Representation of the Iranian Family on Instagram: A Reception Analysis of Family Bloggers' Pages

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Article Info	Abstract
	Background: In the digital age, the expansion of social media platforms has profoundly impacted various aspects of life, including family relationships. **Aim:** This article addresses the complex dynamics of family communication, particularly focusing on Iranian families. In this article, we study the perceptions of users and followers of family blogger pages regarding the representations of family life on Instagram. **Methodology:** Through interviews with users, we seek to understand their understanding of concepts such as love, intimacy, home, and marital relationships. To study how followers perceive and interpret family-oriented pages on Persian Instagram, approximately 29 qualitative interviews were conducted with three groups of respondents. These groups included users, informants, and family psychologists and counselors (couple therapists). **Findings:** The concept of family display helps us understand what practices are defined as "family practices" from the perspective of users and followers of family pages on Instagram. On the other hand, Hall's theoretical model helps us understand the category of readings that users' interpretations and perceptions of the family representation on these pages fall into. The findings reveal the evolving nature of family relationships in the digital age, particularly concerning Iranian families. The findings show that the readings of users following these pages are generally hegemonic and can be divided into three main axes: family rituals, marital relationship, and feminine power, each of which has its own sub-themes. In addition, some interviewees mentioned contrasting and negotiating perceptions. **Conclusions:** The results indicate that readings are complex processes shaped by the cultural contexts and lived experiences of the readers, leading to a combination of interpretations rather than a wholesale acceptance or rejection of media representations. Additionally, followers with preferred readings expressed dual emotions ranging from idealization and beautiful aspirations to feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction with their relationships.

1. Introduction

In the digital age, the expansion of social media platforms has profoundly impacted various aspects of life, including family relationships. Social networks and families are adopting new forms and nuances in every era. In the new millennium, significant changes in these areas are accompanied by the rapid development of new communication technologies (Antonucci et al., 2019) and the expansion and diversification of family structures and norms. Today, individuals, couples, and families exist within broader, more interactive worlds.

The representation of the family, due to the expansion and diversity of media and communication technologies—from print media to radio, television, satellite, and the internet—holds more priority and significance than any other reference or source for understanding family issues in today's world. Before the media expanded to this extent, we had not witnessed the prevalence of the concept of family and the diverse and extensive representations of family (Ameli, 2018: 115).

In the world of new spacization, families are not only exposed to the ideal family models presented by mass media, but new technologies also expose Iranian families to family models from around the world, significantly influencing the formation of our cultural imagination (Ameli, 2011).

Recent technological advancements and the rise of social networks have significantly transformed communication and the representation of life on virtual platforms, influencing couples experiences. The internet, particularly platforms like Instagram, enables individuals to share different facets of their lives and engage with users and followers.

Note that the mediated family is somewhat oriented toward the "family of the future"; that is, something that others aspire to. Accordingly, the family represented in the media is "a family with different cultural relations and imaginations, and lifestyle, which immerses users in a new space; in this space, a new semantic system for family issues is formed, and individuals enter a world where new forms of concepts and family relations are depicted" (Fazeli, 2015).

The family is confronted with communication factors on one side and, on the other side, with content data that have influenced the structure of family relationships, producing a new redefinition of family relationships, family rituals, and the identity of family members. These factors play a role in influencing changes in identity or subjectivity. This change has affected the power structure, the division of labor, family responsibilities, and the expression of intimacy and love.

In this article, we study the perceptions of users and followers of family blogger pages regarding the representations of family life on Instagram. Through interviews with users, we seek to understand their understanding of concepts such as love, intimacy, home, and marital relationships.

In previous studies, audience reception in mass media, as well as

social media, has been of interest to researchers. Studies that examine user readings of mass media generally consider their interpretation of films and television series. For example, a study in Nigeria explored how Nigerians, particularly women, interpret the meanings of female representation in Nigerian films. The findings indicate a significant difference in how women and men understand and interpret the underlying meanings. Furthermore, women with higher education and those with less education perceive the representations differently (Azeez, 2010).

Another study was conducted to understand how female users interpret the beauty construct in one Instagram account. This research, using a critical paradigm and Stuart Hall's analysis method, showed that users' readings are generally preferred readings (Septiyani & Sunarto, 2018). Another study analyzed the interpretation of personal identity presented by a YouTuber (Tasya Farasya). This study uses the reception analysis method with a focus group discussion. The results showed that the content broadcast by Tasya Farasya is considered a reference for young people in shaping their identity, both culturally and persuasively in speech and action. The identity that Tasya Farasya projects leads to a cosmopolitan identity (Briandana et al., 2021).

This article examines how family photography practices are changing in the digital realm, particularly on Instagram. It uses Janet Finch's concept of "family display" to explore how Instagram facilitates new modes of performing and sharing family life. This concept holds exciting potential for media-rich online spaces. To examine family photography on Instagram, they analyzed a sample of 200 Instagram posts. They argue that the specific features of photo sharing in digital spaces, such as hashtags, emojis, and captions, open up new aspects for family display (Barnwell et al., 2023).

