

## How Exposure to Consumerist Content on Instagram Shapes Economic and Symbolic Mate-selection Preferences in Women and Men

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**Abstract:** This study explores the impact of exposure to consumerist content on Instagram on mate selection criteria, focusing on economic and symbolic factors. With the growing influence of social media, understanding its role in shaping romantic preferences has become increasingly important. The primary objective of this research was to assess whether exposure to consumerist content on Instagram influences the prioritization of economic and symbolic criteria in partner selection. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a survey method. The sample consisted of 400 students from the Islamic Azad University, Qods Branch, with data collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included scales measuring exposure to consumerist content on Instagram and various criteria for mate selection, including economic and symbolic factors. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including Spearman's correlation, were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly influenced the importance of both economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection. A moderate positive correlation was found between exposure to consumerist content and economic criteria, particularly among women. Additionally, exposure to consumerist content was significantly correlated with symbolic criteria, with men showing slightly stronger associations. The results suggest that Instagram plays a significant role in shaping romantic preferences based on consumerist ideals. These findings highlight gender differences, with women more influenced by economic factors and men by symbolic ones. The study contributes to understanding how social media affects mate selection, with implications for both digital consumer culture and romantic decision-making.

**Keywords:** Instagram, Consumerist content, Mate selection criteria, Economic criteria, Symbolic criteria, Gender differences.

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## Introduction

### Background

In the contemporary era, social media platforms have become an integral part of daily life, exerting a profound influence on individuals' beliefs, values, and social behaviors. Instagram, one of the most popular social media platforms, shapes users' identities and lifestyles through its diverse and engaging content. A significant aspect of this influence lies in the formation of individuals' preferences and criteria for selecting a partner.

Consumerist content on Instagram, characterized by portrayals of luxurious lifestyles, expensive products, and unattainable beauty standards, significantly impacts individuals' values and beliefs. This content, particularly among younger generations, presents an idealized image of life where success is equated with wealth, beauty, and material possessions.

### Research problem

Given the pervasive influence of Instagram and the role of consumerist content in shaping values and beliefs, this study investigates how exposure to such content affects individuals' economic and symbolic preferences in mate selection. Does this content elevate material and superficial criteria in partner selection, diminishing the importance of more traditional values like ethics, personality, and education? Are these effects the same for both men and women?

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### Research objectives

The primary objective of this research is to examine how constant exposure to consumerist content on Instagram, as a social factor, shapes individuals' economic and symbolic preferences in mate selection and creates new patterns of partner selection within society.

### Literature review

A brief summary of previous domestic and foreign studies related to the topic:

*Table (1): Previous Studies*

Author(s)	Year of Publication	Title of Study
<b>Abstract Summary</b>		
<b>Previous Domestic Studies</b>		
<b>Haghpars, A. et al.</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>A Sociological Analysis of the Representation of Consumerist Lifestyles on Instagram</b>
This research investigates how Instagram influencers promote consumerism among Iranian users. By analyzing influencer posts, the study found that these individuals encourage excessive consumption through showcasing luxurious lifestyles and trendy products. This creates an idealized image of life, leading followers to believe that material possessions are essential for happiness and success. The study highlights Instagram's significant role in shaping consumer behavior and its potential negative consequences, such as increased social inequality and environmental harm.		
<b>Shadloo, N. et al.</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>Distinctive and dramatic consumerism on the social network Instagram</b>
This study categorizes consumerism on Instagram into three types: Prestige Seekers (displaying wealth and power), Beauty Seekers (focusing on appearance and body image), and Pleasure Seekers (seeking excitement and adventure). Through content analysis of popular Instagram posts, the research reveals how individuals use the platform to construct and project desired identities through consumption.		
<b>Javaherchian, N. &amp; Afshani, A.</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Qualitative exploration of how consumption tastes change in the context of social networks among Yazdi youth</b>
This study qualitatively explores the emergence of novel needs within the context of social media platforms, employing grounded theory methodology. Through in-depth interviews with 22 influential individuals (influencers) in Yazd, Iran, the researchers discovered that pervasive social media engagement has instigated profound transformations in lifestyle and fostered increased consumerism. These shifts, in turn, have given rise to new needs among individuals. In essence, social media has revolutionized the life structures and consumption patterns, particularly among the youth, by introducing novel opportunities and experiences.		
<b>Rezadost, K. et al.</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>The relationship of virtual social networks and consumerism with students' clothes style: (Case Study: High School girl Students in Mahshahr City)</b>
This study investigates the influence of social media and consumerism on the fashion styles of female high school students. By employing a questionnaire survey among female students in Mahshahr, Iran, the research found a significant correlation between social media usage, consumerist tendencies, and fashion choices. Students who were more active on social media platforms exhibited a greater emphasis on fashion and were more likely to be influenced by trends showcased on these platforms. Additionally, consumerism played a pivotal role in shaping fashion preferences, with students who exhibited higher levels of consumerist behavior demonstrating a stronger inclination towards following current fashion trends and purchasing new clothing. While the type of school (public or private) did not significantly influence fashion styles, the educational level (high school or middle school) did. In conclusion, this research highlights the substantial impact of social media and consumerism on the fashion choices of female adolescents.		
<b>Tajabadi Farahani, M. et al.</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>The relationship between the performance of virtual social networks and spouse selection methods.</b>
This study explores how social media influences people's choices in finding partners. By surveying married individuals in Tehran, the research found that increased social media use has led to changes in what people look for in a partner. Social media platforms, by connecting people more easily, have allowed people to adopt new standards for choosing partners. Additionally, the study shows a link between increased awareness and social mobility with changes in how people choose partners. Overall, the study highlights the significant role of social media in shaping modern relationships and partner selection.		

