The Role of Gender and Content Format towards Enhancing the Engagement on Instagram

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	This study is aimed at exploring the effectiveness of Instagram's different content formats and assessing the role of influencer's gender on user engagement. In this regard, content analysis of the posts from 20 Pakistani male and female macro influencers, along with three focus group discussions were conducted. The results highlight that photos generate the highest average likes for both the male and female influencers. The deeper interaction of the audience with long videos is evident from the most comments and shares. Interestingly, the female influencers receive higher likes across all content formats, especially in the categories of lifestyle, beauty, and fashion. On the contrary, the long videos posted by the male influencers attain higher shares, particularly in the fitness and technology categories. Focus group discussions provide additional insights into user preferences and behaviors. Participants prefer photos for quick consumption, short videos for their engaging nature, and long videos for detailed content. Personal Stories are favored for their authenticity. Gender-specific engagement patterns show that content from female influencers resonates more with female audiences, while male influencers' content is appreciated in niche categories by male audiences. In order to optimize engagement and enhance influencer marketing effectiveness, brands should undertake a mix of various content formats and gender specific campaigns

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Introduction

The evolution of social media networks has significantly influenced the manner in which we communicate. As noted by Davis (2016), users engage in networking, news, business and personal relationships, and connections in addition to social communications. According to Dixon (2023), social media is widely used by 42% of people worldwide, and its development has been shaped by user-generated content and internet technology improvements (Jones, 2023).

Instagram has emerged as the go-to medium for influencer marketing because of its focus on visual storytelling (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Influencer marketing on Instagram, in contrast to traditional forms of promotion, takes advantage of the credibility and genuineness that influencers build with their following (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Research conducted on the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns on platforms like Instagram shows that the efforts yield significantly higher ROI than conventional marketing methods (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Engagement metrics such as the number of likes, comments, and shares are among the critical variables that determines the impact of influencer marketing campaigns and general audience reception to branded content (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2012). In this regard, short-form films, which are common on the TikTok and Instagram Reels platforms, are gladly embraced because of their simple and efficient storytelling (Ferguson, 2024). Furthermore, Instagram stories allow influencers to share brief moments, behind the scenes, and create polls that disappear after 24 hours (Belanche et al., 2019). Such content effectively captures the consumers' attention and stimulates an immediate response, which leads to higher brand awareness (Tran, 2024).

Problem Statement
It is important to assess the relative effectiveness of videos, stories and photos towards grabbing the attention of the audience. Furthermore, engagement with the different content types may also vary because of the gender of the influencers. Therefore, this study will compare and analyze different content formats, which are used by Instagram influencers, to determine which of them is the most engaging. The study will also investigate if there is a difference in engagement levels depending on the gender of influencers and the type of content they use regularly.

Research Objectives
a) To find out which content should be posted in order to have a greater level of engagement on Instagram.
b) To investigate the impact of influencer's gender on engagement rates across various content types.

This is followed by the Literature Review where prior studies on content formats and influencers are presented. The third section, methodology, outlines the modalities of content analysis and focus groups for data collection. The results are then presented to highlight findings of the content analysis and focus groups. The final part of the thesis provides limitations of the study and future research directions.

Literature Review
Influencer Marketing
According to Scott (2015), Influencer marketing is working with people who have a substantial following on social media sites such as Instagram that help marketers reach audiences. Authenticity helps the influencers in executing successful marketing campaigns which also builds consumer trust and improves brand reputation. (Lim et al., 2017).

People are influenced in their decision making by the deeds and words of those in their social circles (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers have perceived authority and capability in particular areas which shape consumers' attitudes and behaviors during purchase decision (Scott, 2015). Brand collaborations with the influencers result in improved engagement rates and returns on investment (ROI) (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencers have different content at their disposal to engage with their audiences, such as, images, stories, and videos. Influencers can provide their followers with a sense of uniqueness by presenting products in the real world settings, interacting live, and sharing behind the scenes photos through Instagram stories. In order to assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns,

brands may evaluate metrics, such as, reach, likes, and click through rates (Belanche et al., 2019).