Other studies have also examined users' oppositional readings through qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts and comments. A discourse study understood social media users' readings of the traditional woman discourse. To this end, the video known as 'Tašt-e Šir' video which was part of a television program about family values, was studied, which showed an emphasis on the traditional woman discourse. The results of the content analysis indicated that oppositional readings were more diverse and extensive than other readings (Khelghati & Molaei, 2019). Another study explored the differences in readings between two groups of audience members (mothers and daughters) and their attitudes toward Hijab as represented on social media. The findings reveal differences in how teenage girls read the hijab portrayed on hijab fashion bloggers' Instagram pages compared to previous generations (Hajjari & Shojaeian, 2023).

The scholarly examination of digital maternal representations among polish social media influencers offers a sophisticated analysis of contemporary familial dynamics through Instagram. By systematically

investigating the visual content from prominent Instamothers, the research employs an advanced theoretical framework to explore the intricate relationships between visual representation, social positioning, and maternal identity constructions.

The methodological approach, synthesizing content analysis and semiological techniques, reveals a nuanced dialectic between traditional familial paradigms and emerging modernizing discourses, ultimately providing critical insights into the complex ways in which digital platforms mediate and negotiate socio-cultural narratives surrounding motherhood and family structures. The research's significance lies not merely in its empirical findings, but also in its sophisticated deconstruction of how digital platforms mediate and negotiate complex cultural narratives surrounding familial relationships, maternal roles, and social performativity (Gawrońska, et al., 2023).

This research seeks to understand the perceptions and interpretations of users regarding the family communication practices represented on the family bloggers' pages on Persian Instagram. These pages, which generally operate with hashtags such as "my family", "our daily life", "Mr. and Mrs. family", etc., are among those where users depict their family lives. These pages have several followers, with some having over a million followers.

Therefore, the research question is: Given the prominent presence of Iranian family members (spouses) on the social media platform, how do spouses interpret concepts such as home, family, intimacy, privacy, family rituals, and spousal roles?

2. Literature review

Widmer (2010) believes that the family has transitioned from the traditional stage to modernity, but we are now witnessing the postmodern era and must study the characteristics of the family in this age. According to him, these transformations have not occurred uniformly across all societies. In some parts of the world, we see the strong presence of traditional families, in others, modern families, and finally, in a third group, we see the formation of families that should be called individualized families of the postmodern era.

A shift in attitude toward family life is part of the formation of a new social phenomenon that Stacey calls the postmodern family. In her view, this is a period in which families are diverse and fluid, and family relationships will be controversial, ambiguous, and uncertain (Ribbens & Edwards, 2010). The postmodern family model is influenced by the postmodernist theory and proponents of family decline. This theory begins with the observation that people of the twentieth century no longer lived under the conditions of modernity, but rather under the conditions of postmodernity.

In this section, we will first review the theoretical literature on the

representation of the family and its relationship with social networks. Then, we turn to Hall's reception model to study the different types of readings users make.

2.1. Social media and Family display

In 2007, Finch introduced the concept of 'displaying families', which builds on Morgan's earlier argument that family is no longer defined by biology or household, but has instead become a set of 'practices' that must be 'done' (Morgan, 1996; 2011). For Finch, 'doing' family is not enough and family practices must also be 'displayed' to significant others if they are to show that 'these are my family relationships and they work' (Finch, 2007: 73).

Finch argues, however, that contemporary family needs to be 'displayed' as well as 'done' and that the 'the meaning of one's actions have to be both conveyed to and understood by relevant others if those actions are to be effective as constituting "family practices" (ibid: 66). As such, by engaging in displays, family members show that 'these are my family relationships and they work' (ibid: 73).

This is a 'display', because the change in parenting practices shows his children, and the broader audience, that despite him not living with his children anymore, his relationship with them remains familial and of a high quality (ibid: 74).

Finch (2007) explains that the tools for displaying family include family photography and domestic artifacts, giving and receiving gifts, and narratives (e.g., stories). Finch mentions telephone calls but does not mention digital tools (ibid: 77). It has also been suggested that activities in which families publicly interact with each other, such as eating family meals in restaurants (James & Curtis, 2010), can serve important display functions that support the process of conveying family meaning to others.

Finch explains: "By 'displaying' I mean to emphasize the fundamentally social nature of family practices, where the meaning of one's actions has to be both conveyed to and understood by relevant others if those actions are to be effective as constituting 'family' practices". (Finch, 2007: 66).

Displays of family become important ways for people to brand their relationships with a particular quality, character, or identity (Finch, 2007), such as a 'fun' style of parenting or a 'best friend'-like sibling relationship. An important consideration is who displays are for– '*whose* recognition of the family-like quality of relationships is important, and how that recognition is conveyed' (ibid: 74).

This concept has expanded its capacity and position in social media and includes specific forms. When transitioning to an online social media platform like Instagram, the user changes. Rose defines family photos as photos "taken by a member of a family showing members of

that family and mostly viewed by other members of the same family and (often by a few close friends)" (Rose, 2014: 71).

Finch theorizes that 'tools' for family display include family photography and domestic artifacts, gift-giving and making phone calls, but she does not include digital tools (Finch, 2007: 77).