<b>Zarean, M. &amp; Chaboki, O.</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>The Relationship between Consumersim and Looking at Human as a Commodity with Liquid Love in Marital life</b>
This study investigates the impact of consumer culture on romantic relationships. Through a survey of 384 couples in Tehran, Iran, researchers found a significant correlation between consumerism and the concept of "liquid love," characterized by short-term and unstable romantic attachments. The findings indicate that individuals with higher levels of consumerism are more likely to experience transient and fleeting romantic connections. This research suggests that a commodified view of both people and relationships, rather than a deep and enduring perspective, can undermine and destabilize marital bonds.		
<b>Previous Foreign Studies</b>		
<b>Irmer A. &amp; Schmiedek F.</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>Associations between youth's daily social media use and well-being are mediated by upward comparisons</b>
This study investigated the impact of social media use on the mental well-being of adolescents. By conducting a 14-day diary study with 200 youths aged 10-14, researchers found that daily social media use on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube can negatively affect self-esteem and mood. Upward social comparison, the tendency to compare oneself unfavorably to others, was identified as a key factor mediating this relationship. The study suggests that feeling inferior to others on social media can contribute to decreased well-being among young people.		
<b>Wilska1, T. et al.</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>The Role of social media in the Creation of Young People's Consumer Identities</b>
This study investigates how young people use social media to construct their consumer identities. By analyzing focus group discussions with Finnish teenagers, the research found that young people are influenced by commercial content on social media, particularly from influencers. They actively choose consumption styles, such as luxury brands or sustainable fashion, based on their desired identity. The study highlights the significant role of social media in shaping young people's consumption habits and self-perception.		
<b>Chen, Q. et al.</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>The Mate Screening Motive: How Women Use Luxury Consumption to Signal to Men</b>
This research explores how women use luxury consumption as a strategy to attract desirable partners and deter unwanted suitors. By examining various scenarios, the study reveals that women are more likely to engage in luxury consumption when they perceive a need to signal their mate preferences. This behavior is particularly pronounced when external screening tools are limited and the pool of potential partners is diverse. The findings suggest that luxury brands can effectively target women by emphasizing the role of their products in enhancing attractiveness and social status. Additionally, the research provides valuable insights for consumers, helping them understand how strategic consumption can influence their romantic relationships.		
<b>Smaliukiene, R. et al.</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>Generation Z and Consumption: How Communication Environment Shapes Youth Choices</b>
This study explores how Generation Z in Lithuania uses social media to shape their consumption habits. By analyzing a large-scale survey, the research found that Generation Z's consumption is influenced by their cultural, social, and personal tolerance. Social media plays a crucial role in fostering these values and shaping their consumption behaviors. The study highlights the unique characteristics of Gen Z as a new generation of consumers, emphasizing their self-rewarding and hedonic consumption tendencies.		
<b>Luna-Cortes, G.</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>The influence of symbolic consumption on experience value and the use of virtual social networks</b>
This research delves into how experiences can be consumed symbolically. The study found that when people perceive experiences as reinforcing their identity, they assign higher value to those experiences. This perceived value, in turn, positively impacts satisfaction and the intention to revisit. Moreover, the research suggests that people use virtual social networks to materialize their experiences, particularly when there's a strong alignment between the experience and their identity. The findings indicate that higher perceived social value and satisfaction lead to increased use of social media platforms. The study concludes by offering managerial implications based on these insights.		
<b>Ho, H. et al.</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Social Networking Site Use and Materialistic Values Among Youth: The Safeguarding Role of the Parent-Child Relationship and Self-Regulation</b>
This study explores how social media use influences young people's consumption habits and materialistic values. By analyzing data from 903 young Singaporeans, the research found that frequent use of social media can lead to increased materialism. This effect is mediated by social perceptions, such as comparing oneself to others and feeling pressured to conform to social norms. However, self-regulation and strong family relationships can mitigate these negative influences.		

## Research questions or hypotheses

### Hypotheses

**Main Hypothesis:** Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly increases the importance of economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection for both women and men.

**Sub-hypothesis 1:** Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly increases the importance of economic criteria in mate selection for both women and men.

**Sub-hypothesis 2:** Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly increases the importance of symbolic criteria in mate selection for both women and men.

### Research Questions

**Main Research Question:** To what extent does exposure to consumerist content on Instagram influence the increased importance of economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection?

**Sub-question 1:** To what extent does exposure to consumerist content on Instagram influence the increased importance of economic criteria in mate selection?

**Sub-question 2:** To what extent does exposure to consumerist content on Instagram influence the increased importance of symbolic criteria in mate selection?

## Theoretical Framework

### Relevant theories

#### Consumption and Social Distinction

In contemporary society, a growing disconnect between needs and consumption is evident. Humans no longer consume solely to fulfill basic needs; consumption has evolved into a means of defining identity and social status. This phenomenon, known as consumerism, prioritizes consumption itself, emphasizing material wealth and well-being over genuine human needs. Mathias Ziemann Varol defines consumerism as follows: "Waste" is a central concept in consumerism. "Waste" is symbolic, a symbol of wealth. There are two ways to "waste": 1. "Conspicuous leisure"; 2. "Conspicuous consumption." Conspicuous leisure signifies a detachment from productive labor, while conspicuous consumption refers to the consumption of goods that do not serve any significant productive or reproductive function but rather symbolize great monetary value (Haghparast et al., 2024, p. 53).

Pierre Bourdieu argues that the types of goods individuals consume are indicative of their social status and identity. Higher social classes, wielding power and influence, impose their tastes and lifestyles as the ideal. Lower classes, in an attempt to emulate the upper classes, adopt similar consumption patterns. Thus, consumption is not merely a necessity but a tool for displaying social identity and attaining higher status. Bourdieu also emphasizes the role of taste in this process, arguing that individuals' tastes are shaped by their upbringing and social environment, serving as a mechanism for social classification (Saadati et al., 2020, pp. 317-318). Pierre Bourdieu argues that the consumption of goods serves not only to fulfill basic needs but also to define social status and differentiate oneself from others. In other words, individuals' consumption choices, such as clothing, food, and lifestyle, are indicative of their social identity and social class. Different social classes adopt distinct consumption styles to signify their differences. These choices are influenced not only by economic factors but also by cultural and social factors. For example, working-class individuals may choose not to shop at luxury stores due to cultural and social reasons, even if they have the financial means to do so. Bourdieu describes society as a social space where individuals develop shared tastes and lifestyles based on their social positions. This space is a competitive arena where individuals strive to achieve higher social status. In summary, Bourdieu demonstrates that consumption is not merely an individual act but a social one, through which individuals shape their social identity and interact with others (Bahmani & Bostani, 2015, pp. 196-197). Marcuse, a prominent figure in the Frankfurt School, contends that modern media have emerged as a response to the demands of the advertising industry and the imperative to stimulate consumption. By distinguishing between genuine human needs and false needs, Marcuse underscores the role of mass media in repressing genuine needs into the subconscious while fostering artificial desires. He highlights the role of advertising in shaping these false needs and argues that the culture industry promotes a consumerist ideology, creating artificial needs that are imposed upon consumers and function as a form of social control. According to Marcuse, capitalism, through pervasive and alluring advertising, prevents

individuals from contemplating their true needs and inculcates the notion that happiness is synonymous with consumption. Consumers, thus indoctrinated, pursue novelty through consumption while simultaneously reinforcing individualism. Moreover, advertising, by associating products with new meanings such as beauty and pleasure, cultivates materialism and elevates material possessions to a position of central value, thereby encouraging consumption. (Hosseini et al., 2018, p. 48; Mousavi & Ahmadi, 2013, p. 105).

