

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS: INSPIRATION OR DIGITAL DECEPTION.

1) Introduction:

- a) Growing dominance of social media in everyday life.
- b) Shift from traditional celebrity to relatable digital personality.
- c) Thesis Statement: Social media influencers have become a powerful catalyst for growth; promoting education, democratization, and advocating socio-political causes, they simultaneously foster a culture of digital deception through curated and consumerist narratives. Their materialistic lifestyle has taken a psychological toll on people, ultimately impacting their social values ~~and demanding~~ creating an urgency for regulation and digital awareness.

2) Inspiration Argument: Influencers as Catalyst for Growth:

a) Democratization of fame:

- ▶ Breaking the gatekeeping of traditional media.

b) Educational Outreach:

- ▶ Micro learning and skill education such as: fitness training, short courses and educational help.

c) Advocacy for socio-political causes:

- ▶ Case in point: Noor Mukaddam's case prevented delayed justice.

3) The Deception Argument: Dark Side of Digital Facade:-

a) Myths of Perfectionist:

- ▶ Curated aesthetics versus the reality of human experiences.

b) Ethics of promotion:

- ▶ Promotion of "quick-fix" brands and paid product reviews

c) Psychological toll:

- ▶ The perfect appearing lifestyle actually requires hours of efforts.

4) Impacts On Youth and Social Values:-

- a) Youth losing connection to their roots
- ▶ ~~Influences~~ and Influencers promoting western culture and events celebration such as Christmas, Diwali and Holi.
- b) Erosion of patience, hardwork and realism.
- c) Need of validation and material success

5) Need for Regulation and Digital Awareness:

- a) Regulatory framework for transparent brand disclosures
- b) Role of government
- c) Role of individual:
 - ▶ Mindful consumption, unfollowing toxic influencers.

6) Conclusion:

THE ESSAY:

In the 21st century social media has transformed from more than just a means of communication to the powerful tool, shaping individual's lifestyle, opinions and ambitions. ~~This~~ evolution has given birth to a new class of modern day icons: the social media influencers. They are the individuals who command a large number of followers by shaping their behaviors and daily life conduct. Unlike the untouchable movie stars of the past century, they sell their narrative to be "one of us", by sharing their personal schedules from morning coffee, their daily gym routines, to their deepest insecurities that movie stars could never. This creates a sense of intimacy and connectedness between the influencers and their followers. However, this intimacy is a double-edged sword. While many influencers have undoubtedly democratized

information and mobilized a social change by creating motivational and creative content, some critics argue that they create a sense of illusion and often mislead individuals.

The rise of the social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Youtube and X has created opportunities for the ordinary individual to become extra-ordinary. Unlike the traditional movie stars, influencers appear to be approachable and relevant which further strengthens their connection with the audience. Unlike the traditional media stars who used to struggle for fame, running after wealthy costers and expensive movie studios, it has become easier for influencers to connect globally, using nothing more than a smartphone. Social media influencers have also made "micro-learning" easier by promoting platforms that are making online learning and skills training easier for people, that traditional textbooks lacked.

The freedom of speech has facilitated social media influencers to advocate for socio-political causes. This has opened doors for marginalized voices, allowing diverse range of narratives which were previously ignored. This has been observed during Noor Mukkadam's case when a petition went viral and people donated money and ~~voted~~^{demanding} for speedy justice.

However, "inspiration" often stops where the "filter" begins. Influencers often present an exaggerated version of reality. The pressure of "attention-economy" and the constant urge to appear in the algorithm of the general public to attract more numbers of followers, forces them to set unrealistic standards, generating a sense of deception. When influencers portray a life full of ^{enjoyment} ~~money~~, travel experiences, ~~and~~ effortless wealth and flawless skin and hair, they are not only deceiving

their followers, but are selling unrealistic dreams. Big and small brands are believed to hire influential people for promoting their brands, making innocent public fall for their made up stories. Other than that, what appears to be a raw, candid moment, is often the result of hours of editing, staged setups and professional lighting. For an average viewer this can create a dangerous "comparison trap". Consequently this digital deception takes a toll on psychological health of people fueling social anxiety and body dysmorphia, as millions of people across the globe strive to meet the fake standards which ~~are~~ actually donot really exist in real world.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to the influence of social media. A study proves that ^{the mind of young adults} ~~people~~ before the age of 25 can be molded by the environment they live in. Promotion of the western cultures and events has

become

a common occurrence among the influencers. This has impacted youth greatly. These young adults have been observed celebrating Christmas, Diwali and Holy in universities and at work places, which has moved them away from their religious values. Traditional values such as patience, hardwork, and discipline are overshadowed by materialism and appearance based validation. The constant pursuit of likes, followers and viral fame encourages instant gratification. Overtime, this can weaken social values, erodes discipline from life and creates an illusion of a happy life when its only an unwanted ~~gratification~~ validation, hence injecting digital deception in personal lives.

To mitigate the negative impacts of digital deception, a multi-pronged approach is needed. Government should generate a regulatory framework introducing ~~transparency~~ guidelines for transparency and mental health protection. The state and regulatory

bodies could enforce transparency by ensuring that every paid partnership must be clearly labelled, for people to avoid falling in the trap of paid promotions by influencers. However, regulatory authorities alone cannot bring a change to the digital deception. Social media influencers should be mindful of what they promote. They are considered to be the idols by people, hence they should act responsibly and promote content that can help youth grow. Additionally, an individual can serve this purpose by mindful consumption about being conscious what they follow.

To conclude, social media influencers are reflection of the modern world; vibrant, innovative yet profoundly flawed. They have the power to ignite revolution, educate millions and provide sense of community in an increasingly isolated world. However, if people

would keep on following influencers blindly, the risk of digital deception will remain high. We donot need to abandon social media, but we need to change how we engage with it.