In the digital age, Facebook and Instagram are presented as tools for showcasing the family. The opportunities to share digital images (e.g., family photos) on social networks have elevated photography as a modern tool of choice for embedding meanings related to family, constructing one's identity, and conveying it to others (Cushing, 2013; Spracklen, 2015; Winston, 2013). The important point is for whom are the displays and assessment of the quality of family relationships important, and how is this assessment done (Finch, 2007: 74). Finch explains that this assessment can be done by a family member or by the public, which in the age of new media may be the user's Instagram followers (Loukianov, 2020).

Hence, the use of the display concept extends its capacity and location into social media and explores specific forms of digital display that reflect and refigure the traditional modes of composing and consuming family photography (Barnwell et al., 2023).

2.2. Stuart Hall's encoding/ Decoding theory

For many media studies scholars (Morley 1992; Alasuutari in McQuail, 2002), Stuart Hall's audience research in the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies advanced the insights that have emerged from all these perspectives. His encoding/decoding model is considered the model that set the basic conceptual framework for the notable boom in studies of media consumption and the media audiences during the 1980s (Morley 1992). Hall took from the effects model its basic understanding of communication as a process whereby messages are sent and received with some effects (Alasuutari in McQuail 2002). Hall's approach also took from the uses and gratifications theory the idea that audiences are active interpreters of media texts. He moved away from the stimulus-response model that conceived messages or texts as packages that senders throw to receivers. Hall points out that 'the television programme in not a behavioral input, like a tap on the knee-cap' (Hall in McQuail 2002: 303). Instead, he proposed an interpretive framework: the message is encoded by a program producer and decoded by an audience member, and the message sent and the one received may not be the same (Alasuutari in McQuail 2002). The message consists of signs and symbols as well as a system of codes that both message producers and receivers share. For Hall, the effect a message may have, within this semiotic framework, depends on particular interpretations of the signs and symbols (McQuail 2002).

As communicative processes, Encoding/Decoding Model Hall's key

concepts, encoding and decoding, lie in the realm of pragmatics. He defines encoding and decoding as 'differentiated moments within the totality formed by the communicative process as a whole' (Hall in McQuail 2002: 303). Encoding involves the institutional practices and routines of a given tv station that provide the conditions of production. Decoding involves both the understanding of a media text as well as the evaluation and interpretation of its meaning with reliance on relevant codes. Morley (1992), one of the leading researchers who employed Hall's model in an influential analysis of the audience of the television show 'Nationwide', sums up the premises of Hall's encoding/decoding model:

1. The same story or event can be encoded in more than one way.
2. The message always conveys more than one potential 'reading'. Messages propose or 'prefer' one particular reading over others, but the messages can never become wholly closed around one reading: a television text remains polysemic (i.e., capable of conveying a variety of interpretations).
3. Decoding and understanding the message is also a problematic practice, no matter how transparent and 'natural' this act may seem. Messages encoded in one way can always be decoded differently (Morley 1992).

For Hall, encoding is done in such a way as to produce a preferred meaning of the text. tv producers rely on a wide range of socially shared codes to make the text amenable to that preferred reading and interpretation. A dominant or hegemonic reading/viewpoint is one that "(a) […] defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe of possible meanings of a whole society or culture; and (b) […] carries with it the stamp of legitimacy—it appears coterminous with what is 'natural', 'inevitable', 'taken for granted', about the social order" (Hall in McQuail 2002: 307).

Therefore, the concept of family display helps us understand what practices are defined as "family practices" from the perspective of users and followers of family pages on Instagram. On the other hand, Hall's theoretical model helps us understand the category of readings that users' interpretations and perceptions of the family representation on these pages fall into.

3. Method
To examine user reception on Instagram, we conducted a qualitative study. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews. One of the advantages of using a semi-structured approach in interviews is that the same questions are asked in each case, while individual responses can vary significantly, leading to the emergence of new questions based on the answers. This ensures that each interview covers key issues and facilitates the transition from raw transcripts to a

structured analysis. In this research, interviews were conducted with three groups of respondents (approximately 29 people, consisting of 19 female users and 10 clients of family counselors, whose case files were reviewed in accordance with research ethics): the first group consisted of informants, the second group consisted of couples (Tables 1 & 2), and the third group consisted of psychologists and family counselors (couple therapists) (Table 3).

Table 1. Interviewee groups

Rows	Different groups of interviewees
1	Followers of family pages
2	Informant
3	Couples therapists

Table 2. Profile of the interviewees

	Alias	Age (year)	Job	Duration of marriage (year)
1.	Helia	23	Housewife	3
2.	Marzieh	24	Pastry	2
3.	Yeganeh	27	Swimming coach	4
4.	Asal	21	Architecture	1
5.	Mandana	27	Accountant	3
6.	Anahid	25	Staff	1
7.	Dorsa	24	Teacher	1
8.	Mehrnoush	25	Employee	3
9.	Ronia	23	Sports coach	1
10.	Sewin	20	Housewife	1
11.	Mahsa	31	Club coach	4
12.	Reyhaneh	32	Engineer	5
13.	Mina	21	Housewife	1
14.	Hamideh	28	Housewife	3
15.	Haniyeh	24	Employee	2
16.	Sania	27	Nurse	4
17.	Ana	25	Graphic artist	4
18.	Samane	22	Engineer	2
19.	Reyhaneh	25	Accountant	4