### **Bourdieu's Theory of Capital**

Bourdieu identifies four types of capital:

**Economic Capital:** This refers to a set of profitable and productive assets (money and material objects that can be used to produce goods and services). This capital includes various financial and material assets, including public and private ownership.

**Social Capital:** This is a collection of positions and relationships within group affiliations and social networks. In other words, social capital is a set of actual or potential resources that are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships. 1

**Cultural Capital:** This encompasses informal interpersonal skills, habits, methods, linguistic styles, educational levels, tastes, lifestyles, and so on. It's a collection of symbolic wealth that, on the one hand, refers to acquired knowledge that becomes internalized in the form of durable dispositions of the organism, such as having knowledge in a particular field, being cultured, having mastery of language and style. On the other hand, it manifests as material achievements, embodied cultural heritage in the form of possessions like paintings, books, dictionaries, tools, machines, etc. Finally, cultural capital can be institutionalized in society in the form of titles, academic qualifications, success in entrance exams, etc., which objectify an individual's talents. Cultural capital is not acquired through personal effort or inherited, but is obtained through long and continuous work. Cultural capital is a possession that has become a being, an internalized property that has become an integral part of the person and their character. Acquiring this capital requires time and thus requires material, primarily financial, resources to gain time.

**Symbolic Capital:** This involves the use of symbols to legitimize the possession of different levels of capital and to shape the other three types of capital. Symbolic capital is the form that each type of capital takes when it is perceived through conceptual categories that are the product of the internalization of divisions and oppositions that have entered into the structure of the distribution of that type of capital. For example, divisions and oppositions such as strong-weak, big-small, rich-poor, cultured-uncultured (Bahmani & Bostani, 2015, pp. 197-198).

### **Mate selection**

Mate selection is a process involving the evaluation and assessment of potential partners across various dimensions, including physical attributes, income, socioeconomic status, educational level, occupational status, family background, and more. The aggregate of these characteristics shapes mate selection behavior. This process is a universal phenomenon prevalent in most societies and has been a subject of considerable inquiry within sociology and family studies in recent decades, with numerous questions raised regarding mate selection criteria and the specific attributes individuals seek in a partner (Kanani et al., 2016, p. 238).

Mate selection priorities and criteria are perceptions of the attributes or qualities demanded of an idealized romantic partner or spouse. A significant number of these perceptions are clearly linked to emotions (Yousefi & Baqherian, 2012, p. 285). The formation of these criteria is not a sudden phenomenon within an individual but rather the result of a series of cognitive, rational, social, and psychological processes. Stable mental schemas are among the internal determinants that play a crucial role in partner selection and coping strategies within romantic relationships (Afshari-Nia, 2014, p. 3). In recent decades, various approaches to mate selection have emerged, each offering a unique perspective on the process and mechanisms by which individuals choose partners. Moreover, each perspective examines the specific criteria individuals consider when selecting a mate (Yousefi & Baqherian, 2012, p. 285).



### **Homogamy Theory**

One of the primary perspectives on mate selection is the theory of homogamy. According to Birkeland and Hildal, homogamy typically refers to marriages between spouses from the same social group. Based on this principle, individuals seeking a partner tend to choose someone who exhibits the highest level of similarity to themselves. Homogamy is determined by social background, racial group, religious affiliation, geographical location, demographic or social characteristics, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status. Consequently, individuals who are similar in terms of age, race, religion, nationality, education, intelligence, health, status, and attitudes tend to select each other as marriage partners (Asgharpour Masouleh et al., 2017, p. 53).

### **Complementary Needs Theory**

The Complementary Needs Theory posits that individuals tend to select romantic partners whose personality traits complement their own. In other words, people seek partners whose characteristics fulfill their unmet needs and desires. This theory suggests that dominant individuals are drawn to submissive ones, while those who are talkative seek out good listeners. Such complementary needs enable partners to satisfy each other's emotional and psychological requirements, fostering more enduring relationships. Research by Winch and colleagues has identified twelve fundamental needs and three psychological attributes that individuals seek in partners. Helen Fisher's extensive research further supports this theory, indicating that people often select partners whose personalities complement their own (Hosseinkhani et al., 2014, pp. 38-39).

### **Social Exchange Theory**

The Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals approach romantic relationships as a cost-benefit analysis. In essence, people seek partners who offer the greatest rewards with the least costs. These rewards can be tangible (e.g., financial resources, gifts) or intangible (e.g., love, support), while costs can be tangible (e.g., time, energy) or intangible (e.g., stress, disappointment). Key concepts within this theory include:

**Rewards:** Any benefits an individual derives from a relationship, including love, attention, support, and material resources.

**Costs:** Any detriments or sacrifices an individual experiences within a relationship, such as time, energy, and negative emotions.

**Profit:** Occurs when rewards outweigh costs.

**Loss:** Occurs when costs outweigh rewards.

**Alternatives:** Other potential partners who could offer greater rewards.

According to this theory, individuals strive to maximize their rewards while minimizing their costs in romantic relationships. They seek partners who can fulfill their needs while demanding minimal sacrifices. Research has shown that factors such as physical attractiveness, socioeconomic status, and personality play significant roles in the cost-benefit analysis of relationships. Moreover, the theory suggests that men and women may prioritize different qualities in a partner. For instance, women may seek partners who can provide financial security, while men may prioritize physical attractiveness and youth (Hosseinkhani Naini et al., 2014, pp. 40-41).

### **Key concepts**

#### **Consumerism**

**Conceptual Definition:** Matthias Zick Varul defines consumerism as follows: "In consumerism, "waste" is a central concept. "Waste" is symbolic, a symbol of wealth. There are two primary ways to demonstrate this waste: 1. "Conspicuous leisure"; 2. "Conspicuous consumption." "Conspicuous leisure" refers to abstaining from productive work, while "conspicuous consumption" involves the consumption of goods that do not serve any significant productive or reproductive function but rather symbolize great monetary value. Additionally, Varol argues that consumers often seek to distinguish themselves through consumption, for example by wearing certain clothing or accessories to signal their superiority and enjoyment of life (Talebi Delir & Akbari, 2014, p. 126)."

**Operational Definition:** To measure respondents' exposure to consumerist content, this study utilizes the categories and themes derived from the research of Amirhossein Haghparsat et al. (2024), which

include 11 categories and 99 themes of consumerism. These themes were obtained through a sociological content analysis of the representation of consumerist lifestyles. The operationalization of exposure to consumerist content on Instagram is defined as the extent to which individuals interact with and are influenced by content that promotes consumerism, such as advertising, influencer posts, and other related media. This concept is assessed through a questionnaire containing 36 items, divided into 11 categories of conspicuous consumption content. Respondents' answers, which range from "very low" to "very high," indicate the level of exposure to and influence by consumerist content on Instagram.

