Mom Influencers and Strategic Communication on Instagram: A study of Constructing Motherhood in Indian online space

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Abstract

Mothers are the new influencers on Instagram that appeal to the strongest human emotion and make motherhood an efficient tool to market different products. This strategic communication has seen some success and these influencers' posts have found sponsors. This research aims to study how Indian mother influencers construct motherhood on Instagram. Taking the framework of crystallization in the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and theory of Trans para-Social Interaction, the researchers examined Instagram for construction of motherhood by mother influencers as neo-agenda setters and how users in their social network are shaping it through their attitudes and beliefs. Objectives included analysing elements of motherhood in the content and presentation of the posts, exploring aspects of commercial promotion and users' attitude towards content. The study analysed 100 posts uploaded by ten Indian Instagram mother influencers-those with minimum three sponsored posts. Simple random sampling was used to choose first ten accounts with posts appearing in community #indianmomblogger during March 2024. Further, first ten posts from each account were randomly taken for sample. Using mixed methods approach, the researchers conducted content analysis with 'post' as the unit of analysis. Quantitative variables about mother, child and commercial aspects of posts were combined with qualitative elements of visual grammar and analysis of users' sentiments for carrying out the study. The researchers concluded that the motherhood shown in these posts is largely artificial and a pushed one to make profit out of it for which children are the means to an end. The followers look up to them to share their experiences and seek guidance which largely boils down to consumerism.

Keywords: influencers, motherhood, social construction of technology, trans para-social interaction, content analysis, consumerism

1. Introduction

With the introduction of social media, the way we communicate, connect and consume information has changed. New spaces have been created on platforms like Instagram where people share their personal stories with large, engaged audience. Among these digital storytellers, a group of influencers has gained prominence—mothers, or mom influencers. (EY,2023) These women self-brand themselves as experts in parenting, child-rearing and family life. They have created a powerful niche within Instagram, and they narrate their journeys of motherhood. Their narratives present a strategic approach in which they blend their personal experience and sponsored content. This type of content has blurred the lines between authentic self-expression and commercial motives. They have become most important element of marketing mix of brands (EY,2023). In India, a culture where the conceptions of motherhood are deeply imbedded in tradition and social expectations, the depiction of motherhood on Instagram offers a particular lens for the study of digital culture to interact with social constructs. Indian mom influencers not only create content around parenting but also participate in the commodification of their roles as mothers. The extent to which the people have become dependent on technology to cope with their anxiety and loneliness in the post-pandemic era calls placed influencers as the face of brands. (Saldanha N, Mulye R, Japutra A , 2024). This kind of interaction points to the need of studying the implications of influencers' content that reflects the idealized version of motherhood, crafted with care to engage people and attract brands, transforming an intimate bond into something exchangeable for some pretty good money.

This paper examines the construction of motherhood by Indian mom influencers on Instagram. In this paper, we explore how mom influencers use Instagram as a tool to construct and perpetuate specific ideas about motherhood, acting as agenda setters who influence not only their audience's perceptions but also the broader societal understanding of parenting and gender roles in India.

The functionality of these influencers is beyond the simple creation of content-they are already at the

forefront of a complex play between social validation, market forces, and the dynamics of changing motherhood. Through this projection of an aspirational version of motherhood often signifying perfect homes, well-dressed children, and endless patience, these influencers create a standard that is both relatable and aspirational, though the reality they portray is one commonly woven with commercial interests. Sponsored posts, paid partnerships, and brand endorsements are all used seamlessly in their stories, making their personal experience a platform for promotion. (Beuckles and De Wolf, 2024; Guzel, 2023). Against this backdrop, motherhood turns into a marketable identity whereby the influencers in these posts not only present themselves as mothers but also as businesswomen using their maternal roles to earn their living. (Bueckels & De Jans, 2022; Guzel, 2023) This situates critical questions: How is motherhood being constructed by these influencers? What roles do children play in this commodified family life? How do the followers take to this integration of authenticity with consumerism? This paper will, through the scrutiny of both the content produced by these influencers and the responses of their followers, understand the way social media is fashioning mothers' discourse in India.

Theoretical Framework

The current study builds on the theory given by Casalo et al (2018) who see social media influencers as the contemporary opinion leaders with their influence surpassing that of traditional ones in the two-step flow process of communication. This process is seen in a more two-way approach by Wohn and Bowe (2014) in their theory of Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). They gave the crystallization framework that sees social media influencers as neo-agenda setters today. Implied in the contemporary times of online social media, the influencers on various social media platforms can be seen as opinion leaders disseminating brand messages and other information to their followers and users in the form of personal ties, thus influencing their opinion about events, products, practices and other important phenomenon. This is like spreading word -of-mouth about a brand message among the public before the campaign runs on traditional media. This strategy is called 'engagement' (Scilia and Alcazar, 2016). Chen Lou (2021) in his theory of trans para-social interaction throws light on the follower's involvement by seeing this as 'reciprocal', 'two-way' interaction through which the users connect themselves emotionally with the influencers just as the audiences of mass media used to do with the actors, celebrities and characters. The current study takes up Instagram as a social media network where influencers share their perception of reality and the followers express their beliefs and attitudes, thus shaping it as a platform together. The consequent reality that gets constructed in this case, is about motherhood. Thus, the current study applies this framework to analyse the kind of discourse constructed around motherhood by

interaction between the influencers and their followers through their respective posts and comments.