Table 3. Meetings with couples therapists

Experts	Number of sessions
Dr. A.F	Psychologist/Family Therapy/Pair therapist; 8:45-min
Dr. S.	Schema therapist/Interpersonal relations specialist; 2:60 min
Dr. P. M.	Psychologist/Family Therapy/Pair therapist; 3:60 min

The informants included individuals who were in contact with blogger and influencer couples active on Instagram and were aware of the details of their family life. They also included individuals who knew, among their friends and acquaintances, people who were facing one or more family challenges due to the influence of new media and

various platforms. The couples examples of users who possessed the following characteristics: They used various platforms and had personal pages on Instagram.

Family counselors and marriage therapists were also aware of numerous couples who had sought their help due to a media-related challenge in their family life. The information from these cases was provided to the researcher while ensuring privacy was maintained.

Interviewees were identified through various methods. Messages were prepared and shared on social media, requesting users to inform us if they were followers of family blogger pages on Instagram. Additionally, we sent messages to friends and acquaintances about the study sample, asking them to let us know if they knew any followers of these pages.

Furthermore, the experts were asked to inform us if they had clients who were willing to participate in the interviews. Participants were also asked to recommend other individuals with similar characteristics. This sampling method is purposive and snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2004). Snowball sampling is the process of reaching a sample by following up on known individuals to engage with other individuals who share the same characteristics.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted an average of 60 to 70 min. Some interview sessions were conducted over more than one session (Table 3). The interviews continued until there was repetition in the interviewees' responses and we reached data saturation.

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), thematic analysis is a method in which research data are identified, organized, and analyzed. After developing initial codes for interesting elements of the data, the data were manually categorized and organized into meaningful groups (basic themes) (Tuckett, 2005), which ultimately structured the main themes.

Subsequently, the relationship between the long list of extracted data codes and sub-themes (basic themes) was analyzed to create organizing and overarching themes for the qualitative data. Furthermore, the themes were refined and revised through repeated reading.

This process of carefully examining the research topics created a thematic map of the project. After analyzing the thematic map and confirming that the formed themes had a coherent pattern and were relevant to the research question, each theme was defined and given a brief name that accurately described its scope and content (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The themes obtained are presented in the Findings section.

4. Findings
This section presents interviews with some respondents and clients of couples therapists who follow family bloggers' Instagram pages. These users were interviewed about their perceptions of these pages. Based on the thematic analysis of the data, although there are various decoding positions.

Users often have a preferred reading of the representation of family life on Instagram. These preferred readings can be categorized into three main themes: family rituals, female empowerment, and marital communication (Table 4). In addition, some interviewees mentioned contrasting and negotiating perceptions, which are detailed below.

4.1. Preferred reading
In the first section, preferred readings are presented, encompassing three themes: preferred reading of family rituals, preferential reading toward female independence and empowerment and preferences regarding marital relationships (Table 4).

Table 4. Table of subjects related to preferred reading

Preferred reading	Preferred reading of family rituals	• Family surprise; Implication of a romantic relationship • Foreign travel; Essential component of the relationship • Wedding ceremonies; With special and new customs
	Preferential reading toward female independence and empowerment	• Personal travel, personal development, and the right to choose • Home management/Housekeeping with pleasure • Home; A safe, bright, and spacious place
	Preferences regarding marital relationships	• Supportive spouse

4.1.1. Preferred reading of family rituals
Family rituals are specific activities that family members do together to show that this is who we are. These customs may include celebrating important occasions such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries. Users and followers of family Instagram pages cite "surprises" as a new family ritual.

They also prefer foreign travel and consider it a necessary option in their family life. The third theme is wedding ceremonies; accompanied by specific and new customs.

a) *Family surprise; Implication of a romantic relationship*
Surprise is one of the new family rituals that is important for followers of family bloggers' pages and for those who refer to family counselors. Most of the interviewees preferred the representation of family surprises on the Instagram pages.

The increasing emphasis on elaborate and performative surprises, often fueled by the curated content of family-centric bloggers and social media influencers, is emerging as a complex and potentially detrimental factor in familial relationships. Interview data suggests a shift in expectations, where commonplace expressions of affection, like shared walks or casual treats, are perceived as insufficient, replaced by a desire

for grand gestures designed to elicit surprise and, ostensibly, validate the depth of a spouse's love and commitment.

This trend, particularly evident among followers of family bloggers' Instagram pages, creates a pressure cooker environment where individuals feel compelled to orchestrate increasingly extravagant displays of affection, sometimes resorting to financial strain and unsustainable practices, simply to meet perceived media standards of romantic expression. Counselors report clients expressing dissatisfaction with their partners' perceived lack of "surprise", leading to strained relationships and unrealistic expectations.

For example, Dr. S.R. says about her clients: I have many clients who no longer enjoy things like taking a walk together or eating ice cream with their spouse. They are followers of family bloggers' pages and say: "My spouse must do a special thing for me and surprise me to make me happy..."