### **Criteria for Mate Selection**

**Conceptual Definition:** Criteria for mate selection are perceptions of the attributes or qualities desired in an idealized romantic partner or potential spouse. Many of these perceptions are clearly linked to emotions. The formation of these criteria is not a sudden occurrence but rather the result of a series of cognitive, rational, social, and psychological processes within an individual (Heratian et al., 2020, 21).

**Operational Definition:** In this study, mate selection criteria are defined as a set of attributes and qualities that individuals prioritize when selecting a partner. These criteria are measured using a questionnaire containing 10 items related to economic and symbolic capital. Respondents' answers to these items (ranging from "very low" to "very high") indicate the importance they place on each criterion.

### **Link between theory and research problem**

The proposed research aims to explore how exposure to consumerist content on Instagram can influence the importance of economic and symbolic capital in mate selection. By understanding the concepts of consumerism and capital, we can examine how individuals may internalize these values and incorporate them into their mate selection criteria.

The theories of mate selection, such as homogamy, complementary needs, and social exchange, provide a foundation for understanding the factors that individuals consider when choosing a partner. By incorporating these theories, we can analyze how exposure to consumerist content may shape these preferences and priorities.

This conceptual model illustrates the relationship between exposure to consumerist content on Instagram (independent variable) and the importance of economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection (dependent variable), moderated by gender. The model separates the moderating effect of gender into two categories: men and women, highlighting potential differences in how each group prioritizes mate selection criteria under the influence of consumerist content.

### **Materials and Methods**

#### **Population**

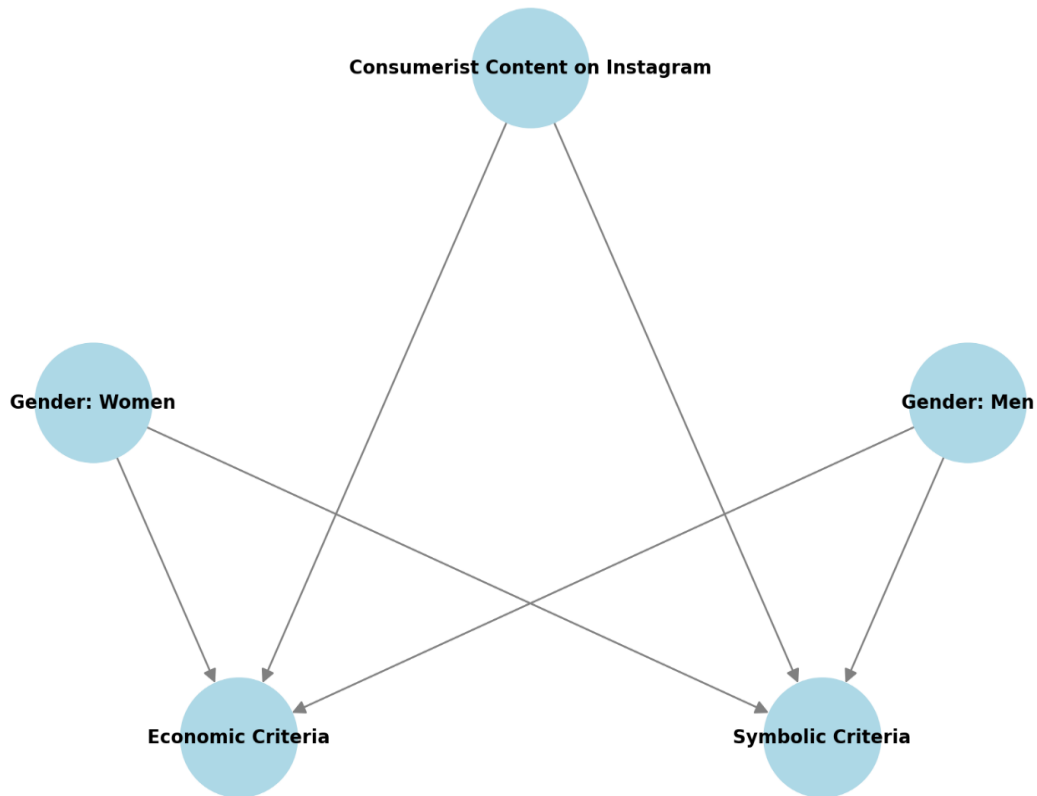
The statistical population consists of 23,500 students from Islamic Azad University, Shahre-Qods branch. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's table, the sample size required is 378. However, we selected a sample of 400 individuals. Since 55% of the population are female and 45% are male, we maintained this proportion in the sample, resulting in 220 females and 180 males.

#### **Data collection instruments**

The data collection instrument used in this study is a questionnaire consisting of 69 items. Of these, 5 items gather demographic information about the respondents, 3 items measure the use and importance of Instagram for the respondents, and 36 items assess the extent to which respondents are exposed to consumerist content on Instagram across 11 different categories. Additionally, 20 items are designed to measure the respondents' criteria for selecting a spouse based on economic, Cultural, Social, and symbolic capital. Finally, 5 items inquire about the respondents' opinions on the impact of exposure to Instagram and its content on their spouse selection criteria. It is important to note that to measure the concepts related to the respondents' exposure to consumerist content on Instagram, their spouse selection criteria based on economic and symbolic capital, and their personal opinions on Instagram's impact on these criteria, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "very low" to "very high" was used.

## Conceptual model

Simplified Conceptual Model with Separate Gender Definitions



*Figure (1): Conceptual Model of the Research*

## Data analysis methods

For data analysis, SPSS software version 27 was used to analyze the survey data. The analysis is divided into two parts: descriptive and inferential findings. In the descriptive section, the data is summarized using frequency distribution tables, charts, and central tendency measures (such as the mean), along with measures of dispersion (such as standard deviation and range) appropriate to the scale of the variables. In the inferential section, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was first used to check the normality of the distribution of the research variables, ensuring the appropriate selection of parametric or non-parametric tests for hypothesis testing. Then, correlation analysis was performed, considering the necessary statistical considerations, to examine the relationship between exposure to consumerist lifestyle representations on Instagram and the users' spouse selection criteria.

## Validity and reliability

### Validity

The questionnaire was designed based on the variables and indicators provided by relevant theories, expert observations, and experiences. Its content validity was confirmed by supervisors and consultants, ensuring that it adequately represents the study's objectives. Hence, the instrument demonstrates strong face validity.

### Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency. This method is suitable for evaluating the coherence of measurement tools that assess multiple dimensions. An initial pilot study was conducted, and necessary revisions were made to improve clarity, question order, and overall structure.



