Partner choices in the age of social media: are there significant relationships between following influencers on Instagram and partner choice criteria?

Escolhas de parceiros na era das mídias sociais: existem relações significativas entre seguir influenciadores no Instagram e os critérios de escolha de parceiros?

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Morteza Darvishi⁴
Sharareh Aris⁵

Abstract

Social Media Influencers (SMIs) are active members of social networks who have a huge number of followers. Some studies have called them the opinion leaders of the age of social media. These people are likely to affect the different aspects of beliefs and/or behaviors of the people who follow them. The current study aimed to investigate the relationships between people’s partner choice criteria on the one hand, and the amount and type of attention they dedicated to influencers on the other hand. A survey was conducted to see if people who pay more or less attention to influencers perceived appearance, wealth, religiousness, culture, and

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Keywords: Influencers. Instagram. Partner. Choice Criteria.

Resumo
Os influenciadores das mídias sociais (SMIs) são membros ativos das redes sociais que possuem um grande número de seguidores. Alguns estudos os chamam de líderes de opinião da era das mídias sociais. É provável que essas pessoas afetem os diferentes aspectos das crenças e/ou comportamentos das pessoas que as seguem. O presente estudo teve como objetivo investigar as relações entre os critérios de escolha de parceiros das pessoas, por um lado, e a quantidade e tipo de atenção que dedicam aos influenciadores, por outro. Foi realizada uma pesquisa para verificar se as pessoas que prestam mais ou menos atenção aos influenciadores percebiam a aparência, a riqueza, a religiosidade, a cultura e a personalidade como critérios importantes em seus parceiros. Os resultados mostraram que havia relações diretas entre dedicar atenção aos influenciadores e perceber que a riqueza e a aparência são importantes. Além disso, havia uma relação significativa entre dedicar atenção aos influenciadores e à religiosidade, mas era uma relação indireta.


Introduction

In today's world, with the advancement of information technology and communication, the use of a new generation of online communication tools is increasing among individuals. This is due to the availability of more features, higher quality, and lower cost for communication. One of these online tools is social networking sites, which facilitate communication between individuals and can even redefine the nature of communication, providing users with the opportunity to experience new and different types of relationships (Razeghi et al., 2015).

Users of social networking sites not only share information and opinions but also engage in expanding their friendships based on their needs and interests. These friendships can have an influence on their thoughts and behaviors (Turkestani et al., 2019). Concern
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One of the most popular social networking sites worldwide is Instagram, which enables millions of users to share information and opinions in the form of photos, and videos, and also facilitates the expansion of friendships. Instagram is also highly popular in Iran, where Iranians rank 7th in terms of the number of users on the platform (Iran Ranked World’s 7th Instagram User, 2018).

Social networking sites serve as platforms for establishing friendships or content-based relationships, where users can share their images or opinions with others. However, this does not mean that everyone enjoys the same level of popularity on these platforms. While many Instagram users have a few hundred followers, some individuals have millions of followers, and their posts or live performances are highly popular. These individuals, known as influencers, typically concentrate on specific industries such as fashion, cosmetics, lifestyle, etc., and produce content within a particular field.

The influencers of social networking sites encompass not only renowned artists, popular public figures, or celebrated athletes who have attained fame outside of the realm of social media but also individuals who have grown on platforms like Instagram without prior fame, gradually amassing hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers. These influencers who are sometimes called “micro-celebrities” augment their follower count by sharing narratives of their personal and everyday lives through blogs or social networks (Abidin, 2016). While some influencers on social media can certainly become mega-celebrities with millions of followers and substantial fame, the term "micro-celebrities" is used to emphasize the unique nature of their fame, which is often tied to their online presence.

There is speculation and research concerning the magnitude and nature of the impact these cyberspace stars have on society, as well as on the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. Scholars argue that these individuals, due to their prominence, can exert influence on their followers and society at large, both within their specific domains of activity and in other spheres. One relevant concept employed in this context is "social influence" which pertains to the behavioral changes an individual undergoes as a result of their interactions with others and organizations (Turkestani et al., 2019).

