media space has also exposed them to new trends and ideas, influencing their perception of happiness, success, and social expectations.

Researcher has also examined Instagram effects on self-identity by causing self-evaluation and comparison among users. Findings revealed that students remain socially connected when using Instagram, but a notable number also reported feeling pressure to portray an idealized version of themselves. Moreover, many students use Instagram as inspiration for lifestyle improvements, but for other

remaining individuals, this motivation shifts into self-comparison and unhappiness. While, a significant number of participants agreed that Instagram promotes unrealistic beauty standards, while contradicting that the presence of Instagram's presentation on a realistic portrayal of people's lives.

The correlation analysis revealed a strong association (r = .782, p < .01) between social perception and self-identity variables. This hints that as students' view more glamorized content, their self-identity is forced, leading to stronger comparisons and reassessments of personal progress, appearance, and living style. The findings collectively show that Instagram's filtered reality remarkably change both self-identity and social perception among Pakistani university students. Furthermore, Instagram has become more than a social platform that it acts as a medium where personal identity is created, compared, and validated. Students tend to rate their values through emojis and social visibility, often trying to present a version of themselves that aligns with societal standards rather than authenticity. This research highlights the need for digital media literacy, psychological awareness, and healthy social media habits.

Recommendations

It is suggested that future researchers would look into how Instagram affects the motivation of people to transform their lifestyles positively by exploring the aspect of the filtered reality. As per this study, Instagram inspires people to improve their lives; consequently, future research could define if such motivation is healthy or builds unhealthy expectations. Furthermore, it can be argued that a huge number of individuals are employing Instagram in order to increase recognition of their business ventures. Said research could explore how the platform aesthetics, decision-making heuristics, and marketing applications enhance business performance and the effects that the making of such enhancements has on consumer behaviors in the future.

References

Carpenter, J. P., Morrison, S. A., Craft, M., & Lee, M. (2020). How and why are educators using Instagram? Teaching and Teacher Education, 96, 103149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103149

Chae, J. (2017). From self-promotion to social comparison: The role of Instagram in the perception of idealized self-image. Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 20(2), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2016.0288

Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015). Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. Body Image, 13, 38–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.12.002

GoWAAA. (2020). 8 types of Instagram AR story filters used by brands. GoWAAA.

Hendrickse, J., Arpan, L. M., Clayton, R. B., & Ridgway, J. L. (2017). Instagram and the illusion of reality: How curated social media content influences perceptions of social reality. Journal of Media Psychology, 29(2), 68–76. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000222

Huang, Y., & Su, S.-F. (2018). Motives for Instagram use and topics of interest among young adults. Future Internet, 10(8), 77. https://doi.org/10.3390/fi10080077

Hurley, Z. (2019). Imagined affordances of Instagram and the fantastical authenticity of female Gulf-Arab social media influencers. Social Media + Society, 5(1), 205630511881924. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118819241

Kang, X., Chen, W., & Kang, J. (2019). Art in the age of social media: Interaction behavior analysis of Instagram art accounts. Informatics, 6(4), 52. https://doi.org/10.3390/informatics6040052

Krause, H.-V., Baum, K., Baumann, A., & Krasnova, H. (2019). Unifying the detrimental and beneficial effects of social network site use on self-esteem: A systematic literature review. Behaviour & Information Technology, 38(1), 10–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2018.1527281

Lo Destro, C. (2024). Unraveling the impact of self-esteem on the utilization of Instagram filters: The mediating role of fear of negative evaluation. Frontiers in Psychology, 15, Article 1229456. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1229456

Meier, A., Gilbert, A., Börner, S., Possler, D., & Krämer, N. C. (2020). Instagram inspiration: How upward comparison on social network sites can contribute to well-being. Journal of Communication, 70(5), 721–743. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaa025

Meier, A., et al. (2014). Instagram and the power of visual communication. International Journal of Communication, 8, 1–19.

Mun, Y., & Kim, J. (2021). Influence of false self-presentation on mental health and deleting behavior on Instagram: The mediating role of perceived popularity. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 658256. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.658256

Romero Saletti, S. M., Van den Broucke, S., & Van Beggelaer, —. (2022). Understanding motives, usage patterns and effects of Instagram use in youths: A qualitative study. Emerging Adulthood, 10(6), 1376–1394. https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968221114251

Scribd. (2022). The impact of social media on self-perception. https://www.scribd.com/document/667404794/The-impact-of-social-media-on-self-perception

Uhls, Y. T., Ellison, N. B., & Subrahmanyam, K. (2017). Benefits and costs of social media in adolescence. Pediatrics, 140(2), S67–S70. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1758E

Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Okdie, B. M., Eckles, K., & Franz, B. (2015). Who compares and despairs? The effect of social comparison orientation on social media use and its outcomes. Personality and Individual Differences, 86, 249–256. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.06.026

Article Information:

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- **All authors Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**

- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

- **Conflict of Interest**: NIL

- **Funding Sources**: NIL

Correspondence:

Amna Fazail

Amna.fazail@wum.edu.pk