Engagement

To ensure higher level of engagement from the followers, influencers should create content that is aesthetically appealing, informative, and emotional (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). Furthermore, well written captions and stories not only receive likes and shares but can also lead to productive discussions in the comments area, thereby, improving engagement (Belanche et al., 2019).

Previous studies on consumer behavior have shown that the brand perceptions and purchase intentions can be influenced through engagement. Brands may ensure engagement through interactive content and sincere conversations, which results in increased follower's trust and brand loyalty (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Followers give importance to the recommendations and endorsements of influencers, which affects their brand perception and purchase decisions (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017).

Video Content

Videos provide a dynamic storytelling tool that allows influencers to communicate ideas more vividly and emotionally as compared to the still photos (Bretous, 2022). Short-form videos, like those on YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and Instagram Reels, have become incredibly popular (Ferguson, 2024). These short films which usually last between a few seconds and a minute are perfect for providing consumers with the kind of fast-paced, interesting content that they want to consume online nowadays.

On the other hand, long-form video content allows content creators to go deeper into complex topics and establish more meaningful relationships with their viewers through prolonged viewing sessions (Collins, 2024). Even though these videos are long in length, they can hold viewers' interest with their fascinating narratives and informative value that over time can lead to more engagement and brand affinity (Burchill, 2024). Zhao (2023) asserts that videos with entertainment value and educational material connect better with viewers.

2.2.2 Stories

Instagram stories are temporal which creates a sense of 'fear of missing out' amongst followers who identify with their favorite influencers to receive new updates. Stories allow influencers to capture backstage videos, answer questions, or provide demonstrations in a casual and spontaneous manner (Macready & Cohen, 2023). Stories advertising is much more impactful for gaining the audience's attention and building brand recognition than most regular feed posts, as evidenced by higher interaction rates and ad memorization (Belanche et al. , 2019).

Interactive elements of stories including polls, quizzes, and swipe-up links further improve user engagement (Dean, 2022). The transient nature of stories provokes viewers to take immediate action like visiting a website, making a purchase, or taking advantage of a limited-time offer. This helps drive conversions and returns on investment (ROI) for the brands.

Short and Long Videos

Short videos have the ability to reach large audience through likes, share, comments etc. (Ferguson, 2024). Influencers can also customize their content for the brands to match audience preferences and latest trends by using tutorials, BTS, customer testimonials, or product demos, among other formats (Tran, 2024). Likes, comments, shares, and views are the most important measures of audience engagement (Muñoz & Towner, 2017).

Long videos usually offer an opportunity to explore complex themes, deliver detailed information, and establish deeper connections with viewers, in contrast to short-form videos that concentrate on brief and have impactful messages. Influencers use a wide range of formats, such as tutorials,

documentaries, interviews, and vlogs, to suit the interests and preferences of their viewers (Collins, 2024).

Static Posts
For influencer marketing on social media platforms like Instagram, static posts (also known as image or text-based posts) are important. Unlike dynamic video content, static posts rely solely on the text or still images to enhance viewers' engagement and convey messages. One of the major advantages of these static posts is their ability to present items or services in a visually attractive manner. The hashtags used by influencers make their posts more visible and draw in targeted audiences who are passionate about certain themes or trends (Blight et al., 2017).

Methodology
Content analysis
Content analysis was performed to examine the differences in engagement rates based upon the various content types on Instagram. We assessed likes, comments, and shares (engagement indicators) for photos, short and long videos (content categories), to evaluate the extent of engagement.