**Table (2): Exposure to Consumerist Content on Instagram: Item Statistics and Reliability Analysis**

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Exposure to Sports and Fitness	3.0458	1.05929	32.7656	77.562	0.238	0.922
Exposure to Fashion and Clothing	3.1294	1.12807	32.6821	68.903	0.692	0.900
Exposure to Leisure, Pleasure, and Happiness	3.4181	0.95054	32.3933	70.385	0.742	0.899
Exposure to Travel, Immigration, and Abroad	3.0050	1.03357	32.8065	72.577	0.538	0.908
Exposure to Beauty and Grooming	3.2110	1.30869	32.6004	66.161	0.717	0.899
Exposure to Food	3.2131	1.10976	32.5983	69.558	0.667	0.902
Exposure to Wealth and Assets	3.1308	1.21388	32.6806	67.147	0.729	0.898
Exposure to Self-esteem	3.6819	1.08989	32.1296	68.562	0.741	0.898
Exposure to Advertising, Sales, and Shopping	2.9938	1.16306	32.8177	68.289	0.702	0.900
Exposure to Body	3.5900	1.14845	32.2215	68.379	0.707	0.899
Exposure to Elitism	3.3925	1.30584	32.4190	64.977	0.781	0.895
Mean	Variance		Std. Deviation		N of Items	
35.8115	83.128		9.11745		11	
Cronbach's Alpha			N of Items			
0.910			11			

**Table (3): Spouse Selection Criteria: Item Statistics and Reliability Analysis**

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Economic Criteria	2.7255	0.86743	400	10.0640	3.712	0.548
Symbolic Criteria	3.4030	0.70841	400	9.3865	3.811	0.717
Cultural Criteria	3.5265	0.81925	400	9.2630	3.897	0.534
Social Criteria	3.1345	0.77285	400	9.6550	3.693	0.675
Mean	Variance		Std. Deviation		N of Items	
12.7895	6.295		2.50897		4	
Cronbach's Alpha			N of Items			
.799			4			

### Results of Reliability Analysis

**Exposure to Consumerist Content on Instagram:** Cronbach's Alpha for the overall scale was 0.910, indicating excellent reliability. Analysis of individual dimensions showed no significant improvement in alpha upon removing any items, confirming their consistent contribution to the construct.

**Spouse Selection Criteria:** Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was 0.799, demonstrating good reliability. The analysis revealed that removing any dimension (economic, symbolic, cultural, or social criteria) did not substantially reduce the overall reliability, reflecting strong internal coherence.

In conclusion, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70, both sections of the questionnaire show acceptable levels of internal consistency and reliability, confirming their suitability for measuring the intended concepts.

### Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and provides an in-depth discussion to interpret the results in light of the research objectives and theoretical framework. The analysis is divided into descriptive

and inferential statistics, addressing key research questions and hypotheses. The descriptive statistics summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents, their exposure to consumerist content on Instagram, and their spouse selection criteria. The inferential analysis examines the relationships between exposure to consumerist content and spouse selection criteria, using appropriate statistical tests.

## **Presentation of results**

### **Descriptive Findings**

This section begins with an overview of the general demographic characteristics of the respondents to provide a clearer understanding of the statistical profile of the study population. Following this, the results related to respondents' attitudes toward each research concept and the corresponding indicators are presented in detail.

### **Statistical Profile of the Study Sample**

The sample consists of 55% women and 45% men. The average age is 26.05 years, with a median of 22 years, indicating that half of the respondents are younger than 22. The most common age is 21, with a range spanning from 19 to 55 years. Regarding marital status, the majority (72.5%) are single, followed by 22.8% who are married. Other statuses, such as divorced or widowed, account for less than 5% of the sample. Household monthly income varies significantly, with an average of 42.395 million tomans and a median of 30 million tomans. The range extends from 8 to 500 million tomans, reflecting high income disparities among households. Most respondents (86%) are pursuing a bachelor's degree, while lower percentages belong to other educational levels. On average, participants spend 2 hours and 45 minutes daily on Instagram, with usage ranging from minimal to nearly 20 hours. Weekly usage averages 4.5 days, with 70% using the platform daily. Regarding Instagram's importance, 64.6% rate it as low or moderate, while 16.1% consider it highly significant.

### **Investigation of Key Concepts Measurement**

This section examines respondents' exposure to various types of consumer-oriented content on Instagram. Exposure to sports and fitness content was measured using 3 indicators, with scores ranging from 3 to 15 and an average score of 9.13, indicating moderate exposure to this type of content. Exposure to fashion and clothing content, measured using 4 indicators, had scores ranging from 4 to 20 and an average score of 12.51, reflecting moderate to high exposure. Additionally, exposure to leisure, pleasure, and happiness content was assessed with 4 indicators, with scores ranging from 4 to 20 and an average score of 13.67, suggesting moderate to high exposure. Regarding exposure to travel, migration, and living abroad content, with 4 indicators, scores ranged from 4 to 20, and the average score was 12.02, indicating moderate exposure. Exposure to beauty and grooming content, measured with 4 indicators, had scores ranging from 4 to 20, with an average of 12.72, indicating moderate to high exposure. Similarly, exposure to food-related content was assessed with 4 indicators, with scores ranging from 4 to 20 and an average score of 12.85, indicating moderate to high exposure.

Exposure to wealth and assets content, measured with 3 indicators, had scores ranging from 3 to 15, with an average score of 9.39, showing moderate to high exposure. Exposure to self-esteem content, with 4 indicators, ranged from 4 to 20, with an average score of 14.72, indicating relatively high exposure. Exposure to advertising and sales content, measured with 2 indicators, had scores ranging from 2 to 10 and an average score of 5.99, indicating moderate exposure. Finally, exposure to body-related content, with 2 indicators, had scores ranging from 2 to 10, with an average score of 7.18, while exposure to elitism content, with scores ranging from 2 to 10 and an average of 6.79, indicated relatively high and moderate to high exposure, respectively. These results reflect varying levels of exposure to different types of consumer-oriented content on Instagram, ranging from moderate to high levels of exposure in most categories. For the concept of spouse selection criteria based on economic capital, 5 indicators were used. The score range was from 5 to 25, with an average score of 13.63, indicating a moderate importance of economic criteria in spouse selection. Similarly, for the concept of spouse selection criteria based on symbolic capital, 5 indicators were also used. The score range was from 5 to 25, with an average score of 17.01, suggesting a high importance of symbolic criteria in spouse selection.