Arguably, the impact of influencer-generated content can be significant, especially when we consider the broader influence of online materials in the absence of critical thinking.
Sabbar and his colleagues adopted a creative approach to assess how seriously people take social media posts and whether they accept them without applying adequate critical thinking. They devised posts that resembled typical social media content and carefully analyzed whether individuals simply believed these posts or engaged in thoughtful evaluation. The results were quite revealing, indicating a notable lack of critical thinking and a tendency toward easy acceptance. Reporting two examples, the article provides the following excerpts.

Even the messages that were not assumed to be true by high numbers of respondents could be considered evidence for people’s uncritical minds. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents believed the message about the aliens and only about 47 percent of them believed the one about the remains of a mermaid. However, considering the oddity of the claims presented by these messages (e.g., aliens have traveled to the earth in the past centuries and a beautiful woman with a fishtail exists) those percentages seem considerably high (Sabbar et al., 2021).

According to the International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition), “Social influence refers to the phenomenon where an individual's behaviors, opinions, or beliefs change as a result of their network ties, often becoming more similar to those with whom they are connected” (Sweet & Adhikari, 2023). Some scholars argue that the increased social influence resulting from the proliferation of social networking platforms can give rise to value conflicts across different generations within society (Faramarziani et al., 2016).

According to several Iranian researchers, there are notable shifts in values and beliefs taking place in the country, particularly among the younger generation (Rezaei, 1993). These transformations are evident in changing relationship patterns and emotional dynamics, as young people now have various avenues to connect with each other and may have different criteria when choosing a life partner. In a society where emotional relationships and partner selection are no longer confined to traditional marriage within societal and religious norms, we are witnessing a rise in more liberalized connections. Consequently, it becomes crucial to understand the patterns and criteria that govern the selection of a spouse or relationship partner.

**Research Question**

In a changing society, characterized by the increasing prevalence of online engagement and the growing emphasis on individual autonomy in partner selection, an intriguing research question arises: What are the associations between the nature and extent of attention given to Instagram influencers and the criteria for selecting a relationship partner among young adults?
Understanding the potential impact of influential individuals on social media networks on the patterns of spouse or life partner selection holds significant academic importance from at least two perspectives. Firstly, it can assist in conducting research and ideation to mitigate the potential harms inherent in this domain and curb the dissemination of erroneous lifestyle paradigms. Secondly, it provides an avenue for harnessing this potential for positive purposes and capitalizing on its merits.

Given the exploratory nature of this study to a certain extent, the main research question is disaggregated into several sub-questions to shed further light on the study's objectives and methodology. Specifically, this investigation focuses on scrutinizing the existence or absence of five significant relationships.

**Sub-questions**

1. Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on *physical criteria* in partner selection?
2. Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on *financial criteria* in partner selection?
3. Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on *personality traits* in partner selection?
4. Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on *cultural factors* in partner selection?
5. Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on *religious criteria* in partner selection?

**Literature Review**

Previous studies have addressed and investigated the influencers, their influence, and their functions from various perspectives. These individuals have been referred to by different terms in various articles. Some identify them as influencers while others, following earlier research in the field of information dissemination within society, label them as opinion leaders. An influencer can take the form of a young girl who shares her life events and perspectives with millions of followers, or a specialist such as a surgeon (Elson et al., 2020) who shares information and updates about their medical procedures.
The studies related to influencers in social networks encompass a collection of research endeavors that examine different aspects of these individuals' lives or their roles and positions, as perceived by themselves, others, or society. A study examines influencers on social networks and categorizes them into three groups: opinion leaders, information influencers, and activists (Soares et al., 2018). The present study divides the previous studies on influencers into two broad groups: those investigating the advertising role of influencers and those exploring the social implications of influencers' presence in society.

**Influencers in Advertising**

Numerous studies have delved into the roles and functions of influencers in the realm of marketing and advertising. In marketing and advertising, the primary objective revolves around selling or promoting products and services, be it for commercial gain or to serve the non-financial objectives of public and private entities. Research indicates that influencers have contributed to various domains of marketing, including market research, product sampling, personal selling, retailing, and advertising (Turkestani et al., 2019).

In many instances, influencers serve as intermediaries between advertisers and the general public. As a result, companies have the opportunity to engage influencers by offering financial compensation, products, or support, thereby encouraging them to endorse and introduce their desired products, services, or brands, ultimately aiding in audience engagement and customer acquisition (Karimi Alavijeh & Bakhshi, 2017).