The pursuit of blog-worthy moments can even mask underlying issues, as illustrated by the influencer couple maintaining a facade of romance online while privately struggling with marital discord, highlighting a disconnect between curated online personas and the realities of interpersonal connection. The pervasive influence of social media in shaping relationship ideals raises concerns about authenticity, financial burden, and the potential for superficial gestures to overshadow genuine communication and everyday acts of love and support.

Helia says of her husband's surprise: "I like to do what bloggers do for me, but he doesn't pay any attention at all, he doesn't love me..."

b) Foreign travel; Essential component of the relationship
The pervasive presence of foreign travel within the curated narratives of family bloggers on platforms like Instagram suggests its increasing significance as a perceived cornerstone of familial bonding and relationship satisfaction. Interviewees like Ronia explicitly articulate the aspirational allure of these digitally disseminated experiences, noting that observing family bloggers' international adventures has intensified her own desire for foreign travel, both as a prelude to potential emigration and as a source of personal enrichment.

Similarly, Anahid underscores the perceived correlation between frequent international trips, often presented as readily achievable by family bloggers, and the cultivation of intimacy and enjoyment within the family unit, expressing a desire to emulate this model despite existing constraints.

Anahid said: "Most of the families I follow take at least two trips abroad a year, but we don't have that opportunity. Bloggers travel abroad easily with their two children and experience a very intimate atmosphere together. I think multiple trips, especially traveling abroad, can bring satisfaction and fun to a relationship."

These perspectives highlight how the documented foreign travel experiences of online influencers contribute to a growing perception that such experiences are not merely recreational but are instead vital components in fostering strong and fulfilling family relationships.

c) Wedding ceremonies; with special and new customs

The pervasive influence of social media, particularly blogger pages, on shaping perceptions and expectations surrounding wedding ceremonies and pre-marital relationships is demonstrably profound. The testimonies presented reveal a tangible adoption of digitally-mediated rituals and customs, driven by the aspirational content disseminated across platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp. From the selection of lavish bridal services that mirror those showcased by influencers, to the emulation of "wedding stories" narrated by family bloggers, individuals are increasingly internalizing a narrative where virtual acquaintance is equated with compatibility and enduring happiness.

Mina, who is preparing for her wedding ceremony, says: "I was following bridal service pages to find a studio and so on. There are pages with titles like 'wedding planner' that create groups in virtual space and add the page's followers to these groups. All these people are preparing for their wedding ceremonies. These pages offer services that bloggers usually use on their pages, and everyone wants to have those services at their wedding."

Helia says: "Everyone holds their ceremonies like this nowadays. Just take a look at the Instagram pages. Furthermore, honestly, what I'm saying and the expectations I have are nothing compared to what others expect."

This, however, generates a paradoxical situation where individuals simultaneously seek authentic connections while grappling with anxieties about the veracity and performative nature of online personas. The disillusionment experienced by individuals who encounter discrepancies between the curated online image of their partners and their lived reality highlights the potential for misconstrued expectations and subsequent marital discord stemming from an over-reliance on the idealized representations of relationships presented in the digital sphere.

This phenomenon underscores the critical need for discerning the evaluation of online content and a recalibration of expectations regarding the complexities inherent in forging genuine, lasting relationships.

Dr. F. talks about a girl who receives numerous marriage proposals on her personal page and is now facing the challenge of making a decision. She says: "I have no idea which marriage proposals are real and which are fake. I cannot trust any message. I don't even know who the person proposing to me in the message is and why they are

proposing marriage. On the other hand, when I read the stories of how bloggers met, I see that many of them met virtually."

Hamed, a client, talks about how he met his wife on Instagram: "I met my wife on Instagram. She had a page, and I saw qualities in her that made me feel like she could be a good match for marriage. I thought her personality was what she was projecting in her posts—a strong, kind, and happy person. But when we started living together, I was only then introduced to the hidden parts of my wife's personality, things that I had never seen on her page, and it was a shock to me."

Dr. F. says about one of his clients, a young man: "This young man became fascinated by the activities of a young, newly-minted female consultant, and after they got married, they are now experiencing problems because he doesn't see the idealized Instagram image of his wife."

The way bloggers portray marriage through a series of stories or wedding highlights has created the implication in the minds of their followers that a virtual acquaintance before marriage can lead to a happy life.

4.1.2. Preferential reading toward female independence and empowerment
Respondents generally spoke about women's independence and freedom of choice within family-oriented pages. They cite examples such as leisure trips without spouses and children, or women managing and designing the home and pursuing personal development within the family, as signs of greater independence and empowerment for women in the family. Followers of these pages generally have a preferred reading of the representation of female power and the changing roles of women. Personal travel, women's personal choices, bloggers' personal development, and home management were among the themes that the interviewees mentioned.

a) Personal travel, Personal development, and the Right to choose
The perception of female bloggers engaging in personal travel and showcasing seemingly effortless family management often elicits complex emotional responses from other women. While some viewers recognize these activities as indicative of empowerment and autonomy, perceiving solo trips as a testament to a woman's right to independent decision-making and self-prioritization, others experience feelings of inadequacy and discontent. This disparity arises from a perceived lack of comparable resources, opportunities, and spousal support, fostering a sense of being "behind" in life. The meticulously curated online personas of bloggers, often highlighting organized routines, readily available childcare solutions, and supportive partners, inadvertently amplify these feelings of comparison.

