



Influential factors in Friendship establishment decisions Instagram users in the disruptive era

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

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Instagram is a highly popular social media platform worldwide, including in Indonesia. In this disruptive era, both men and women extensively use Instagram for various purposes, making efforts to expand their social connections on the platform. Unfortunately, studies on the factors influencing men and women in forming friendships are relatively scarce. This research aims to uncover the aspects that influence Instagram users' decisions in forming friendships, based on gender in the disruptive era. The researcher employed a qualitative method, collecting data using a semi-open questionnaire. A total of 52 informants were involved in the study, meeting three inclusive criteria: active Instagram users, willingness to participate as research informants, and a minimum of two years' experience using Instagram. After tabulating the data based on simple frequency distribution, the researcher found that on Instagram, men and women tend to make different decisions when it comes to forming friendships. Men use Instagram as a means of entertainment, as they are inclined to be friends with individuals who share similar interests and preferences, as well as enjoy entertaining posts. On the other hand, women use Instagram to develop themselves, as in addition to making friends with those who share common interests, they also appreciate posts that provide information and knowledge. This research has broad implications for various purposes, highlighting the importance of considering gender aspects in the use of Instagram.

1. Introduction

Human beings as social creatures require means of communication to sustain their lives within the community. With communication, humans can connect with each other in their daily lives, no matter where they are Wijaya (2013) In this era of disruption, where changes are driven by incredible innovations that transform societal systems and structures on a wide scale, communication has also evolved. Thanks to the development of technology, humans can interact with one another even over long distances. This is because of the emergence of social media (Agusti & Anggoro, 2021).

Widjajanto (2013) stated that social media is a medium designed to disseminate messages through social interactions and is created with easily accessible and large-scale publication techniques. In today's all-digital era, social media has a significant impact on the community's way of life, changing communication styles that know no boundaries of distance, space, time, anywhere, and anytime, by using internet networks. According to Nasrullah (2015), social media is an online intermediary that allows users to present themselves or communicate, collaborate, share, and interact with other users.

Currently, there are various social networks in the form of applications that can be classified by their functions. For example, there are social networks that send direct messages, more commonly known as chat, social networks that send direct messages and record audio, and social networks with audio-visual features like Instagram. Instagram is capable of offering attractive features, allowing internet users to learn and share in the field of photography and build friendships with new people (Hawali & Cyrielle, 2020).

Instagram is a beloved social media platform among people today. According to the Indonesian Digital Report 2020 survey conducted by Hootsuite (We are social), the total number of Instagram users in Indonesia as of 2020 amounted to 63 million individuals. Approximately 50.8% of Instagram users are female, while around 49.2% are male (Kemp Simon, 2020).

Instagram itself derives from the word 'insta' or 'instant,' inspired by the Polaroid camera, which was formerly known as 'instant photos.' The social media platform Instagram is a social networking site for sharing photos that was created in October 2010 (Albarran, 2013). Instagram was released in October 2010. Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger were the creators of this application. Initially, this social media platform was called Burbn, and it was only available for iPhone users with a wide range of features. However, these features were streamlined to focus primarily on photos, comments, and likes to better cater to its users

Instagram is a social media application that can be used on smartphones, computers, and laptops. According to Bambang, Instagram is a digital media similar to Twitter, but it allows users to take digital photos and share them. Instagram can also inspire its users and enhance creativity because it offers features that can make photos more beautiful, artistic, and appealing (Atmoko, 2012).

In social media, the connections formed by individuals are referred to as online friendships. This is because the interactions between individuals do not occur face-to-face but rather through the use of computers (Computer Mediated Communication). Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is the process by which people create, exchange, and experience information using telecommunication networks that facilitate human activities to encode, transmit, and decode messages (Liliweri, 2014).

Online friendship is an interindividual relationship that occurs between people in the virtual world (Helmi, 2017). Online friendships can be formed with people from one's real-world acquaintances and new individuals met through social media. On Instagram, these friendships are established when both parties connect, which is through mutual following. According to Lai and Fung (2020), The stages of online friendship development consist of four phases: 1) Initiating conversations with individuals they have not previously known; 2) Evaluating online friends, progressing from being strangers to acquaintances; 3) Commencing virtual friendships that may eventually transition to offline friendships (meeting in person); and 4) Strengthening social relationships.

In a previous study titled 'The Use of Social Media in Friendship Relationships,' Marchellia (2022) explained that by using Instagram, individuals can expand existing friendships and establish new ones, not only with familiar acquaintances but also with people from other countries whom they have not met. The aim of the research was to understand how a social media platform could facilitate friendship connections (Fadillah, Farihanto, & Setiawan, 2022).

This study primarily focused on an in-depth exploration of the factors that significantly influence an individual's decision to establish friendships on Instagram. The research's objective was to identify and analyze the contributing factors that affect Instagram users' decisions in forming friendships, as well as to examine whether there are gender differences in friendship formation on Instagram. Although Instagram users generally have similar goals when it comes to interacting and making friends, the factors influencing their decisions can be complex and varied. This research can provide a better understanding of this variability and how specific factors can influence users' decisions in establishing friendships.