Recently, Iranian authorities made it public that the sum of the amounts deposited into the bank accounts of 123 influencers amounted to over 2 trillion Tomans (equivalent to 40 million US dollars) over the course of one year (BBC Persian, n.d.). To provide a perspective on the magnitude of this monetary figure, it is worth noting that the minimum monthly wage in Iran is approximately 200 US dollars. Therefore, the aforementioned amount is equivalent to the cumulative salary that many Iranians would earn over a period spanning nearly 17,000 years.

Previous studies have addressed various aspects of the work and impact of influencers in the field of advertising and marketing. For example, one study raises the question that relying solely on an influencer's number of followers or the number of comments on a post is insufficient to measure the success of an influencer (Gräve, 2019). This study delves into the intricacies encountered by companies when engaging influencers for advertising purposes and the limited control they exert over the content generated by these individuals.
Viral marketing is one branch of marketing that has been the subject of an investigation regarding the role of influencers (Himmelboim & Golan, 2019). Furthermore, certain studies in this domain explore the advertising role of influencers from perspectives closely related to the study of advertising such as brand building (Iqani, 2019). For instance, a research endeavor examines the activities of influencers on the social media platform Instagram and scrutinizes the methodologies employed to transform them into professional brand builders (Van Driel & Dumtrica, 2020).

Influencers and Social Impact

The role and social impact of influencers go beyond mere advertising, sales, and brand building. These individuals, who can be considered as opinion leaders of the online world, possess the power to influence people's thoughts and behaviors across various domains. Although, distinguishing between the two types of influence (advertising vs. social impact) is not always straightforward, arguably, social impact refers to the more indirect and potentially unintended effects they have on individuals and society as a whole.

Fewer studies have explored the potential or practical role of online influencers beyond advertising and marketing. One example is a study that has investigated this role within the realm of religion. For instance, a research conducted in Indonesia focused on the role of influential women on social media in redefining the identity of Muslim women (Beta, 2019).

Another study conducted among nurses examines the impact of influencers in reinforcing their ethical beliefs (Davis et al., 2012). Moreover, research has revealed that influential individuals can play a significant role in advancing sustainable urbanization and guiding individuals towards a more sustainable urban culture. Influencers can effectively educate and rapidly disseminate information, replacing conventional and costly methods in support of urban sustainable development (Zarei et al., 2013).

Another example is a study that explores how influencers from different countries shape their nations' image and reputation, evaluating their effectiveness in public diplomacy efforts (Ingenhoff, 2021). Another study examines the use of influencers to amplify the reach of health campaigns and foster engagement with target audiences (Kostygina et al., 2020).

The two categories of influencers' impact, social impact, and advertising, can be intertwined without a clear boundary. Some aspects of influencers' impact can be seen as social impact, relating to societal attitudes and behavior. However, when influencers are paid to promote specific policies, it aligns more with advertising.
Several other studies may not neatly fit into either of the two categories. For example, some research examines societal reactions or the responses of specific groups to influencers. One study investigated how local media attributed their news coverage to the influence of celebrities and prominent figures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abidin, 2016). Influencers are occasionally implicated in allegations of racism and embroiled in controversies. Another study explores the reactions of influential individuals in such situations (Lawson, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The present study aims to provide preliminary evidence as to whether individuals who devote time and attention to Instagram influencers are likely to change their criteria in partner selection. Therefore, the study falls within the realm of research and is effectively supported by Albert Bandura's renowned social learning theory.

Bandura's Social-Cognitive Learning Theory

The social-cognitive theory of Bandura, which falls under the category of learning theories, was proposed by Albert Bandura, a Canadian psychologist. He presented his theory in the 20th century within the field of social psychology. The theory, also known by other names such as the social learning theory, explores how individuals acquire behaviors in social settings through processes of observation, imitation, and modeling. This form of social learning, rooted in observation and imitation, occurs unconsciously in many individuals who possess the capacity for attention, interest, as well as the ability to mimic and emulate behaviors. It brings about its own positive or negative consequences (Kadivar, 2013).

Bandura substantiated his claim regarding the acquisition of knowledge through observation in his renowned experiment known as the "Bobo Doll." In this experiment, he demonstrated that children learn and imitate behaviors they observe in others. When exposed to an adult engaging in aggressive actions towards the Bobo doll, such as hitting and striking it, the children replicated these behavioral patterns when left alone with the doll (Fathi & Rahmani, 2015).