2. Review of Literature

Ouvrein (2024) in her study shows that for mothers, exposure to content of mommy influencers led to comparison with such influencers and resulted in lower perceived parental self-efficacy. Mothers who more frequently visited profiles of mommy influencers scored lower scores on the parental self-efficacy scale. Mommy influencers lead to their audience forming perceptions and expectations about motherhood, and they present a perfect motherhood which leads to internalization of these ideas, thereby increasing the pressure to be a perfect mother and making them insecure. (Ouvrein, 2024). However, for primary caregivers, regular exposure to mommy influencer content was helpful and related to higher parental efficacy. This is related to easy access to information provided by mommy influencers, which leads to primigravida having more information and more confidence. (Ouvrein, 2024) Beuckles and De Wolf (2024) found that the parents are unique communication entities on social media who have attributes of ordinary parents, social media influencers and advertisers. In their systematic literature review of parent influencer research, they found that in dominant messages about parenthood contained discourses that could be harmful for parents and children, like unequal gender roles, alcoholism as a means for coping and escapism, public exhibition of intimate children's practices and emphasis on the looks of mothers. (Beuckles and De Wolf, 2024)

These influencers create images of ideal parenthood and motherhood and what it means to be a good mother in the digital age, but parents don't always follow these versions. They have agency and they do not always behave as individuals in need of assistance. (Beuckles and De Wolf, 2024). D'Amelio (2024) focuses on a framework, digital maternal ambivalence. According to this framework, in order to stay relevant on social media algorithms, mom influencers have to constantly negotiate between the pressure of adhering to idealized notions of motherhood and on the other side, the need for presenting and re-presenting an authentic relatable self which might be in conflict with what constitutes a good mother image. Guzel (2023) conducted a year-long digital ethnography study and discovered that Insta moms are regarded as exemplars of wisdom and beauty by their followers, with those sharing experiential knowledge exerting a greater influence on the audience. Insta moms have introduced new responsibilities associated with the idealized parenting paradigm, encompassing celebrification, self-exhibition, brand promotion, impeccable beauty, and sensuality. Nonetheless, most of their low-income followers are concerned about their postpartum weight, and these mothers exhibit increased feelings of hopelessness, fragility, depression, and insecurity.

Instamoms utilize digital media to attain both money and spiritual fulfilment through the influencer economy, while also reconstructing the self-perceived to have

vanished with childbirth. The idealization exhibited by insta moms engenders issues related to the commodification of parenthood, gender inequality, and commercialization. (Guzel, 2023). Chee et al. (2023) assert that influencers offer a conveniently accessible and relevant network for pregnant individuals or new parents experiencing a difficult adjustment to motherhood. Parents are compelled towards influencers due to uncertainty and susceptibility, encountering significant risks of disinformation. Egmose et al. (2022) conducted a study involving 270 mothers of children aged 0-6 years, revealing that moms exhibiting elevated levels of social comparison experienced detrimental effects from following Insta Parents and similar profiles, resulting in a diminished sense of parenting competence. Mothers were adversely impacted by upward comparisons with romanticized images of exemplary parents. Nevertheless, women perceived greater assistance from Insta Parents when they engaged in horizontal comparisons with parents who disclose their own parenting difficulties. They were bolstered by Insta Parents who shared their parenting challenges and affirmed their adequacy.

Bueckels and De Jans (2022) discovered that sponsored social media posts by "mom influencers" generated greater purchase intention and perceptions of product appropriateness for their children compared to posts disseminated by the brand itself. Increased purchase intention and views of product suitability were noted when the "mom influencer" was recognized as an "expert" in relation to the marketed product (Bueckels & De Jans, 2022).

Kirkpatrick and Lee (2022) discovered that Instagram posts romanticize maternity and parenting. New mothers drew more comparisons to honest depictions of motherhood by ordinary mothers than to those by influencers. Idealized representations of parenting by influencers led to increased envy but not heightened anxiety. Posts about parenthood on social media can adversely affect the mental health of new mothers.

Halliday et al. (2020) studied influencer marketing between mother and found that there were negative reactions to posts when promotional disclosures were executed quietly by "brand-tagging." However, when brands were both textually and visually promoted, it assuaged feelings of manipulative intent and enhanced affective response to the posts. Lehto (2019) illustrates that evaluative and critical discourse occurs in the comments regarding different parenting approaches that may characterize the modern woman as a "bad mom". The notion of the "bad mom" has become commonplace in a context where various parenting methods are scrutinized and accepted by some. In these popular blogs, traditional assumptions are contested while maintaining that the ostensibly "bad" mothers are, in fact, "good". More precisely, negativity is redefined as positivity, while the concept of motherhood remains both emotionally charged and divisive. In this process, bad motherhood evolves into a new idealized or even "normal" paradigm of maternal behaviour. (Lehto, 2019)

3. Research Gap

Most of the research studies in this field have focused either on the source (influencers) or the receivers (followers). And their focus revolves around the impact, response, motivation or perception. Moreover, there is nominal research in influencer motherhood or parenting with reference to Indian society. The current study tries to analyse the content and presentation of motherhood in the posts uploaded by influencers in the Indian society, thereby shedding light on the strategies and techniques used while using platform of Instagram to reach out to followers. The researchers also analyse the sentiment of the Indian users/followers on this type of communication, thereby revealing some pertinent findings about the ways these followers use various social media networks.