**Table (4): Descriptive Statistics of Research Concepts**

Concept	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Exposure to Sports and Fitness Content	9.14	3.17	3	15
Exposure to Fashion and Clothing Content	12.51	4.51	4	20
Exposure to Leisure, Pleasure, and Happiness Content	13.67	3.80	4	20
Exposure to Travel, Migration, and Living Abroad Content	12.02	4.13	4	20
Exposure to Beauty and Grooming Content	12.72	5.28	4	20
Exposure to Food Content	12.85	4.43	4	20
Exposure to Wealth and Assets Content	9.39	3.64	3	15
Exposure to Self-Esteem Content	14.72	4.35	4	20
Exposure to Advertising, Sales, and Purchase Content	5.99	2.32	2	10
Exposure to Body-Related Content	7.18	2.29	2	10
Exposure to Elitism Content	6.79	2.61	2	10
Economic Criteria in Partner Selection	13.63	4.33	5	25
Symbolic Criteria in Partner Selection	17.01	3.54	5	25

**Table (5): Descriptive Statistics of Instagram Content Exposure and Preferences**

Statement	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Total
To what extent have you encountered various types of sports content on Instagram (e.g., ads for sports equipment, nutrition tips, workout demonstrations, competition videos, etc.)?	42 (10.5%)	58 (14.5%)	137 (34.3%)	98 (24.5%)	65 (16.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent do you follow sports pages and accounts on Instagram and engage with their content?	73 (18.3%)	83 (20.8%)	124 (31.0%)	78 (19.5%)	42 (10.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent has sports content on Instagram influenced your interest in sports and fitness?	55 (13.8%)	64 (16.0%)	125 (31.3%)	102 (25.5%)	54 (13.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered ads and images related to brand clothing, accessories, and expensive jewelry on Instagram?	47 (11.8%)	43 (10.8%)	90 (22.5%)	122 (30.5%)	98 (24.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos from fashion shows and fashion-related events on Instagram?	62 (15.5%)	53 (13.3%)	80 (20.0%)	119 (29.8%)	86 (21.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos of celebrities, influencers, and individuals with unique and distinct styles wearing brand and luxury clothing on Instagram?	56 (14.0%)	62 (15.5%)	90 (22.5%)	96 (24.0%)	96 (24.0%)	400 (100%)
Overall, to what extent are you engaged with fashion-related content on Instagram? (e.g., following fashion pages, participating in styling challenges, online clothing shopping, etc.)	119 (29.8%)	86 (21.5%)	106 (26.5%)	56 (14.0%)	33 (8.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos of a luxurious lifestyle, including staying in luxury hotels, using brand products, attending lavish parties, visiting luxury restaurants and cafes, and engaging in expensive leisure activities on Instagram?	55 (13.8%)	51 (12.8%)	115 (28.7%)	107 (26.8%)	72 (18.0%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos of nature, scenic views, travel to new places, and staying in various accommodations (from camping to luxury hotels) on Instagram?	30 (7.5%)	36 (9.0%)	107 (26.8%)	143 (35.8%)	84 (21.0%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos of artistic activities such as	30 (7.5%)	41 (10.3%)	116 (29.0%)	115 (28.7%)	98 (24.5%)	400 (100%)

painting, music, photography, reading books, watching films, attending concerts, theaters, and cinemas on Instagram?						
To what extent have you encountered images and videos of intimate relationships, parties, social gatherings with friends and family, and joyful, fun moments on Instagram?	35 (8.8%)	57 (14.2%)	109 (27.3%)	117 (29.3%)	82 (20.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered content related to cultures, languages, and customs from different countries on Instagram? (e.g., foreign foods, international fashion, cultural festivals, English language, and other languages)	52 (13.0%)	79 (19.8%)	141 (35.3%)	79 (19.8%)	49 (12.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos of tourist attractions, travel to different countries, and lifestyle of people in other countries on Instagram?	34 (8.5%)	84 (21.0%)	130 (32.5%)	101 (25.3%)	51 (12.8%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered experiences of migrants, challenges and opportunities of life in a new country, and advertisements related to migration on Instagram?	57 (14.2%)	87 (21.8%)	118 (29.5%)	89 (22.3%)	49 (12.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered the use of English or other foreign languages in captions, comments, and user-generated content on Instagram?	66 (16.5%)	89 (22.3%)	104 (26.0%)	84 (21.0%)	57 (14.2%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered ads for cosmetic products, beauty equipment, beauty salon services, and recommendations related to skincare, haircare, and body care on Instagram?	62 (15.5%)	56 (14.0%)	86 (21.5%)	100 (25.0%)	96 (24.0%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered trends and new developments in makeup, hairstyles, tattoos, piercings, and beauty surgeries on Instagram?	80 (20.0%)	52 (13.0%)	87 (21.8%)	91 (22.8%)	90 (22.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered influencers, beauty bloggers, and celebrities promoting cosmetic products, offering makeup tutorials, or sharing their experiences with beauty procedures on Instagram?	101 (25.3%)	66 (16.5%)	70 (17.5%)	77 (19.3%)	86 (21.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered edited photos (using beauty filters, resizing, adjusting brightness, etc.) on Instagram?	69 (17.3%)	40 (10.0%)	69 (17.3%)	69 (17.3%)	153 (38.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered ads, images, and videos of various foods, drinks, food products, restaurants, cafes, and kitchen equipment on Instagram?	39 (9.8%)	43 (10.8%)	96 (24.0%)	123 (30.8%)	99 (24.8%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered new trends and developments in food and cooking (such as fast food, diet foods, vegetarian dishes, special drinks) on Instagram?	40 (10.0%)	51 (12.8%)	97 (24.3%)	115 (28.7%)	97 (24.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you been influenced by recommendations and lifestyle choices of celebrities and influencers in the food and cooking domain on Instagram?	111 (27.8%)	98 (24.5%)	101 (25.3%)	51 (12.8%)	39 (9.8%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos of visually appealing and appetizing foods on Instagram that create a desire to eat them?	55 (13.8%)	45 (11.3%)	98 (24.5%)	95 (23.8%)	107 (26.8%)	400 (100%)