The curated content can trigger negative emotions such as regret, sadness, and demotivation, as users grapple with their own perceived

shortcomings in managing household responsibilities, personal development, and romantic relationships. Some women also feel empowered by using Instagram to share their relationships with their husbands, finding the space friendly and drawing happiness and positive energy from other users' likes.

Mehrnoosh says: "When I see these bloggers going on solo trips, easily, despite having a husband and two kids, and I can't even imagine doing that, I feel like they are so independent and can live for themselves, but I don't have that possibility at all."

Haniyeh, who has been married for two years, talks about this: "When I see bloggers traveling with their friends and without their children and husbands, I feel like I'm so behind in my life and not thinking about myself at all."

Users point to the management, possibilities, and facilities available to women bloggers and express their frustration at not having such resources and capabilities themselves.

Sania, who has been following the family bloggers' pages for several years, says: "I think a lot about how organized bloggers' lives are and how well they can manage their lives. How capable they are and how many resources they have, and their living environment is also very different, for example, they have a special stroller for running with their child, or a daily routine for taking care of the house and themselves."

These users, in addition to pointing out that bloggers have more opportunities for personal development, also feel uncomfortable following these pages. In fact, what is clear is that following these pages has not only failed to create a pleasant feeling and motivation for life and effective relationships, but has also fueled feelings of sadness, demotivation, and hopelessness.

One of Dr. M's female clients, who follows family blogger pages, says: "Other women's husbands tell them, 'I love you no matter what you're like,' but when I want to choose my own style of dress, my husband complains. You should see this woman's stories, how much her photos have changed, and when they ask her in direct messages if her husband doesn't say anything, she says he tells her he loves her as she is."

This user believes that female bloggers have more choices. Mina, one of the users who also has a page on Instagram, says: "For me, this is like a family album. I like to record my memories. After all, the Instagram space is friendly. Liking and the happiness of others gives me positive energy. Of course, I should also say that in this space, you want to say 'I'm here too' and 'I want others to understand my affection.'"

This user, too, feels empowered by being on Instagram and sharing her relationship with her husband.

b) Home management/Housekeeping with pleasure
Home; A safe, bright, and spacious place.
The interviewees' responses show that family-oriented pages consistently reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, where women are predominantly portrayed as the primary managers and orchestrators of domestic spaces. These visual narratives systematically depict women engaging in household management tasks with an apparent sense of satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, while simultaneously highlighting their strategic decision-making capabilities regarding home design, spatial configuration, and esthetic refinement. The findings suggest that these digital representations present women as the quintessential architects of domestic environments, responsible for creating and maintaining harmonious living spaces through meticulous attention to design, decoration, and spatial organization.

Notably, one respondent articulated this phenomenon, emphasizing that women are portrayed as responsible for redesigning living spaces, relocating to more expansive residences, or selecting alternative neighborhoods that align with their familial and personal aspirations.

Several respondents have a preferred reading regarding the representation of home on bloggers' pages.
Sewin, who is preparing for her wedding ceremony, says: "What exists on bloggers' pages is that alongside seeing a happy family. They always have large houses with lots of light. They do household chores with a smile and satisfaction."

Ghazal says: "I think bloggers have a safe environment and feel secure in their emotional lives."

4.1.3. Preferences regarding marital relationships; Supportive spouse
The interview data revealed a notable trend among respondents who engaged with family-oriented content on platforms like Instagram, specifically concerning their perceptions of marital relationships and the role of supportive spouses. Many participants expressed that these online portrayals, while potentially idealized, offer valuable insights and aspirational models for their own relationships. The depiction of husbands actively supporting their wives, both emotionally and practically, resonated strongly, with examples cited including partners sharing life experiences, managing household responsibilities, and expressing affection through gestures like gift-giving. The appeal of these online narratives stems from a perceived correlation between such spousal support and a more harmonious and fulfilling marital life, prompting some individuals to actively seek out content showcasing these dynamics with the intention of learning and implementing similar strategies in their own relationships.

The perceived "calmer life" achieved through specific spousal interactions, as highlighted by Anahid's comment on influencer content, underscores the desire for relational harmony and the potential

for social media to serve as a source of inspiration and guidance in navigating the complexities of marriage. This search for relatable and achievable models of spousal support suggests a broader societal emphasis on egalitarian partnerships and a desire for men to actively participate in both the emotional and practical aspects of family life.

Anahid says: "I follow these pages because I find their approach to life interesting. I feel like they share good life experiences—someone who has immigrated and has exciting work experiences. Her husband has been by her side in many experiences. It's entertaining and educational for me. For example, you learn that if you have this kind of interaction with your spouse, you will have a calmer life."

Dr. S. R. says: "I have many clients who say: 'I follow bloggers to learn what they do that makes their husbands love them so much and support them, how they cook, and how they manage their homes'."