4. Objectives of the study

For current research, the following objectives were formulated –

a. To analyse the construction of motherhood by Instagram mother influencers through their parenting related content and presentation

b. To explore the strategies of commercial promotion in the posts of Instagram mother influencers

c. To find out the users' attitude towards the parenting content of mother influencers

5. Research Questions:

As the approach of triangulation demands a theoretical base to provide a perspective for using mixed methods at the level of data collection and analysis, the present study has formed some research questions:

RQ1. What is the definition of motherhood in the posts of mother influencers?

RQ2. What is the role and identity of child in the content?

RQ3. Which strategies are used for making the content believable and authentic?

RQ4. What are the influencers' strategies of promoting collaborated products among the followers?

RQ5. Does the promoted brand relate to the parenting theme of blog?

RQ5. How do the other users see the parenting of the mother influencers?

6. Research Methodology

This study aims to analyse the content shared by the influencers and its presentation along with the opinion and attitudes of their followers. Thus, it involves analysis of Instagram posts, interpretations of conversations and comments as well as use of non-verbal elements involving camera, colours, body language etc. The authors have adopted a pragmatic approach by combining quantitative as well as qualitative research methods on the level of data collection as well as data analysis. As part of the quantitative approach, method of content analysis is adopted wherein small set of variables of roles and tasks of mothers, appearance of mothers in terms of class and social distance, type and format of the post, presence and

role of child, type of emotions, formats of collaboration, number of likes, number and type of comments in the posts are used in the form of codebook to analyse the content of Instagram posts shared by the influencers.

As part of qualitative approach, tools from semiotics and critical analysis are used to understand the strategies used for presentation and promotion in the posts to engage the followers. The authors have used tools from narratology toolkit (Chatman, 1978, 1990) to analyse the presentation techniques used by the influencer. This includes elements like actor- appearance and performance, location, prop, camera distance, angle and movement, colour, lighting, music, editing etc. to analyse visual aesthetics and symbolism. Thematic sentiment analysis was used to study the followers' attitude towards these posts by using data reduction on the variables of agreement, graphic expressions, tone of words and response to featured product.

The study analysed 100 posts uploaded by top ten Indian Instagram mother influencers- mothers with minimum three sponsored posts. Simple random sampling was used to choose first ten accounts with posts appearing in community #indianmomblogger during March 2024. Further, first ten posts from each account were randomly taken for sample. Using mixed methods approach, the researchers conducted content analysis with 'post' as the unit of analysis. The variables included roles and tasks of mothers, appearance of mothers in terms of class and social distance, type and format of the post, presence and role of child, type of emotions, formats of collaboration, number of likes, number and type of comments in the posts.

7. Data analysis

7.1 Profile analysis of mother influencers
The study tries to look at the demographic profile of the influencer mothers with regard to their focus of the content and targeted audience. – based on the appearance and treatment of issues/theme along with visible access to indicators of high socio-economic class including material things and price range of the products used by them.

The data (Table 1) tells us that 70% of the influencers belong to the upper class or elite class in terms of socio-economic standards and only 1 influencer each belongs to upper middle and middle class. This points to a

dominance of upper-class mothers who work as influencers. 50% of these are running their own business ventures while 30% and 20% are housewives and work in service sector respectively. Looking at the kind of appeal given through display picture, language and presentation of content of the influencer, it seems that the upper-class Instagram users dominate as their target audience. 50% of the influencers focus on elite /upper class only while the other 50% consider upper middle users along with it.

The researchers tried to analyse the central theme of the mother influencers' account by looking at the grid and themes taken up for individual posts. It was found that 40% (4/10) influencers focus on lifestyle in their content. This includes the content showing looks, make up, dressing and hair style, luxurious living, socialising and using various modern products and facilities. 10% influencers each produce content about child's nutrition and skills), mother's routine and issues of a work-from-home (WFH) mother. The theme of mother's routine includes the post-partum situation of new mothers and its impact on their mental health. This is emphasised even more with a large number of posts in 'WFH' category talking about the need of love, care and support from husband and in-laws. Child's skills include talking about finger skills, fine motor skills and activities for sharp mind.

7.2 Construction of motherhood in the content of the posts:
The researchers analysed the content of the posts on the parameters of the coding sheet that gave the following results:
7.2.1 Role of Mothers
A list of the tasks being done by mothers in the video was prepared on the basis of the content shown in the sample posts. An analysis of these tasks reveals that the content is distributed equally around the five kinds of roles (Table 1) with the task of taking care of child (23%) and spending time with family and friends (23%) dominating slightly more than self-care (20%), Household Chores (18%) and handling conflict with in-laws (16%) respectively. Further, hardly than $1/5^{th}$ (18%) of the posts shows the individual life of the mothers in terms of their individual presence in the friends and social circle, focus on own fitness and involvement in their hobbies.