Instagram Account Selection
Macro influencers, with no less than 100k followers, were selected for this study. Influencers who are classified as celebrities were excluded from the analysis, focusing instead on individuals who have gained prominence through Instagram. All influencers are based in Pakistan, providing a localized context for the research. The selection aimed to maintain a balance of gender, resulting in an equal distribution of 10 male and 10 female influencers. The selection process involved identifying top influencers within fashion & style, travel, lifestyle, beauty, and sports & fitness categories and ensuring they primarily feature their own photos in their posts. The final list of influencers was extended through suggested accounts and additional searches to balance the male-female ratio.

Instagram Post Selection
For each influencer, the 40 most recent posts were analyzed. The criteria for selecting these posts included the following:
   Content Focus: Only posts where the influencer's own photo is the primary image were included. In case of multiple-photo posts, the influencer's image had to be the leading one.
   Content Type: Posts were categorized into long videos (one minute or more), short videos (less than one minute), and photos.
   Visibility: Only posts that had been up for more than 24 hours were included to ensure they had adequate time to accumulate engagement metrics.
   Appropriateness: Photos showing influencers with clothes were included to avoid increased engagement due to nudity. Posts needed to clearly show whether the influencer was smiling or not, looking at the camera or not, and whether the photo was a full body or close-up.

Data Collection and Coding
Data collection involved having a template to label selected post and where the number of likes, comments, and shares were officially recorded. The engagement metrics used in the analysis included the average engagement rate per post, and the average engagement rates per post for each content format. This quantitative data helped build an understanding about the content types that produced the most discourse.

Focus Group
Further to the content analysis, three focus group discussions were arranged to gather in-depth perceptions of the different types of Instagram content that contributes towards influencer marketing. These focus groups were aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the users'

attitudes and behaviors with the various Instagram content and the gender of the influencer.

The participants of the focus group discussions were active users of social media, and aged between 16 to 35 years. Each focus group had seven participants, where one had only male participants, the other only females, and the third involved both the genders. This deliberate approach ensured less gender bias and gave a better understanding of the gender based differences in attitudes and engagement. Semi-structured and open ended questions were asked to supplement and direct the focus group discussions.

Data Analysis
Content analysis
Female Influencers
The table below presents the average of the users' engagement with the content posted by the female influencers:

Table 1: Female Influencers' Content Engagement

	Likes	**Comments**	**Shares**
Photos	15,143.4	91.5	0
Short videos	8,924.9	90.5	230.5
Long videos	7,604.7	120.1	363.7

It appears that the followers of the influencers, who were analyzed, appreciate photos more as compared to videos, which is evident from the table above. The long videos generate the highest average comments, with photos and short videos eliciting the same response levels. Long videos also take the lead in the share, which suggests that such content is more likely to be shared with other people and draw more attention from the audience. However, none of the photos of the influencers analyzed for this study were shared.

Male Influencers
The table below presents the average of the users' engagement with the content posted by the male influencers:

Table 2: Male Influencers' Content Engagement

	Likes	**Comments**	**Shares**
Photos	9,420.7	66.2	0
Short videos	4,021.6	62.3	378.7
Long videos	7,629	86.6	1,110.3

As with the female influencers, the highest average likes are recorded on photo posts. Long videos also receive the most comments for male influencers, showing that this format encourages more audience interaction. Long videos are much more likely to have higher shares than the short videos, especially for male influencer. This suggests that their longer-form content is highly regarded and shared across different platforms.

Effectiveness of Content Formats
Amongst the three content types analyzed, photos received the highest number of likes for both the males and females. Long videos, posted by both the genders, garnered the most comments and shares compared to the photos and short videos due to their ability to elicit interactions.

Impact of Influencer's Gender
Female influencers are consistently preferred more than male the influencers for all content types. This means that the audience has a higher degree of appreciation or interaction with posts by female influencers. However, male influencers received higher shares for their long videos

compared to those of females. Interestingly, long videos received more or less the same number of likes for both the male and female influencers.

Overall, the analysis suggests that understanding the impact of gender towards audience engagement on Instagram can help brands and influencers create effective posts, such as photos for one-click appreciation or complex videos for discussion and sharing. This knowledge can also be useful in developing gender-focused advertising campaigns.