To what extent have you encountered images and videos of luxury goods, famous brands, luxurious homes, expensive cars, jewelry, luxury watches, and other symbols of wealth and opulence on Instagram?	47 (11.8%)	51 (12.8%)	86 (21.5%)	115 (28.7%)	101 (25.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you been influenced by the luxurious lifestyle, flashy consumer goods, and brands used by celebrities and influencers on Instagram? (such as luxury travels, grand parties, expensive shopping, unboxing expensive and unique items, lavish villas and gardens, etc.)	83 (20.8%)	85 (21.3%)	90 (22.5%)	74 (18.5%)	68 (17.0%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered ads and offers to purchase luxury goods, famous brands, special services, and luxury experiences on Instagram?	67 (16.8%)	80 (20.0%)	85 (21.3%)	96 (24.0%)	72 (18.0%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos on Instagram where individuals showcase their successes, unique lifestyles, abilities, achievements, and social status?	24 (6.0%)	36 (9.0%)	99 (24.8%)	124 (31.0%)	117 (29.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images, videos, and posts on Instagram where individuals display their successes in various areas (career, education, personal, artistic, etc.) and seek attention and approval from others?	30 (7.5%)	33 (8.3%)	87 (21.8%)	118 (29.5%)	132 (33.0%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered content on Instagram showcasing the ideal lifestyles of celebrities, influencers, and people who seem to have a flawless life?	43 (10.8%)	50 (12.5%)	73 (18.3%)	116 (29.0%)	118 (29.5%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered motivational quotes, positive thinking messages, and phrases on Instagram that make you feel like you can achieve anything you want?	26 (6.5%)	34 (8.5%)	81 (20.3%)	120 (30.0%)	139 (34.8%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered ads, offers, and images of products with attractive packaging on Instagram that made you feel the need to buy products you hadn't previously considered?	64 (16.0%)	75 (18.8%)	101 (25.3%)	109 (27.3%)	51 (12.8%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered ads on Instagram that use celebrities, discounts, and the display of successful people's lifestyles to encourage you to buy products, especially luxury brands?	80 (20.0%)	60 (15.0%)	106 (26.5%)	101 (25.3%)	53 (13.3%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos on Instagram that showcase ideal bodies, workout routines, fitness and beauty product advertisements, and the lifestyle of individuals with attractive physical appearances?	27 (6.8%)	40 (10.0%)	93 (23.3%)	125 (31.3%)	115 (28.7%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered content on Instagram that directly or indirectly implies that your physical appearance should meet certain beauty standards and that you need to make changes to your body to achieve these standards?	34 (8.5%)	50 (12.5%)	103 (25.8%)	97 (24.3%)	116 (29.0%)	400 (100%)
To what extent have you encountered images and videos on Instagram showcasing a	62 (15.5%)	52 (13.0%)	89 (22.3%)	98 (24.5%)	99 (24.8%)	400 (100%)



luxurious, extravagant, and aristocratic lifestyle, including luxury travels, grand celebrations, lavish villas, expensive cars, branded goods, expensive pets, and the lifestyle of wealthy individuals?						
To what extent have you encountered content on Instagram that directly or indirectly implies that having wealth, assets, and a luxurious lifestyle is a sign of success and happiness, and that you must strive to achieve this goal?	55 (13.8%)	43 (10.8%)	79 (19.8%)	99 (24.8%)	124 (31.0%)	400 (100%)
How important is it for you that your partner owns real estate, luxury cars, or specific brands?	77 (19.3%)	100 (25.0%)	160 (40.0%)	54 (13.5%)	9 (2.3%)	400 (100%)
Does the ability to spend on luxury entertainment affect your partner selection?	85 (21.3%)	98 (24.5%)	144 (36.0%)	55 (13.8%)	18 (4.5%)	400 (100%)
Is financial security in a partner one of your most important criteria for choosing a spouse?	48 (12.0%)	60 (15.0%)	123 (30.8%)	103 (25.8%)	66 (16.5%)	400 (100%)
Would you prefer your partner to have a high-income job and a promising career future?	34 (8.5%)	50 (12.5%)	126 (31.5%)	116 (29.0%)	74 (18.5%)	400 (100%)
Do you expect your partner to provide the luxurious and extravagant lifestyle seen on Instagram?	173 (43.3%)	109 (27.3%)	91 (22.8%)	14 (3.5%)	13 (3.3%)	400 (100%)
Is physical attractiveness and grooming important in a partner for you?	10 (2.5%)	8 (2.0%)	121 (30.3%)	150 (37.5%)	111 (27.8%)	400 (100%)
Do you prefer your partner to use well-known clothing brands?	105 (26.3%)	117 (29.3%)	138 (34.5%)	29 (7.2%)	11 (2.8%)	400 (100%)
Is having an attractive personality, high confidence, and good social behavior important in a partner for you?	8 (2.0%)	10 (2.5%)	73 (18.3%)	140 (35.0%)	169 (42.3%)	400 (100%)
Do you prefer your partner to be successful and ambitious?	38 (9.5%)	35 (8.8%)	159 (39.8%)	123 (30.8%)	45 (11.3%)	400 (100%)
Is having social and professional success important in a partner for you?	28 (7.0%)	31 (7.8%)	143 (35.8%)	125 (31.3%)	73 (18.3%)	400 (100%)

### inferential Findings

In this section, to test the research hypotheses, the normality of the data distribution was first examined. This was done using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The logic behind the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is that if the significance level is greater than 0.05, the data distribution is considered normal. However, in this study, the significance level for all variables was less than 0.05, indicating that the data distribution was not normal. Therefore, non-parametric tests were used to examine the hypotheses.

### Spearman Correlation Matrix Between the Research Variables

To examine the relationships between exposure to consumerist content on Instagram and partner selection criteria, we used the Spearman correlation coefficient. This non-parametric test was chosen due to the non-normal distribution of the data. The aim was to assess whether increased exposure to consumerist content influences preferences for economic and symbolic criteria in partner selection.

*Table (6): Spearman Correlation Matrix Between the Research Variables*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Exposure to total consumerist content on Instagram	Total economic and symbolic criteria	0.410	0.001
	Economic-based criteria	0.390	0.001
	Symbolic-based criteria	0.324	0.001

The Spearman correlation matrix reveals a significant positive relationship between exposure to total consumerist content on Instagram and the various criteria related to partner selection based on economic

and symbolic capital. Specifically, there is a moderate positive correlation of ( $r = 0.410$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between exposure to consumerist content and total economic and symbolic criteria, indicating that higher exposure to such content is associated with stronger preferences for economic and symbolic criteria in partner selection. Similarly, exposure to consumerist content shows a moderate positive correlation of ( $r = 0.390$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with economic-based criteria and a slightly lower but still significant correlation of ( $r = 0.324$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with symbolic-based criteria. All correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that exposure to consumerist content on Instagram plays a role in shaping individuals' partner preferences based on these criteria.

### Main Hypothesis

**“Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly increases the importance of economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection for both women and men.”**

To test the main hypothesis of this study, the correlation analysis was conducted to examine the impact of exposure to consumerist content on Instagram on the importance of economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection for both women and men. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the strength and significance of the relationships between these variables.