Table 1. Roles & Tasks of the influencer as seen in the posts:

S No	Task of Mother	Percentage
1	Care Of Child	23%
2	Spending Time With Others (Family, Husband, Friends, Outing)	23%
3	Self-Care	20%
4	Household Chores	18%
5	Handling Conflict with In-Laws (Including Husband)	16%

7.2.2 Common Appearance of the mother influencer: Social distance with camera
According to Machin (2016,15), the choice of visual semiotic resources is a process of communicating and

constructing the visual world. It connotes a specific discourse. Taking the codes of Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) for analysing the distance of social actors from the viewers, the researchers tried to analyse the visual

representation of mothers by observing the distance between their appearance the camera (which plays the role of viewer).It was found that 66% posts have featured the mother influencers in the range of intimate to personal distance from the viewers. According to the proxemics, this is considered as the range of family members and close relatives. It was followed by 28% posts showing them at far personal distance and 3% at impersonal distance which refer to social space and public space respectively. This finding reflects the element of intensive care and natural intimate bond between the child and mother, thus indicating an intimacy in the relationship and more involvement of the mother in the act. This trend is also visible in the usage of more and more extreme close up (ECU) and Close Up (CU) shots included by the mother influencers in their posts. The purpose behind going too close may be to focus more on the sponsored product or expression or act or skill or just to arouse curiosity about what is happening in a spot inside the post. An example of the intimate bond is seen in the visuals of SS cuddling her son, bathing him or waking him up, hugging, kissing in her posts. Example of showing close shot of the actor in case of a sponsored product is seen in the posts of influencer no 7 where she is changing the diaper of her daughter from an old brand to a new enforced brand.

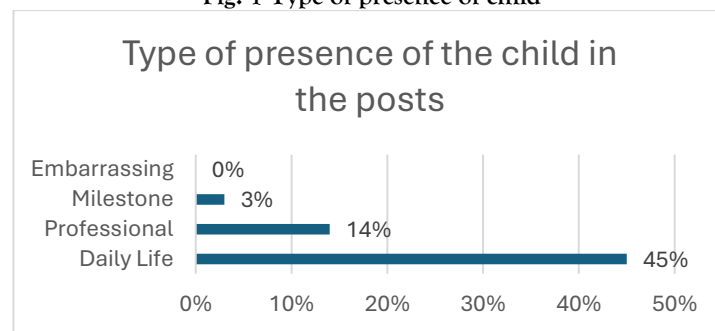*7.3 Role and identity of child*
7.3.1 Demographic identity of child

62% of the sample posts contained visuals of child(ren) while they were not seen in 38% posts. Following the demographic parameters of children given by Choi & Lewallen (2017), out of these 62% child(ren), more than half (33%) of the children shown in the video were infants (0-11 months), 25% toddlers (1 yr -2yr 11mths) and 12% belonged to the category of young children (3yr-5yr). The classification was based on the categories specified by the popular brands of diapers on their packets and the percentage was found by looking for the required data in any part of the influencer's account, be it their profile, post or comment. Further,36% children were boys while 31% were girls.

7.3.2 Appearance of child in the posts
45% posts (Figure 1) show child(ren) in the situations of natural daily life activities like eating, sleeping, studying, playing etc while in 14% cases, the child was shown acting or posing professionally or for a collaboration. While 13% posts contained child(ren) in the situations of achieving a milestone in life like first birthday, monthly birthday shoots, first travel experience, first dance etc, no post showed the child in any embarrassing situation like nude or semi-nude. The codes are based on the ones used by Anna Brosch (2016) but modified according to the requirement of the study. Out of the five options given by her, first two – outing and daily life were combined as most of the posts included outing of children as part of daily activities like parks, marketplaces etc.

Fig. 1 Type of presence of child

The researchers noted the emotions of children by looking at their expressions and gestures in the content. The happy, joyful expressions and participatory gesture were considered positive while the negative emotions consisted of blank expressions, crying, angry and postures of forceful appearance in the content.
The children appearing in 40% videos looked positive and an almost equal number of videos featured children who appeared to have negative emotions (38%). An example of negative emotion was seen in a post by Influencer no 7 where her daughter is shown carrying a sponsored dress labelled as 'comfortable' while it was so heavy that the girl could barely walk in it and it was visible on her face also. Another example includes children shown as daughter loaded with heave dress, but the text mentions it as 'comfortable'. In another example, child

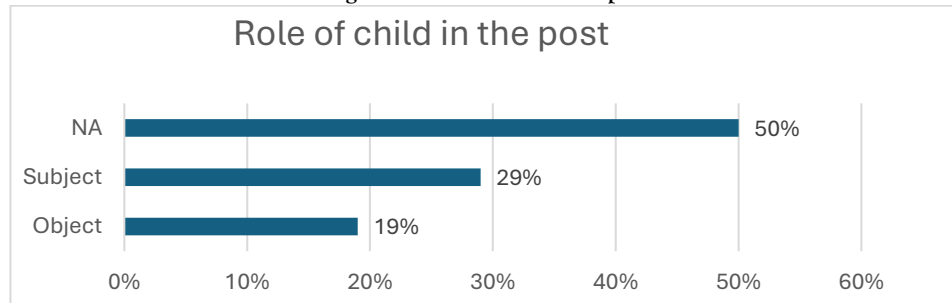was shown crying as part of a video about managing night routine of kids.

7.3.3 Role of child in the posts
Almost 1/5th posts (Figure 2) showed the child in the position of an object that has no role to play in the content and has been included just to stand or pose by the side of mother or endorsed product. This kind of role where he is just an element in the post and the content is not built around him positions him to be used for his/her innocence or cuteness or beauty for the purpose of gaining viewers or followers or selling the products of the brands that have sponsored those posts. This includes posts where the kids are posing without understanding what is happening and which things they

are using. They are told to give random smiles for sponsoring attires and even bribed by the influencer by offering Maggie for that (as mentioned by the influencer in the caption). It is clearly visible that the kids are made to do things without being told about the purpose or platform. Another example of a post by influencer no 7

shows two children almost crying and tense in the severe sun heat in the park while making the video of dresses. 29% posts show child in the position of a subject. This refers to the child being an active participant in the post and doing acts by himself/herself in a natural way. 50% posts where such where the child had no role to play.