The following tables 3 and 4 provide a detailed account of the engagement metrics for the influencers analyzed:

Table 3: Engagement Metrics for Female Influencers

Female Influencers						
Influencer Name	**Followers**	**Avg Engagement Rate**	**Content Type**	**Likes**	**Comments**	**Shares**
Dr. Urooj Fatima	625k	1569%	Short Videos	8253	83	176
			Long Videos	6272	133	182
			Photos	29704	275	-
Annosha Amir	417k	501%	Short Videos	25756	195	1104
			Long Videos	17957	98	44
			Photos	25943	107	-
Esha Khan	124k	1938%	Short Videos	3430	84	288
			Long Videos	10672	242	1003
			Photos	11209	39	-
Summaiya Irfan	121k	162%	Short Videos	1042	84	28
			Long Videos	1258	189	53
			Photos	2697	149	-
Shaina Gull	378k	413%	Short Videos	4916	73	202
			Long Videos	9567	145	413
			Photos	9417	26	-
Muskan Asif	371k	293%	Short Videos	14336	111	217
			Long Videos	2621	50	164
			Photos	9622	52	-
Zara Dar	291k	283%	Short Videos	1592	69	35
			Long Videos	1951	77	116
			Photos	8424	78	-
Maimoona Shah	779k	1665%	Short Videos	14153	110	44
			Long Videos	13537	63	203
			Photos	30766	82	-
Reeja Jeelani	738k	128%	Short Videos	5840	43	89
			Long Videos	5307	25	649
			Photos	12599	47	-
Ammarah Imran	242k	3384%	Short Videos	9931	53	122
			Long Videos	6905	179	810
			Photos	11053	60	-
Average			Photos	15143.4	91.5	-
			Short Videos	8924.9	90.5	230.5
			Long Videos	7604.7	120.1	363.7

Table 4: Engagement Metrics for Male Influencers

Male Influencers						
Influencer Name	Followers	Avg Engagement Rate	Content Type	Likes	Comments	Shares
Faizan Sameer	303k	1572%	Short Videos	448	4	52
			Long Videos	1919	85	215
			Photos	7271	53	-
Hamza Ibrahim	359k	1549%	Short Videos	8258	31	504
			Long Videos	6775	29	79
			Photos	16096	49	-
Osamah Nasir	180k	1182%	Short Videos	3213	44	317
			Long Videos	13722	119	625
			Photos	2412	30	-
Azlan Shah	267k	1128%	Short Videos	2724	100	71
			Long Videos	1164	21	55
			Photos	10964	35	-
Sheikh Umar Saleem	238k	606%	Short Videos	722	14	13
			Long Videos	4239	73	565
			Photos	2487	55	-
Imad Khan	155k	686%	Short Videos	6464	117	683
			Long Videos	20611	136	4845
			Photos	6170	57	-
Daniyal Sheikh	209k	517%	Short Videos	1202	19	86
			Long Videos	2021	34	71
			Photos	3594	35	-
Moiz Nawaz	386k	845%	Short Videos	5045	78	205
			Long Videos	9331	126	99
			Photos	30088	83	-
Abbas Raza Bukhari	425k	3326%	Short Videos	10084	173	1662
			Long Videos	15047	192	4478
			Photos	5871	223	-
Saqalain Haider	228k	2637%	Short Videos	2056	43	194
			Long Videos	1461	51	71
			Photos	9254	42	-
Average			Photos	9420.7	66.2	-
			Short Videos	4021.6	62.3	378.7
			Long Videos	7629	86.6	1110.3

Focus Group

The data was analyzed using a traditional inductive qualitative approach. The following data is presented under the researcher centric second order themes and the aggregate dimensions of the emergent themes:

Content Format Preferences

Photos

Majority of the respondents stated that they like photos because they do not require a lot of attention and raise awareness quickly. However, photos are less effective in driving deeper engagement in the form of comments and shares compared to videos. The following quotes highlight the respondents' attitudes:

"Photos are faster to process but videos are more engaging" (Respondent 6, Male focus group).