One of the prevalent methods of this type of learning is vicarious learning, also referred to as modeling, whereby individuals acquire knowledge by observing others' behavior and its subsequent consequences. The emphasis on observational learning constitutes a distinctive feature of Bandura's theory. Another notable characteristic lies in its interaction with cognitive...
processes. Individuals make calculated and conscious decisions to adopt specific behaviors. Essentially, they need to anticipate and comprehend the outcomes associated with the observed behaviors (Parsa, 1993).

There are three factors that exert influence on modeling, as follows:

1. Model characteristics: Individuals tend to be more influenced by individuals who bear greater resemblance to themselves. Furthermore, the status and renown of the model also play a pivotal role. The specific type of behavior demonstrated by the model impacts the extent to which it is imitated.

2. Observer characteristics: Individuals with lower self-confidence are more inclined to imitate individuals possessing higher levels of self-confidence.

3. Consequences and rewards associated with behaviors: Receiving appropriate rewards heightens the likelihood of individuals repeating the learned behavior (McLeod, 2016).

The rationale behind the importance of Bandura's theory in the present study stems from the possibility that individuals who frequently consume and engage with Instagram influencers' content may adopt their patterns of behavior in significant aspects of their social relationships, including marriage. Many of these influencers, even those primarily focused on promoting specific product types, do not confine their content solely to product introductions. They often delve into various aspects of their personal and familial lives and may even provide recommendations to their audience and followers.

For instance, one influential Instagram user, operating under the username "Sadaf_Beauty," boasting over 3.8 million followers at the time of writing this article, consistently shares anecdotes and narratives about her experiences with her spouse, even making joint appearances in live sessions. Another influencer named "Neda Yasi," with over 3 million followers as of writing recurrently discusses the qualities of her partners as part of her role-modeling behavior.

Do these individuals influence the desirable qualities of a spouse or suitable partner in society? Considering the difficulty of conducting rigorous impact assessments (which in many cases is impractical) and establishing a causal relationship among social issues, this article does not make a claim to definitively answer the above question. However, the theory of social-cognitive learning (supported by ample empirical evidence) provides a suitable theoretical framework to explore meaningful associations between individuals' attention to influencers and their patterns of selecting spouses and partners.
This research aims to investigate the correlations between the consumption of specific content on social networks - which may not directly pertain to the selection of a spouse or life partner - and the patterns and criteria used in choosing spouses and partners.

**Methodology**

The current research adopts a quantitative approach and utilizes the survey method as its primary data gathering tool. To address the sub-questions and eventually the main research question, two types of data need to be collected: 1) Information regarding the nature and level of individuals' attention to influencers on Instagram, and 2) Patterns and criteria for selecting spouses and partners as perceived by the individuals. Given that both categories involve variables associated with individuals' behaviors, beliefs, and preferences, employing a survey questionnaire is deemed the most suitable method for gathering data.

A researcher-designed questionnaire consisting of 65 questions was developed to encompass both the aforementioned variable categories. Some questions were designed to investigate patterns of spouse selection and explore the importance of factors such as appearance, wealth, etc. Additionally, certain questions inquire about the number of influencers that the respondent follows on Instagram, the time they devote to reading or watching their materials, and other related factors.

The distribution of the questionnaire was carried out online using Google Forms. To address potential flaws in the questionnaire, a preliminary test was conducted where five potential respondents provided feedback and suggestions for improvement, which were then discussed with the researcher and incorporated into the questionnaire. The target population for this study consists of Iranians between the ages of 16 and 40 who actively use Instagram. The questionnaire was distributed using a random sampling method, with the researcher sharing the questionnaire within various online communities capable of facilitating its distribution, and individuals were requested to participate and respond to the questionnaire to contribute to the scientific study.

There are varying statistics regarding the number of Iranians using Instagram. It is estimated that around 24 million Iranians were utilizing Instagram as of April 2018, placing Iran as the seventh country with the highest number of Instagram users globally (Financial Tribune, 2018). It can be inferred that a significant portion of these users falls within the 16-40 age range. Based on this information and utilizing the Cochran formula (with a 95% confidence level and a 6.2% margin of error), a required sample size of 250 individuals was
determined. Furthermore, even with the potential growth of the target population in recent years, this sample size remains relatively stable. The collected data were analyzed using Excel and SPSS, and the presence or absence of significant relationships between different variables were examined through the application of the chi-square test.