Fig. 2 Role of child in the post

7.4 *Techniques of presentation used in the posts*
The study analysed various formats and other types of elements used in the presentation aspect of the posts.
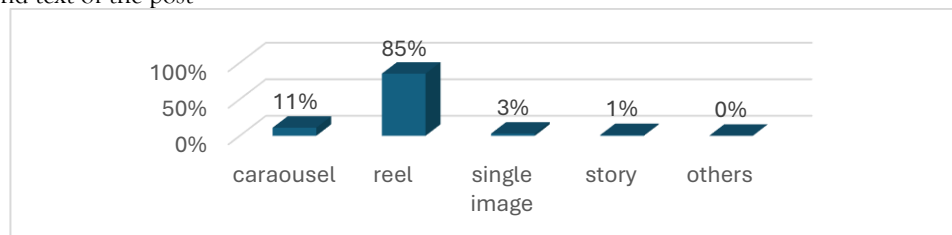
7.4.1 Format and text of the post

Fig. 3 Type of Post uploaded by the mother influencer

Reels (85%) (Figure 3) dominate as the most popular form of post being used by the influencers to share their content with the followers. 11% posts used carousel (slideshow of multiple images) while 3% used single image and 1% used story as a post. Further, 70% posts contained text while 30% did not need it.

7.4.2 Tools used to make the content engaging
Many posts shared by the influencer mothers used the method of storytelling to communicate their point to the followers. This includes sharing of anecdotes regarding society's behaviour during post-partum and childcare, personal experiences of handling tantrums of kids, problem -solution method for feeding tasty and healthy food, usage of mother and baby products and links for purchasing trendy clothes, accessories along with home and kids furnishings. influencer No 4 created act-based dramas for most of her posts, like creating a scene with expressions about how society perceives work-from home mothers and those having their own way of parenting. A common trend is to set the backdrop using elements according to the theme of the content and profile. An example of this is the use of fruits or vegetables of a colour matching to that of the baby's dress while clicking the monthly birthday photos by influencer No. 9.

More examples include a play area as a backdrop while talking about kids (influencer No 4) activities, kitchen and living room for content based on nutritious recipes, resorts and beaches for travel related videos and balcony and outdoor backdrops of nature while talking about the motherly love and the commitment, care and support required by the children.
Music plays an important role as background in the posts of all the influencers. Recent trending Bollywood and other songs are used during uploading of the content. In the posts of influencer SS, a regional touch has been added to the lifestyle by using regional tunes and songs in the background like Tamil version of *Saame* and showing religious occasions and ceremonies as well.

7.5 *Strategies of commercial promotion*
The nature and status of an influencer is considered important for influencing the lives of his/her followers Owing to this reason, brands approach them for promotion of their products and services amongst their followers. This affects the content and presentation of their posts. 36% posts had collaboration with some brand like mother and baby products, hotels and restaurants, toys and clothing companies as well as the influencers' own business.
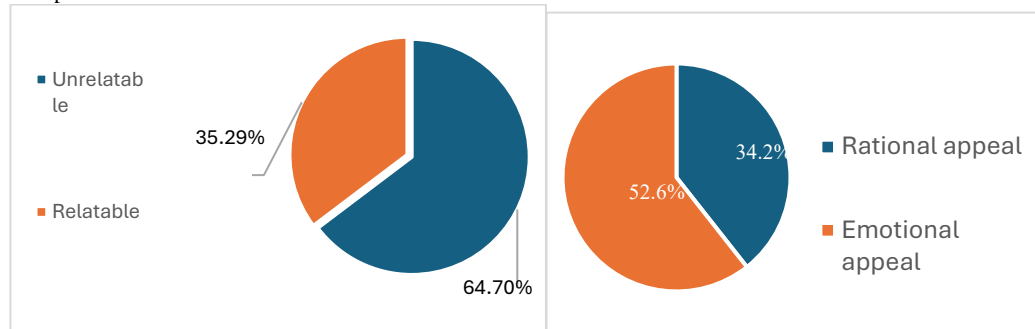
7.5.1 Nature of product endorsement

Fig.4 Relatability of product and blog   **Fig.5 Type of appeal in collaborated post**

Out of all collaborated posts ,76% products choose the demonstration method while 24% were limited to just their placement in the frame. On the relatability part (Figure 4), 64.7% promoted products were related to the parenting theme of blog while more than 1/3ʳᵈ did not make sense with it. Figure 5 shows that more than half of the collaborated posts (52.6%) appeal to emotions of the followers while 34.2% target logic.

7.5.2 Use of natural appeal to increase followers and views

All the influencers have used the elements of colours, backdrops and accessories to lend a more natural look to their posts. 50% influencers who focus on lifestyle have shot their visuals against the backdrop of luxurious mansions and are seen using expensive accessories and items, be it cosmetics, table mats, cars, dresses, Disney furnishings and ecofriendly toys from expensive brands. Though the fact that their faces are always seen covered with heavy makeup may seem relatable to some upper-class users but does not fit naturally into the gestures and actions shown in the video. As an example, the act of wearing high heels by influencer no 10 in a park while playing with the child and showing face in full make up while presenting oneself as frustrated or busy in early morning cooking certainly does not look natural, and thus unrelatable. This conflict highlights that the content is not natural but rather created artificially for the purpose of putting a post and the influencers may not practice these actions, gestures and suggestions in routine life.