4.2. Oppositional readings

The presented scenarios highlight the complexities in the interpretation and negotiation of performative expressions of affection and lifestyle choices, particularly within the context of social media. Dr. F.'s situation exemplifies how an ostensibly romantic gesture, a lavish birthday celebration documented online, can trigger discord rooted in deeper relational issues. The wife's perspective reveals a contrasting reading of the event; she perceives it not as a genuine expression of love but as a superficial performance designed to project a specific image to the husband's followers, exacerbating her feelings of inadequacy and unmet expectations regarding her husband's acceptance of her.

Dr. F. talks about this: "They are currently married. Some time ago, the husband held a ceremony at a famous restaurant for his wife's birthday, wrote a special poem for her, invited an orchestra, and finally surprised her. He published pictures of this ceremony on his personal Instagram page."

However, in their recent visits and after the husband held the birthday ceremony for his wife, they experienced more serious tensions. The wife says: "This surprise wasn't for me! If he really loved me, he would accept me as I am. If he really loved me, he wouldn't have told me I was fat all these years! I tried so hard for our online shop, I have so many personality traits, but he constantly checks the pages of bloggers and wants my body to be like theirs. I am who I am and I don't want to change for others. He just wanted to play an attractive theater in front of others and tell his followers that I am the kind of person who can do this. I think so, and I'm not happy with this surprise at all. The theater puts on an attractive show in front of others and tells its followers, 'I'm the kind of person who can do this.' I think this way and I'm not at all happy with this surprise."

Furthermore, the experiences of Mohaddeseh, Marzieh, Samaneh, and Mina illustrate a growing skepticism toward the idealized

portrayals of relationships and lifestyles perpetuated by social media influencers. Their resistant readings, characterized by unfollowing, muting, and critique, stem from a recognition of the unrealistic and often financially motivated nature of these representations, leading to feelings of envy, inadequacy, and a desire to preserve personal privacy. The recurring theme is a questioning of authenticity and a rejection of performative happiness that lacks genuine substance, revealing a sophisticated awareness of the potential for social media to distort perceptions and negatively impact personal well-being.

Mohaddeseh also shares her experience of unfollowing these pages: "For a while, I was following a page where the page's customers shared their surprise experiences—family, friendship, sibling surprises, and so on. I felt envious, wishing I could receive such a box of chocolates. After a while, I decided to unfollow the page. Because I realized that we couldn't afford to give each other iPhones or buy cars for each other."

Samaneh, says: "These pages don't give you useful information; they give you a bad feeling. They present an idealized content that is far from my life. I mute these pages. I think bloggers actually get married with a plan to make money."

4.3. Negotiated reading
The consumption of family-oriented content from online sources, particularly blogs and social media pages, appears to be characterized by a degree of critical engagement termed "negotiated reading". While respondents indicated following family blogger pages, they simultaneously expressed a discerning awareness of the potentially curated and idealized nature of the presented marital experiences. Rather than passively accepting these representations, users actively adapt the gleaned information and ideas to the realities and constraints of their own lives. This adaptive behavior is exemplified by individuals like the respondent who, inspired by the concept of surprises, communicated her preferences to her husband while tempering her expectations to avoid direct comparisons with the often-exaggerated displays seen on the blogger pages.

Furthermore, the preference for minimalist lifestyle content, focusing on practical solutions and relatable challenges rather than aspirational luxury, highlights a desire for authenticity and tangible applicability. As illustrated by Mandana's experience, such content can foster a sense of connection and contentment with one's own circumstances, providing actionable strategies for improving domestic life and fostering a more positive perception of one's living space. This suggests a shift toward using online resources for educational and self-improvement purposes, actively selecting and integrating relevant information while critically evaluating the underlying motivations and potential biases present in the content. The value lies not in replicating

an idealized online portrayal, but in extracting practical advice and inspiration that can be realistically integrated into everyday life, contributing to a more satisfying and functional domestic environment.

For example, Helia says: "Regarding surprises, I really like them, so I talked to my husband about it. I told him I like being surprised, and he tries his best. Of course, I also control my expectations. For example, I don't really expect the kind of ceremonies and gifts that are on bloggers' pages from my husband."

Mandana, regarding the pages she follows on Instagram and YouTube, says: "I don't follow luxury bloggers; They are after advertising and making money. The kind of pages I follow are those that present a minimalist style. such pages don't want to flaunt their lives. For example, they have challenges in cleaning the house and removing extra items. This has helped me a lot. It's like, any item that's been sitting in a corner of the house for two years gets a six-month grace period, and if it's not useful, you throw it away... Since I discovered this page, I get along better with my house. In some ways, our houses are similar in terms of size and things like that. Since I discovered this page, I feel like I have a better connection with the house that I previously thought was too small and the walls were closing in on me."
This user mentions the following pages that help improve her married life, and these pages are usually not promotional but more educational.

5. Conclusion
This study, drawing on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, examines how users decode family life as represented by bloggers on Instagram. Decoding can take the form of dominant or hegemonic readings, which align with the encoder's intended meaning; negotiated readings, which blend elements of hegemonic and oppositional readings; or oppositional readings, which reject the intended meanings.

