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# Instagram Serving Instant Happiness: Social Media Perpetuating Consumerism and Maximal

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## ABSTRACT

*This article investigates Instagram's role in sustaining consumerism and maximalism in the present day consumer culture. It investigates how the platform's algorithms, influencer marketing tactics, and visually appealing material affect users' propensity for excessive consumption. Further, three instances of abuse of Instagram Reels to promote excessive buying are highlighted. The article also provides suggestions for consumers to adopt a more thoughtful and responsible approach to consumption to overcome the excessive buying pressures.*

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Instagram Reels, Consumerism, Maximalism, Conscious Consumption.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms represent a crucial aspect of contemporary life, impacting how people interact, communicate, and purchase. With its eye-catching design and fun features like Reels, Instagram has become a dominant social media platform in today's digital world. However, as Instagram's popularity grows, so does the concern about its contribution to heightened consumerism and maximalism. The present article provides an in-depth discussion of consumerism and maximalism perpetuated via Instagram. Post a brief discussion of crucial concepts, three instances of Marketers using/abusing Instagram Reels to promote consumerism and maximalism are highlighted. Lastly, suggestions are provided to consumers to enable conscious consumerism.

## II. SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Academic studies on social media and consumer behavior have shed light on how internet platforms affect consumers' decision-making processes. A study by <sup>3</sup>Lee and Youn (2009)

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<sup>3</sup>Lee, M., & Youn, S. (2009). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM): How eWOM platforms influence consumer product judgment. *International Journal of Advertising: The Quarterly Review of Marketing Communications*, 28(3), 473–499

examined the effects of social media use on consumers' purchase intentions. The study found that exposure to aesthetically appealing information on social media sites, such as photographs and videos, influenced customers' preferences for goods and services. Various books and articles in social media psychology clarify the psychological impacts of social media platforms. Bert (2010)<sup>4</sup> in the book "The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains," writes how exposure to internet information might result in shorter attention spans and a constant craving for novelty, which can contribute to consumerist inclinations.

### III. CONSUMERISM AND MAXIMALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Comprehensive viewpoints on the connection between materialism and social media have been made possible by research that has analysed consumption and maximalism in the digital era. For example, in "Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough," Hamilton and Dennis (2005)<sup>5</sup> have examined how the culture of consumerism has led to the desire for maximalist lifestyles, primarily when propelled by digital media and advertising. When research from various scholarly works such as the above are combined, it is clear that social media sites such as Instagram play a big role in perpetuating consumerism and maximalism. Reels are one example of the aesthetically appealing content-medium on Instagram that encourages materialistic wants and an opulent way of life. Furthermore, by showing users content catered to their interests and objectives, the platform's algorithm-driven personalized content delivery fosters consumerist tendencies.

### IV. INFLUENCE OF INSTAGRAM ON MATERIALISTIC ASPIRATIONS

Several authors have examined Instagram's role in encouraging materialistic desires among its users. Dittmar and colleagues (2014)<sup>6</sup> have examined how exposure to materialistic media affects teenagers' values. According to the study, social media sites that strongly emphasize visual content and material things, such as Instagram, significantly impact how materialistic young users want to be. Thus, it is critical to be aware of how such platforms can affect materialistic expectations as the impact of social media on consumer behaviour continues to increase. Users can work to make thoughtful decisions and avoid the pitfalls of excessive consumerism and maximalism pushed on social media by recognizing the underlying psychological mechanisms at work and being critical of the information consumed.

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<sup>4</sup>Bert, R. (2010). *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* By Nicholas Carr. New York City: W.W. Norton, 2010. *Civil Engineering*, 80(9), 82.

<sup>5</sup>Hamilton, C., & Dennis, R. (2005). *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough*.

<sup>6</sup>Dittmar, H., Bond, R., Hurst, M., & Kasser, T. (2014). The relationship between materialism and personal well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 107(5), 879–924.

Instagram is perhaps the perfect medium for promoting goods, ways of life, and experiences because of its emphasis on visual content. Users are continually exposed to expertly prepared content that generates a sense of yearning and ambition through tailored feeds and engaging Reels. By adjusting material to individual preferences, the platform's algorithms drive consumerism by keeping users 'hooked' and exposing them to more advertisements. Additionally, influencers and famous people on Instagram frequently display their material things and opulent lifestyles, portraying them as the pinnacle of success and happiness. Users become compulsive buyers due to the pressure to live up to these ideals, even though it exceeds their financial capabilities.

## **V. USE/MISUSE OF INSTAGRAM REELS TO PERPETUATE CONSUMERISM AND MAXIMALISM**

There are several instances of use/misuse of Instagram Reels by Organizations/Brands to propagate hyper-consumerism and maximalism. Three such instances are highlighted below:

- i) *Fast Fashion* – Fashion retailers use Reels' limited attention span to promote new trends and designs continuously. They engender a sense of immediacy by introducing new products quickly, which promotes impulse purchases. This trend-driven strategy encourages a 'throwaway culture' pushing customers to upgrade their wardrobes, thus, adversely affecting the environment.
- ii) *Luxury* – Reels are used by luxury brands to convey a sense of exclusivity and allure. They produce aspirational content that feeds their followers' need for conspicuous consumption by showcasing luxurious lifestyles and opulent goods. The desire to own these status symbols may cause customers to spend more money than they can afford.
- iii) *Home Décor* – Reels are frequently used by home design companies to display attractive home décor settings encouraging consumers to gather more home décor than they need, which can result in excessive consumerism and clutter, thus feeding maximalist tendencies in interior design.