Those focusing on the theme of child's skill development have used commonly seen house interiors including middle priced sofas and refrigerators with kids using simple items at home for demonstration of activities, for example a pack of black rubber bands, steel bowls and a commonly used pencil. Those having their content about the mental health and social perceptions are shown wearing casual pyjamas with their specs. The influencer sharing the nutrition-based recipes as content highlights the aspect of nature by shooting at the backdrops of farm, riverside, tree logs as dining table and interiors with aluminium roof, clay walls and steel utensils. Another influencer no 9 posts travel reviews by carrying child along in a comfortable dress with flat slippers that make

it naturally easy and less painful to carry the child for a longer duration.

7.5.3 Choice of hashtags and colours

All influencer mothers have used the various elements of their profile on Instagram account to create and communicate the theme and nature of their content. The display pictures of 6 influencers contain their own photograph while 3 have put up their pictures with the child and /or spouse. One influencer has put her child's photo in the display picture. Several hashtags related to mother communities in India have been used in their profile description and the grid reflects usage of various colours in synchronisation with the theme of the content. As an example, brown, green and blue colours are used in the account (influencer no 6) with the focus on nutritious recipes that are cooked in farm area, thus appealing to the elements of nature. Similarly, excessive use of red, black and white is visible in the grid of the influencer who focuses on travelling at lavish places and trying new western outfits. Another practice is that of using pink and white coloured theme with the girl child and blue or black theme in case of boy child, thus giving the feminine and masculine impression respectively.

7.5.4 Relating brands to emotional occasions

Most of the posts have used the idea of setting a daily-life situations like dilemma between household work and kids, answering society's questions about parenting style, facing support issues during post-partum time etc where the product can be suggested as a solution. The brands have focused on demonstrating the use of the product or service by the influencer herself or on her child to convey the intended message. They way the influencers tell their experience of the product is very similar to the customer testimonial or celebrity endorsement as a trustworthy expert in recommending the product. They tap the special occasions and take out offers in the form of coupons on the name of the influencer. Examples of such posts include associating Mother's Day with skin care products in the name of self-care and 'me time' for the mothers, religious ceremonies like *Ashtmi* and *Holi* associated with links for buying casual and party wear stuff at home.

The entrepreneur influencers relate their work to supporting other women, need of mother to pursue passion and 5-minute dressing up tips for working

mothers living in non-supporting families. The attention captured by the content of the post is converted into interest by mentioning the situations which followers can relate. This is followed by an effort to create a desire for the product through language of captions by using capital letters for its features, emoticons and other graphics around the central selling point and brand name and coupon code written in the closing text as an appeal for action by the user. The result of using a product is shown as a cute giggling baby or a relaxed confident mother. While video posts list several features or benefits of a product, the carousals and still images depend a lot on the captions given to the post.
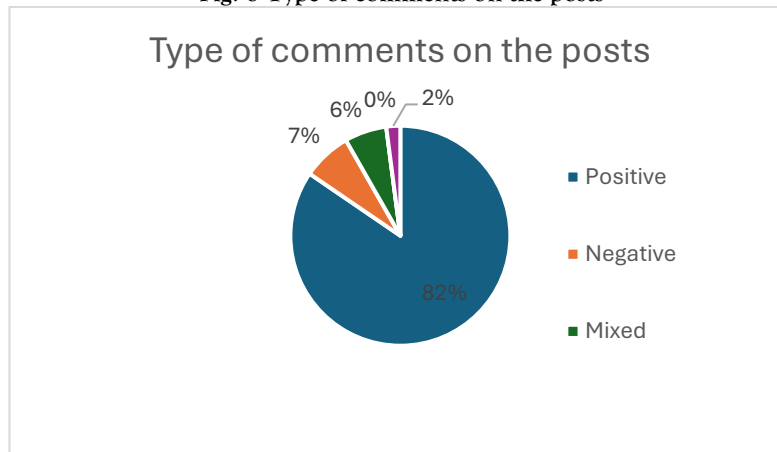
7.6 User's attitude

In accordance with the crystallisation framework taken by this study, the users of social media (here Instagram) play an important role in shaping the platform. This makes it imperative to analyse how do they interact with and respond to the posts. Since the followers of an influencer account are considered as a potential customer for the brands, the authors tried to analyse the interaction and response of the followers on these posts.

7.6.1 Nature of comments

In terms of likes, various posts received the linking of the followers differently with the Mean number of likes being 13102.22. The mean number of comments on the posts was 90.123. The authors analysed the nature of the comments to understand the response of the followers. Talking about the sentiment score, Figure 6 shows that 82 % posts received positive comments while 7% posts received negative and 6% mixed comments.

Fig. 6 Type of comments on the posts

No neutral comments were found and only 2 % posts got no comments at all. The positive and negative categorisation of comments was primarily on the basis of appreciation/agreement and criticism/disagreement.

7.6.2 Lexicon-based Analysis

In accordance with the method of thematic sentiment analysis, the study further conducted a lexicon-based analysis of the comments and tried to look at the keywords that convey the inclination of the follower's opinion. These included phrases, adjectives and other forms of expression that conveyed how much they could agree and appreciate and how did they respond when they don't like anything shared by the influencer.