"Photos are great for quick inspiration but videos are better for tutorials" (Respondent 4, Female focus group).

Short Videos

Most of the respondents appear to like short videos because they capture attention quickly through their engaging content. However, similar to photos, they do not interact much in the form of comments or shares. This finding reflects in the following quotes:

"Short videos capture attention quickly" (Respondent 7, Male focus group).

"Short videos are engaging because they are fun" (Respondent 2, Joint focus group).

Long Videos
Almost all of the respondents highlighted that the long videos will be appreciated if their content is interesting, relevant and rich. They also underlined that they are likely to comment on long videos than short videos or photos, which suggests that long videos are valued for their depth and detail.
"I prefer to watch long videos when I want detailed information regarding a topic that I am interested to know more about" (Respondent 1, Male focus group).
"Long videos are effective in providing a comprehensive understanding" (Respondent 6, (Female focus group).

Influencer's Gender Impact
Engagement with Male Influencers
When it comes to specific categories, content from male influencers generates more interest in topics such as fitness and technology, which reflected in the responses of the male participants:
"I prefer technological and sports content created by males, however, I like lifestyle content from female influencers" (Respondent 1, Male focus group).
Female respondents stated that they prefer content from male influencers that relates to fitness and travel categories. However, they generally engage with female influencers because of content relevance. (Female Respondent 6: "From male influencers, I like fitness and travel").
"I like to watch fitness and travelling videos that are uploaded by male influencers" (Respondent 6, Female focus group).
"I find content from female influencers more engaging because it is relevant to me" (Respondent 4, Female focus group).
Engagement with Female Influencers
Content from female influencers is generally more liked, particularly in the lifestyle and fashion categories because of their relevance with the female audience and perceived expertise. The respondents highlighted that the female influencers are able to create content that appears to align better with the interests of females:
"I prefer female influencers because their content aligns with my interest" (Respondent 3, Female group).
Some of the respondents appeared gender neutral in their preference as their engagement is dictated by the content rather than the gender:
"I follow both, but my engagement depends more on the content than the influencer's gender" (Respondent 5, Joint focus group).

Overall Insights
- Photos are most liked for their quick consumption but are less engaging for comments and shares.
- Short videos are highly engaging and frequently liked and shared.
- Long videos drive deeper engagement through comments and shares but are less frequently consumed.
- Female influencers generally attract more likes and engagement across content formats, while male influencers' content is particularly shareable in long video formats.

Conclusion
This study explored the effectiveness of various content formats in Instagram influencer marketing and analyzed the impact of influencer's gender on engagement metrics. The study utilized content analysis and focus group discussions to gather comprehensive insights into audience engagement on Instagram. Photos emerged as the most favored format, garnering the highest likes across both male and female influencers, indicating their effectiveness for immediate attention. Long videos, while less frequently posted, generated the highest comments and shares, fostering deeper interaction and wider dissemination. Female influencers consistently received higher likes across

all content types, especially in lifestyle, beauty, and fashion categories. Male influencers excelled in generating higher shares for long videos, particularly in fitness and technology categories, indicating that detailed and informative content from male influencers resonates well with their audience.

Managerial Implications and Future Research Directions
Content Strategy Optimization
Photos can help with swift and widespread audience engagement, whereas videos will generate interactions and shares. Brands and influencers should combine a mix of various content formats in view of the different audience preferences to improve engagement levels.

Gender-Specific Campaigns
Lifestyle, beauty, and fashion campaigns will benefit more from the female influencers, whereas male influencers can be more useful for campaigns that revolve around fitness and technology.

Further Research
Future studies should explore the impact of different content formats and influencer's gender across other social media platforms and in various cultural contexts to validate and extend these findings. Additionally, examining the role of emerging content formats, such as live videos and interactive posts, could provide valuable insights for evolving marketing strategies.

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