Results

10.1 Respondents' Statistics

Following the elimination of incomplete or erroneous questionnaires, a set of valid and completed questionnaires was obtained. Analysis of the data from these questionnaires indicates that 68% of the respondents were females, while 32% were males. Additionally, among the respondents, 40% were married and 60% were unmarried. The frequency distribution of the respondents according to age is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Frequency distribution by age
Source: Authors findings

Additionally, 7.6% of the respondents have educational qualifications below a diploma. Given that approximately 9% of the respondents fall within the age range of 16 to 20, these individuals are likely predominantly high school students. Furthermore, 15.2% of the respondents hold a diploma or higher vocational qualification, 43.6% possess a bachelor's degree, 24.4% have obtained a master's degree, and 9.2% have achieved a doctoral degree. The frequency of Instagram usage in one day among the respondents is displayed in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instagram usage per day</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One hour or less</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one hour to two hours</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Partner choices in the age of social media: are there significant relationships between following influencers on Instagram and partner choice criteria?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More than two hours to three hours</th>
<th>52</th>
<th>20.8%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than three hours</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Frequency distribution by Instagram usage
Source: Authors findings

One of the survey questions was related to the extent of engagement with content shared by influencers. According to the responses to this question, 8.8% of individuals never spend any time consuming influencer content, 33.6% spend one hour or less, 39.2% spend more than one hour up to two hours, 11.6% spend more than two hours up to three hours, and 6.8% spend more than three hours engaging with this type of content.

10.2 Examination of Research Questions

Sub-question 1: Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on physical criteria in partner selection? The following table presents the cross-tab related to the question. Note that the total frequency in this table (and the others) is 250 individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Physical Criteria</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following Influencers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Following influencers vs physical criteria crosstab
Source: Authors findings

By conducting a chi-square test, the obtained statistic for the variable of physical criteria is 24.766 with a p-value of 0.000056, indicating that the variable of physical criteria is statistically significant.

Upon careful examination of the table, it is evident that the middle column, representing the selection of medium importance for physical criteria, is almost equal across all rows, with approximately 28% to 30% of respondents. Consequently, the remaining 70% of the respondents are divided among those who attribute "low" or "high" importance to physical criteria.
Furthermore, upon observing the column related to high attention to influencers (on the right side), it can be noted that an increase in attention to influencers corresponds to a higher percentage of individuals who prioritize physical criteria. In other words, there exists a direct significant relationship between the level of attention to influencers and the importance given to physical criteria in the selection of a partner.

**Sub-question 2:** Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on financial criteria in partner selection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Financial Criteria</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following Influencers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 - Following influencers vs financial criteria crosstab
Source: Authors findings

By conducting a chi-square test, the resulting statistics for the financial criteria is 16.9857 with a p-value of 0.001945. Therefore, the relationship is direct and statistically significant.

To comprehend the numbers within the table, attention can be directed towards the two columns representing low attention and high attention to financial criteria. The numerical values in these columns exhibit a linear trend. However, as the level of attention to influencers increases, there is a decrease in the number of individuals who prioritize financial criteria. In other words, there is a significant and inverse (negative) linear relationship between the level of attention to influencers and the significance attributed to financial criteria in the selection of a partner.

**Sub-question 3:** Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on personality traits in partner selection?
By conducting a chi-square test, the obtained statistic for the personality criteria is 2.8857 with a p-value of 0.577128. Consequently, the personality criteria are not statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05. This study failed to find a significant relationship between the level of attention to influencers and the importance attributed to personality traits in the selection of a partner. Even without prior knowledge of the chi-square test or other statistical analyses, a simple examination of the numbers within the table suggests that there is no apparent association between the two variables. Irrespective of the degree of attention to influencers, less than ten percent of respondents indicated low importance placed on personality traits. Furthermore, between 58 to 63 percent of individuals stated a high level of importance attached to personality traits regardless of their level of attention to influencers.