7.6.3 Use of strong words for emotional affirmation

The study found that 95% posts were successful in making the followers agree with the content. Many of them were highly emotional in their response to the theme of the posts. Among the popular ways of positive affirmation was repetition of the same words as used by the influencer, compliments for the influencer and other actors of the content with the most appreciated elements being those related to looks and lifestyle. Examples of adjectives used by them include 'good hair', 'stealing show', 'real' videos, 'amazing', 'great mother', 'cute, 'best

upbringing' 'same playlist for my young one', 'yes', 'totally', 'can understand'. This feeling of appreciation makes the followers relate to the content emotionally which, in turn, is expressed using strong words like 'Wishing you courage', 'Don't worry God will help', 'I got 5 days only with my mom', 'husbands can't be changed', 'god bless you'. This includes suggesting ideas like 'leave your in laws house immediately', 'make a sitcom on this'. The involvement becomes so high at times that the followers go to the extent of fighting with each other over difference of opinion regarding the post. This kind of response is more visible on the posts related to society's perception and family's non-supporting behaviour regarding new mother and her child.

Another popular way of expressing reaction or emotions by the users is using memes, emojis and short phrases in the comments section of the posts. While the frequent memes are based on using celebrity faces laughing, raising toast, confused expressions, Indian women with expressions of appreciation and baby faces with kisses, the most frequent emoji reactions include heart, cute, smile, fire, clap and crying. The short phrases work as substitute of long sentences, thus making it easy to comment quickly on social media posts including Instagram. Examples of such phrases include 'go girl', 'princess', 'hotty', 'nailed it'.

7.6.4 Emotional fans turning into interested customers

The positive impact of the appreciation and approval of the posts reaches to the extent that the followers become a kind of their fans and, in some cases, convinced as well to explore and try the product being talked about. Example of a fan-like statement includes 'how do you manage so much in the morning', 'gorgeous as always', 'did you learn all this after marriage or knew these before', 'best daughter-in-law', 'how do you find such amazing dresses always' and words like 'trusted', 'adorable' etc. An example of interest in the endorsed product includes a user's comment on a reel about the trending cafes with kids' area in the city as 'lovely' followed by 'heading there soon' (influencer no 5). Another example is the request for sharing links of the dress, earrings and make up used in *Ashtmi pooja/shivratri*, furnishings, brand of CCTV, new range of diapers and toys, functional dresses of the kids, natural premium dry fruits for snacking by the child etc. Some followers even 'thanked' the influencers for saving their time of searching for the appropriate product and others thanked them for saving money by suggesting easy tips of using low-cost products, like using Glycerine with Aloe Vera Gel. Thus, the emotional involvement of the followers places the influencers in the position like that of a celebrity recommending a product as an expert or showing testimonial or demonstration to the followers.

7.6.5 Strong expression of disagreement

There were some posts where the followers reacted in a negative manner. The probable reason of this kind of reaction was not liking the influencer's perspective, disagreement with usage of some things, visuals showing something they don't like. Examples include a comment on the use of plastic containers by the influencer for *kanyapooja* on *Ashtmi* , visual of the husband holding cigarette in his mouth while getting a photo clicked, use of home remedies for treating child's illness. The dislike is usually expressed strongly with the use of words pointing at someone, at times fighting with the other followers as well. Examples of such words include '*faaltu reels ke chakchar mein bachcha jaayega kisi din*' , 'didn't expect this from you', 'people like you do this....' 'stop spreading half knowledge...', 'I don't like such changes in life'. In the case of a post about finding work for an extra income by using a website, the follower even shared his experience of using such platforms and deterred the others from doing that.

Such high involvement of the followers in the posts reflects their need of a platform for sharing their experiences, stories and opinion with others, this fulfilling the social need of interaction from the Instagram. But their expression usually remains limited to emotional affirmation or reaction, and they are unable to identify any conflict in the account and presentation by the influencer. An example of this behaviour can be the account of influencer (TM) who has mentioned herself as a mommy blogger and used hashtags of motherhood related communities, but none of her posts talks about child issues, rather they are focused on traveling, looks and lifestyle. In fact, hardly 2% posts have the sight of child and that too in a nominal role. Not a single one out of her 99.4k followers pointed to it or noted this rather they are busy in appreciating her looks, luxury lifestyle and shopping. This also reflects a strong interest of the followers of influencer mothers in the elements related to looks and lifestyle irrespective of the issue or theme being mentioned in the profile.

1.   **Findings and discussions**

- The act of creation, distribution and consumption of the content by influencer mothers on Instagram is largely an upper-class phenomenon with respect to the topic, visual appeal and presentation of the content. Instead of issues of motherhood, the content focuses more on luxurious lifestyle, looks and shopping of largely premium products.

- The concept and forms of motherhood vary across cultures in India but their themes remain focused on skills, child nutrition, emotional and mental support. Besides, the topic of family and in law's role for new mothers is an evergreen issue for debate.

- Motherhood is mostly shown as spending more time with spouse and child or growth of mother as an individual like travelling, fitness, socialising and few posts show involvement in household chores. But it is inclined extremely on either of the sides. The influencers are seen as either engaged totally in socialising and sole travelling or seen all the time in kitchen or sitting with the kids.

- Instagram is a highly close up medium, more than television, partly due to need of showing expressions, products or actions happening in the posts, and partly due to the smaller size of smartphone screens than TV where everything is expected to be zoomed out for clear viewing. This increases followers' engagement as they feel part of the post.

- Children of age 0-3 years are considered impactful with almost equal ratio of sons and daughters. Though most of the kids are enjoying naturally, placing almost 1/5 children as objects with blank faces, just accompanying parents or performing the instructed steps without understanding or consent is unethical. Their cuteness and innocence are used to gain followers and sponsors, thus making them a tool to earn money and fame.