## **VI. REASONS GALORE**

Multiple simultaneous reasons help propagate consumerism and maximalism via Instagram Reels. Most of the reasons are applicable to other social media platforms as well. A few crucial ones are highlighted:

- i) *The allure of aspirations* – Instagram fosters an aspirational culture where users always

look for ways to better their lives and present themselves in the best possible way<sup>7</sup>. Influencers significantly impact their followers' purchasing decisions since they frequently serve as role models for them. Influencers intentionally/unintentionally encourage a consumerist mindset among their followers when they promote a product or display their assets.

- ii) *The Algorithm's influence* – Instagram's algorithm aims to maximize user engagement. The platform adapts material to individual preferences and interests by monitoring user interactions<sup>8</sup>. The possibility that a user would convert interest into a purchase is increased if the algorithm prioritizes material comparable to what the user has expressed interest in viewing. This personalized information delivery reinforces the user's exposure to adverts, thus encouraging buying.
- iii) *Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO)* – Instagram users frequently experience a sense of missing out. They want to keep up with others, and a sense of inadequacy might result from scrolling through posts of friends having fun or showing off their things. Impulsive purchasing is encouraged by this worry about missing out because people hurry to buy things or participate in activities to feel accepted or recognized.
- iv) *Limited attention span* – Instagram's Reels makes use of consumers' short attention spans. The brief, snappy movies are intended to grab viewers' attention immediately and offer a steady stream of exciting content, resulting in frequent exposure to commercials and product demonstrations. This structure promotes quick responses, which frequently lead to impulsive purchasing decisions.
- v) *Social validation* – Instagram's "likes" and comment culture fosters a feeling of social validation. Users frequently use material items to elevate their status and earn the respect of their peers in their pursuit of acceptance and appreciation. The consumerist attitude is supported by this need for social approval, which promotes the need for more and better stuff/goods.
- vi) *Promotion of instant gratification* – Instagram encourages a culture of quick gratification, in which users look for rewards and pleasures 'right now'. By providing limited-time discounts, flash sales, and other special promotions, brands use this propensity to persuade consumers to purchase goods impulsively without thoroughly

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<sup>7</sup>Chan, K. (2018). The role of social media in consumer empowerment. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 12(2), 180-196.

<sup>8</sup>Founta, A. M., Kavoura, A., & Kefallonitis, E. (2021). Social Media Algorithms and Consumer Behavior: A Literature Review. *International Journal of E-Services and Mobile Applications*, 13(3), 66-84.

assessing their utility or long-term value.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USERS/CONSUMERS TO DETOXYIFY FROM CONSUMERISM AND MAXIMALISM

In summary, Instagram's visually engrossing and captivating platform, in conjunction with influencer marketing and the delivery of personalized content via algorithms, significantly contributes to maintaining consumerism and maximalism. When interacting with information on social media, users must be attentive to these influences and aware of their behavior. They may fend off the pressures of materialism and look for fulfillment outside of material items by being aware of their consumption patterns and considering the reasons behind their shopping choices.

In a society where social media platforms have become so interwoven in daily life, users must be aware of the impact that websites like Instagram may have on their shopping decisions. Instagram contains many 'traps' that could promote materialism and maximalism, yet it can also provide information and enjoyment. Here are some practical suggestions for clients to balance these influences:

- i) *Being critical of content* – Instagram's material is carefully chosen to present an idealized view of reality. It is essential to probe the motivations underlying the content encountered by a consumer, to consider whether a specific post or commercial adds value to their life or is just trying to influence to make unneeded purchases<sup>9</sup>. Consumers need to acquire a discerning eye and evade falling into the trap of mindless consumerism by critically evaluating one's need to buy a product.
- ii) *Curating the feed* – Instagram users can limit the content they see by following particular accounts. They should spend some time un-following accounts that persistently encourage consumerist behaviour or give the impression that one is incomplete without their product(s)<sup>10</sup>. Instead, users should look for content producers who champion sustainable living, thoughtful consumption, and experiences above things. Users can build a more uplifting and mindful online environment by carefully curating their feeds.
- iii) *Practice mindfulness (Dhyaan and Dhairya) in purchases* – Users can consider whether a purchase aligns with their values and requirements before making it and avoid making

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<sup>9</sup>Hudders, L., De Jans, S., Cauberghe, V., & Panic, K. (2016). The impact of advertising disclosure language on consumer trust. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 143(4), 749-766.

<sup>10</sup>Proksch, D., & Scholz, J. (2017). Fashion bloggers and their impact on consumers: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 8(4), 320-331.

rash purchases out of a desire to follow trends or a fear of losing out. Users can consider how their decision may affect the environment and society, whether they require the goods or whether it is merely heightened interest fuelled by social media. Making attentive purchases can assist in making more informed and responsible choices.

- iv) *Supporting sustainable brands* – Users can look for and support companies that value moral behavior and environmental responsibility. Companies that employ fair labor practices, use eco-friendly products, and are open about their production procedures should be rewarded. By supporting such brands, users can shift consumer culture toward one that is more aware and responsible. Supporting sustainable brands also frequently entails investing in higher-quality goods, which can eventually result in less consumption.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

Social media sites like Instagram can promote materialism and maximalism while serving as compelling tools for connection and discovery. Consumers can fight against these influences and regain control over their consumption patterns by being aware of the content consumed, curating feeds, being careful when making purchases, and supporting sustainable products. Instead of searching for material happiness, one can find true fulfilment and pleasure in meaningful experiences, authentic connections, and personal progress. In short, one can only find true happiness in spirituality, not materialism and maximalism.

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