The findings indicate that most followers express dominant or preferred readings. They found the content visually appealing and depicted the ideals they aspired to in their own lives: spacious and bright homes evoking feelings of security and tranquility, the empowerment and personal development of women, and supportive and affectionate spousal relationships. This decoding reveals the power of media representation in shaping aspirations and normalizing ideals and family relationships. However, followers also expressed a sense of distance from these representations, using words such as frustration, disappointment, and demotivation.

On the other hand, interviews with marriage therapists and informants revealed numerous tensions and contradictions surrounding the authenticity of relationships, privacy, commodification, and unrealistic ideals of family life as represented on Instagram. This study demonstrates that social networks, particularly Instagram, play a significant role in constructing an ideal of family life. These networks

allow individuals to present their lives as happy, energetic, and more beautiful, and to adjust their relationships based on these ideals. However, these representations may differ from the more complex and diverse realities of family life. Individuals who engage with these representations may experience various effects, ranging from idealization and beautiful aspirations to feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction, this duality of emotions being one of the results.

Followers of these pages enjoy seeing the portrayed family life and relationships, but ultimately this feeling is not sustainable because it is something that not only differs from the real lives of the followers but also does not match the real lives of the bloggers themselves. Indeed, couples therapists report numerous cases of clients who themselves are family bloggers on Instagram and seek therapy for separation, even while continuing to share their intimate relationship with others on their pages. In the new world, families, and especially couples, need a new literacy called "Love Literacy" (Shahghasemi, 2022) to better understand the difference between mediated love and real love.

Beyond the points already raised, interpretations that suggest female independence and the possibility of individual development for bloggers are under discussion. The idea that female empowerment and the advancement of women are fundamentally defined for followers of these pages through managing the home, planning housework, and enjoying luxury amenities, while other aspects of life and social responsibility are ignored, warrants further discussion and study. In any case, what is clear is that female users' understanding of female power is shaped by such representations, and women have a hegemonic reading of it.

However, alongside these preferred readings, negotiated decodings also emerged, combining esthetics and the pleasure of escaping content with critical perspectives. Several respondents also pointed to the unrealistic nature of the representations in oppositional readings, believing that the nature of family life is a combination of everyday realities and challenges in relationships. They believe that this content presents an inaccurate and not entirely credible picture of family life. Comparing the representations with the complex realities of their own family situations leads followers to critically analyze the ideals constructed through the lens of Instagram. This decoding reveals the agency of users in their self-aware reading of media representations of the family in relation to lived experience. Others pointed to the excessive commodification and marketization of some accounts. Some also mentioned privacy and criticized documenting private family moments for public consumption on Instagram.

Furthermore, some followers described oppositional readings. Some followers were quite disillusioned by what they perceived as the inauthenticity of family blogger accounts and they stopped following them. Others felt alienated or discouraged when comparing their own

lives to the representations made. These oppositional readings emphasize that some users ultimately reject or want to distance themselves from the reproduction of family life on social media.

These findings illustrate Hall's argument that readings are complex processes shaped by the cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of the reader, leading to a mixture of interpretations rather than a wholesale acceptance or rejection of media representation. The semiotic constructions of family life by Iranian bloggers are reflected through the lens of their users' subjective positions and realities.

Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that individuals' readings and interpretations of representations of family life on social media are complex and diverse. Individuals may find representations to conflict with their own ideals or be critical of them. These results indicate that these representations have flexibility and different interpretations and may have different effects on individuals, although in this case, the reading of most interviewees was the preferred reading. These representations have a significant impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviors in real life, encompassing various dimensions from private to public life. However, questions arise regarding the authenticity and reality of these representations, their impact on family communication, and the persistence of these images in the minds of users, which requires further research.

While the concept of family possesses an inherent and legally defined nature, the experience of being a family is significantly shaped by the evolving communication ecosystem. Social media networks, particularly platforms like Instagram, act as powerful lenses through which users redefine and reimagine their own family relationships and rituals. These platforms provide a space where individuals actively construct and negotiate their understanding of family, drawing upon both their personal lived experiences and their levels of media literacy awareness. As users engage with diverse representations of family life online, they develop various interpretations, reflecting a dynamic interplay between traditional values and the evolving norms presented within the digital sphere. This leads to nuanced perspectives on what constitutes a family, how relationships are maintained, and the significance of shared rituals in the media age.

6. Limitations
This present research encountered significant methodological challenges inherent to studying interpersonal family dynamics, particularly due to the intrinsically sensitive nature of familial relationships. Despite extensive outreach and recruitment efforts, numerous potential participants demonstrated reluctance to engage in substantive discussions regarding their personal family interactions.

Furthermore, the researcher implemented rigorous ethical protocols to protect participant confidentiality, carefully anonymizing case

studies and professional testimonies from family counselors and couple therapists. Particular emphasis was placed on protecting individual identities by systematically omitting distinctive personal characteristics and specific identifying details when presenting clinical observations and therapeutic insights. These methodological constraints necessarily influenced the breadth and depth of data collection, while, simultaneously ensuring the highest standards of research integrity and participant privacy.

Conflict of interest
The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations
The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability
The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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