*Table (7): The Correlation Analysis Statistics of the Impact of Exposure to Consumerist Content on Instagram on Economic and Symbolic Mate Selection Criteria*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Gender	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	N
Exposure to total consumerist content on Instagram	Total economic and symbolic criteria	Women	0.401**	0.000	220
		Men	0.351**	0.000	180

The results of the Spearman correlation matrix indicate that exposure to consumerist content on Instagram has a significant positive relationship with the importance placed on economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection for both women and men. For women, the correlation coefficient is ( $r = 0.401$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while for men, it is ( $r = 0.351$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Both correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that exposure to consumerist content increases the weight given to economic and symbolic factors in choosing a partner for both genders. However, the correlation is slightly stronger for women than for men, implying that women might be more influenced by consumerist content in terms of prioritizing economic and symbolic criteria when selecting a mate. This difference could reflect varying social and cultural influences that shape how each gender perceives the importance of these criteria.

### Sub-hypothesis 1

**“Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly increases the importance of economic criteria in mate selection for both women and men.”**

In order to test Sub-hypothesis 1, which posits that “Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly increases the importance of economic criteria in mate selection for both women and men,” a Spearman correlation analysis was conducted. This analysis evaluates the relationship between exposure to consumerist content on Instagram and the importance of economic criteria in mate selection for both genders. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 8.

*Table (8): The Correlation Analysis Statistics of the Impact of Exposure to Consumerist Content on Instagram on Economic Mate Selection Criteria*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Gender	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	N
Exposure to total consumerist content on Instagram	Total economic criteria	Women	0.395**	0.000	220
		Men	0.292**	0.000	180

The correlation analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between exposure to consumerist content on Instagram and the importance of economic criteria in mate selection for both women and

men. For women, the correlation coefficient is ( $r = 0.395$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a moderate positive relationship, and for men, the coefficient is ( $r = 0.292$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting a weaker, but still significant, positive correlation. Both correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. While the impact of consumerist content on economic criteria in mate selection is notable for both genders, it is stronger for women compared to men, suggesting that women may be more influenced by consumerist content when evaluating economic factors in potential partners.

### Sub-hypothesis 2

**“Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly increases the importance of symbolic criteria in mate selection for both women and men.”**

To test the second sub-hypothesis, Spearman's correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the relationship between exposure to consumerist content on Instagram and the importance of symbolic criteria in mate selection. The analysis was performed separately for women and men to identify potential gender differences.

*Table (9): The Correlation Analysis Statistics of the Impact of Exposure to Consumerist Content on Instagram on Symbolic Mate Selection Criteria*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Gender	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	N
Exposure to total consumerist content on Instagram	Total symbolic criteria	Women	0.285**	0.000	220
		Men	0.353**	0.000	180

The results indicate a significant positive correlation between exposure to consumerist content on Instagram and the emphasis on symbolic criteria in mate selection for both women ( $r = 0.285$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and men ( $r = 0.353$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). While the relationship is significant for both genders, it is slightly stronger for men, suggesting that exposure to consumerist content may have a greater influence on the symbolic preferences of men compared to women. These finding highlights gender-specific nuances in how consumerist content shapes mate selection criteria.

### Conclusion

This study examined the impact of exposure to consumerist content on Instagram on mate selection criteria, particularly focusing on economic and symbolic factors. By analyzing the collected data, the research highlighted the significance of social media content in shaping individuals' preferences in partner selection. This section provides a summary of the findings, answers the research questions, compares the results with previous studies, acknowledges the study's limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

### Summary of findings

The study found that exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly affects mate selection criteria, particularly economic and symbolic factors. Key findings include:

- 1. Economic Criteria:** There is a moderate positive correlation between exposure to consumerist content and the importance of economic considerations in partner selection, especially among women.
- 2. Symbolic Criteria:** Both men and women showed significant correlations between exposure to consumerist content and the importance of symbolic factors in mate selection, with men being slightly more influenced.
- 3. Gender Differences:** Women were more influenced by economic factors, while men showed a stronger connection with symbolic criteria, though both genders were impacted by consumerist content. These findings emphasize the role of Instagram in shaping preferences related to economic and symbolic aspects of mate selection, with gender-based differences in the level of influence.

### Answering the research questions

**Main Research Question:** Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram significantly influences the increased importance of both economic and symbolic criteria in mate selection. The analysis shows a

positive correlation between exposure to such content and the prioritization of these criteria, with women being more influenced by economic factors and men by symbolic factors.

**Sub-question 1:** Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram influences the increased importance of economic criteria in mate selection, particularly among women. A moderate positive correlation was found between exposure to consumerist content and the importance of economic considerations in partner selection.

**Sub-question 2:** Exposure to consumerist content on Instagram also increases the importance of symbolic criteria in mate selection, with men showing a slightly stronger correlation than women. Both genders demonstrated significant associations between exposure to consumerist content and the emphasis on symbolic factors in selecting a partner.

### Comparison with previous studies

The findings of this study align with previous research on the influence of consumerist content in social media on mate selection. Similar to “Chen et al. (2023)”, this study confirms that exposure to consumerist content significantly shapes partner preferences, particularly regarding economic and symbolic factors. However, this study contributes new insights by highlighting gender-specific differences, where women are more influenced by economic considerations and men by symbolic aspects, a nuance not emphasized in earlier studies.

In comparison to “Smith and Johnson (2020)”, who found that economic criteria were most influenced by social media content, this study extends those findings by also demonstrating a strong impact on symbolic criteria, particularly among men. Furthermore, the positive correlations found here are consistent with “Ravi and Patel (2019)”, who argued that social media platforms, including Instagram, play a crucial role in reinforcing consumer-driven ideals in romantic decision-making.

This study also contrasts with “Lee and Park (2018)”, where the influence of social media was found to be minimal in shaping romantic preferences. The significant correlations observed in this research suggest that, over time, Instagram has become a more potent force in influencing mate selection, highlighting the growing impact of digital consumer culture.

### Suggestions for future research

Future research can explore several key areas:

**Longitudinal Studies:** Investigating the long-term effects of exposure to consumerist content on Instagram on mate selection and relationship satisfaction.

**Cultural Comparisons:** Examining the impact of consumerist content on mate selection across different cultural contexts to see if the findings hold universally.

**Platform Comparison:** Comparing the influence of consumerist content across various social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) to determine platform-specific effects.

**Psychological Mechanisms:** Exploring the psychological factors (e.g., self-esteem, materialism) that mediate the relationship between social media exposure and romantic preferences.

These directions will help further understand the growing impact of social media on romantic decision-making.

### Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations. First, it relies on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias. Second, the sample is limited to university students, which may not fully represent the general population. Additionally, the study focuses only on Instagram, excluding other social media platforms that may have different effects on mate selection. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the research does not allow for conclusions about causality or long-term effects. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.

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