- A disturbing finding was to see some kids crying or tense or disinterested in the posts. Though this number is just 7%, such practice can't be ignored because the essence of motherhood is to see the child's happiness as the priority. This gesture of not caring about their emotions and situation just for the sake of recording the post is highly in contrast with the natural scenario of motherhood.

- Daily life situations make the content relatable, especially appealing to followers' excitement about their children's role as model, celebrating their birth, first walk, first talk and other milestones. This is done

mostly by using reels with a lot of text and captions full of keywords related to product or skill shown in the post. A lot of hashtags have been used to expand their reach to online communities with similar content. Other strategies include use of theme-related backdrops, brand colours of attire and accessories and use of regional and recently popular tunes to gain followers and boost their mood while surfing the posts.

- Storytelling technique and demonstration are the most preferred techniques of mother influencers for brand promotion in the name of day-to-day issues of motherhood or make them part of customs on religious and cultural occasions. Thus, emotional appeals seem to impress their followers even if the endorsed products are unrelatable to motherhood or parenting.

- Followers seem to be highly emotional in their response to the posts. Most of them appreciate and approve their gestures or ideas to the extent of standing for them and even fighting with other followers in the comments section by using strong words. They feel so relatable with the issues that it makes them overlook the business agenda or other goals of influencers. Usage of non-verbal responses like emojis and memes is gaining popularity among the users. However, some followers feel pressurised wondering the practicality of this ideal all-inclusive motherhood.

- The charm and excitement of the followers about the looks and lifestyle of influencers have earned them the status of an expert or celebrity whose every viewpoint, style or statement becomes a topic of discussion resulting in followers joining their YouTube channels or Q&A community pages. This is evident with number of likes as high as 834000 and number of comments as high as 1291. This status, in turn, makes them a neo agenda setters for the followers and are used by the brands for promoting their products.

- The way in which followers share their personal stories, analyse and discuss various personal issues related to family and in laws, the platform of Insta blogging seems to act like a medium to fulfil their needs of social interaction, sharing ideas and finding new things.

Conclusion

Influencer mothers have used Instagram to not only share their motherhood experiences but also to sell products of different brands in a manner that they become opinion leader in the eyes of the followers. Though they guide the followers for lifestyle and quick hacks of solving problems of child and family, their use of children's innocence and followers' emotions for monetary gain is unethical and sets bad ideals. They have the right to promote own or other associated brands as entrepreneurs, but setting unrealistic expectations is unfair with those who appreciate them. Thus, the study concludes that the influencers' communication in the

posts is more strategic than natural, and this appears to be pushing the followers towards an artificial lifestyle of carrying faces decked with make up at home, buying expensive premium products and showing off the looks in the name of ideal image of motherhood. And this seems to be much more important than taking care of themselves. This kind of behaviour is in highly contrast with the natural scenarios of motherhood.

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Statements and Declaration

To avoid any conflict of interest, the identities of influencer mothers have not been revealed, and their names have been replaced by numbers 1,2,3...etc. Sample profiles in Appendix A are for reference of the editorial decisions of the journal.

Annexure

CODING SHEET FOR ANALYSIS-

S No	Code	Categories		
1	**Type of occupation of the influencer:**	**Service**	1	
		Business	2	
		Housewife	3	
		other	4	
		Not clear	5	
2	**Roles &Tasks of the influencer as seen in the posts:**	**Taking care of kids** (includes playing and managing things)	1	
		Self-care (includes dress up, fitness etc)		
		Tension with in-laws (includes conflicts and issues with husband and other members in in-law family	2	
		Household chores (including cooking, cleaning, serving, arranging things etc)		
		Outing and celebration (includes time spent with family, friends, relatives in leisure occasion/event	3	
			4	
3	**Whether influencer mother's own life shown in the posts:**	**Yes**	1	
		No	2	If yes, how ?
4	**Common Appearance of the mother influencer: soc-eco class** (Kress &Van Leeuwen,2006)	**Upper**	1	
		Middle	2	
		Lower	3	
5	**Common Appearance of the mother influencer: social distance** (Kress &Van Leeuwen,2006)	**Intimate**	1	
		Close personal	2	
		Far personal	3	
		Impersonal	4	
6	**Type of Post uploaded by the mother influencer:**	**Carousal**	1	
		Video /reel	2	
		Single image	3	
		Story	4	
		Other	5	
7	**Whether the post includes text:**	**Yes**	1	
		No	2	
8	**Presence of child in the post:**	**Yes: a. Daily Life**	1	
		b. Professional		
		c. milestone		
		d. Embarrassing: N/S/F/M		
		No	2	
9	Role of child in the post:	Object	1	
		Subject	2	
		NA	3	
10	**Attributes of the post with child: Probable age range** (Choi & Lewallen,2017)	**Infant**	1	
		Toddler	2	
		Young child	3	
		NA	4	
11	**Attributes of the post with child: Sex of the child** (Choi & Lewallen,2017)	**Male**	1	
		Female	2	
		NA	3	
12	**Attributes of the post with child: Emotion level of child in the post** (Choi & Lewallen,2017)	**Positive**	1	
		Negative	2	
		Neutral	3	
		NA	4	
13	**Users' Response: Comments by the users:**	**Negative**	1	
		Positive	2	
		Mixed	3	
		Neutral	4	
		No Comments	5	
14	**Whether the posts contain any collaboration:**	**Yes**	1	
		No	2	