One plausible explanation for this is that, unlike factors such as wealth, education, and other quantifiable measures, assessing the level or nature of personality is inherently challenging. Personality, even when compared to physical attractiveness or beauty, possesses a more elusive essence. Physical attractiveness cannot be measured by a universally accepted standard, and personal preferences play a pivotal role in this domain. It can be conjectured that individuals will consistently assert the significance of personality, even without a clear understanding of its specific connotations.

**Sub-question 4**: Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on *cultural factors* in partner selection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Following Influencers</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Following influencers vs personality criteria crosstab
Source: Authors findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Cultural Criteria</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 - Following influencers vs cultural criteria crosstab
Source: Authors findings
By conducting a chi-square test, the obtained statistic for the cultural criteria is 2.2143, with a p-value of 0.696415. Therefore, the cultural criteria are not statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05. This study did not find a meaningful relationship between the level of attention to influencers and the importance placed on cultural criteria in selecting a partner. The findings align with the observations made regarding personality criteria. A significant percentage of individuals expressed the belief that their life partner should possess cultural sophistication. However, the few individuals who considered cultural criteria less important may have interpreted it as referring exclusively to artistic attributes. One limitation of this study lies in the design of the questionnaire, which includes somewhat ambiguous indicators that do not apply uniformly across all dimensions.

**Sub-question 5:** Is there a correlation between the level of attention given to influencers on Instagram and the significance placed on religious criteria in partner selection?

By conducting a chi-square test, the obtained statistic is 18.3158, with a p-value of 0.00107, indicating that the religious criteria are statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05. Analyzing the data presented in the table and the results of the chi-square test, it becomes evident that as the level of attention to influencers increases, the significance attributed to the religious criterion diminishes. More precisely, as the attention to influencers intensifies, there is a substantial increase in the number of individuals who perceive religious criteria as less important, while there is a significant decrease in the number of individuals who consider it significant. In essence, these findings reveal a significant and inverse relationship between the level of attention to influencers and the importance placed on religious criteria.
Correlation vs Causation

In social studies, researchers often focus on finding connections between variables instead of proving cause and effect. This is because social studies don't have the same control over variables as a chemistry lab does. Even if two things seem to happen together, it's challenging to say for certain that one causes the other.

To illustrate this, let's consider a study that looked at the behavior of married and unmarried people. In a previous study, the researchers found that unmarried individuals used laughing emojis more often on social media. What can be concluded from this? Does getting married make people stop using emojis? One playful suggestion was that maybe married people avoid emojis because their partners might misinterpret them.

However, it was also suggested that age could be a hidden factor influencing this difference. When the data was analyzed, there was indeed a significant relationship between age and marital status. This means that the observed difference in emoji usage might be due to different habits among people of different ages, rather than their marital status.

The main idea is that the present study found interesting connections, but it's important to note that these connections may or may not imply causal relationships. However, regardless of causation, recognizing these significant relationships is valuable and can guide further research and social interventions. With this in mind, it would be worthwhile to explore the potential link between age and people's attention to influencers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of the Respondents</th>
<th>Following Influencers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-16</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-21</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-26</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-31</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-36</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8- Age Vs Following Influencers crosstab
Source: Authors findings
After conducting a Chi-square test, the obtained statistics is 6.2519 with a corresponding p-value of 0.395573. Thus, the age variable is not statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05. Consequently, we do not find a significant relationship between age and the level of attention to influencers.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of the present research demonstrate a significant relationship between the level of attention to influencers on Instagram and three dimensions: appearance, financial, and religious values in partner selection. However, no specific relationship was found between two dimensions: personality and culture. As discussed, this study cannot assert a causal relationship or imply that individuals are inevitably influenced by social media influencers, leading them to prioritize superficial aspects such as appearance. It is possible that individuals who already have a stronger interest in physical aspects are more inclined to be attracted to influencers.

Nevertheless, the observation of this relationship holds significance, and this study serves as an initial step towards further investigations. For instance, conducting in-depth interviews and qualitative studies can provide a deeper understanding of social learning from influencers. Additionally, by categorizing influencers based on the content they share or their personal characteristics, or by analyzing their generated content, a more nuanced understanding of their social roles can be achieved.

Moreover, long-term studies can be done to understand how people's beliefs, standards, and interests change over time regarding their interaction with influencers. By comparing the differences that emerge, we can gain more accurate understanding. While we might not find direct cause and effect relationships, such studies can provide valuable insights.

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