2. Method

This research was conducted openly with several criteria, which included: 1) having a personal Instagram account, 2) the Instagram account being at least 1 year old, 3) actively using the Instagram account for a minimum of one week prior to the study, and 4) being between 18-30 years of age. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire method consisting of statements and questions. According to Sugiyono, (2017) A questionnaire is a data collection method involving a set of written questions or statements presented to respondents for their responses. The questionnaire used to measure the factors influencing someone to form friendships on Instagram consisted of 40 items (Sitohan, 2021). The questionnaire was in the form of a Likert scale, comprising 5 options: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5), along with one open-ended question in each category. The results were then processed by calculating averages and cross-

tabulation. According to Sugiyono, (2018) The Likert scale is used to measure an individual's or a group of people's attitudes, opinions, and perceptions about social phenomena. For questionnaire distribution, the researcher used several social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

3. Result and Discussion

Instagram is one of the platforms where individuals can seek new friends with similar hobbies and interests. It's not surprising that Instagram is currently popular among social media users, both men and women. Naturally, men and women have differences in their decisions about making friends on Instagram. This study involved 52 informants, with 54% being male and 46% female. The majority of the informants have had Instagram accounts for more than five years, indicating that they have a good understanding of the features, trends, and interaction methods within the application. In this study, the researcher divided the questions into five indicators, which are profile factors, similarity factors, social factors, posting factors, and purpose factors, which will be explained as follows.

Profile factor

The Profile factor in forming friendships on Instagram refers to how one's information and self-presentation on their Instagram profile can influence the decisions of others to become friends. Based on the research findings, regarding the profile factor, an impressive profile picture was the most commonly chosen reason for someone to establish friendships on Instagram, with a percentage of 37% choosing 'strongly agree,' 42% choosing 'agree,' 15% being 'undecided,' 2% choosing 'disagree,' and none choosing 'strongly disagree.' In the open-ended question, out of 52 informants, 25% decided to make friends based on profile pictures, whether they were funny, interesting, or amazing.

Profile pictures are highly significant in forming friendships because they allow individuals to make a first impression on those who view them. Therefore, someone can create an appealing first impression by showcasing their interests and personality in their profile picture. According to Yanti, (2020) A profile picture is not just a lifeless image devoid of meaning; on the contrary, it serves as a conduit for conveying messages and a representation of an individual. Profile pictures are not limited to personal photos; some people use graphic images or images of landscapes, animals, plants, or anything that reflects their personality. According to Yanti,(2020), The fundamental principle of a profile picture is the freedom within the medium of the photo itself, and the consequence of this freedom is the potential for various possibilities in constructing messages and representing one's image. Through this freedom, an individual can shape their own image according to their preferences to attract the attention of those who view it.

There is a difference between male and female respondents in their preferences. In the closed-ended questions, men tend to choose profile pictures of users displaying funny photos, while women are more inclined to select profile pictures that are impressive.

Similarity factor

The Similarity factor in forming friendships on Instagram refers to the presence of common hobbies, regions, or experiences among Instagram users. In terms of the similarity factor, having the same school is the most commonly chosen factor, with a percentage of 54% selecting 'strongly agree,' 46% choosing 'agree,' and none choosing 'undecided,' 'disagree,' or 'strongly disagree.'

School is a place where individuals form strong bonds, whether with friends, teachers, shared experiences, or even the school environment itself. Making friends with someone who shares the same school background can provide a sense of support in facing difficulties related to the environment or even in a broader social context. According to Rachmawati, (2017) The benefits of making friends with schoolmates on Instagram include: 1) staying updated with the latest information or news, 2) easily keeping track of friends' recent activities, and 3) finding inspiration for creative work. According to Rachmawati, individuals who form friendships with their schoolmates on Instagram feel delighted because they can easily access information about their friends on Instagram, such as discovering new recreational places or receiving recommendations for online shops.

Furthermore, making friends with schoolmates on Instagram also offers long-term benefits as it can help in building a career network for the future, providing job information, business opportunities, and even sharing experiences. It is undeniable that the common school background can have a significant impact in the digital era we live in today.

In response to the open-ended question, the answers from the informants were quite diverse regarding this similarity factor. However, 23% mentioned that sharing the same hobbies is one of the factors for them in forming friendships on Instagram. Shared hobbies can serve as an initial foundation for making friends on Instagram because having common interests and activities can create strong bonds among individuals. When someone comes across an account or content that focuses on the same hobby, they feel they have something to discuss, share, and explore together. Furthermore, Instagram itself offers features that make it easier to find people with similar interests through search functions and hashtags. It allows someone to quickly discover a broader and more diverse community, opening up opportunities to befriend people from different backgrounds, which may be challenging in the real world. Instagram has a positive impact on individuals with hobbies, according to Aditya (2015) Users are motivated to learn and self-develop through the friends they meet online in the virtual world. Social networking sites make users more friendly, attentive, and empathetic.

Regarding the similarity factor, male respondents tend to prefer the school similarity factor, while female respondents opt for the similarity in the region of residence. In the open-ended question, males tend to befriend someone with shared hobbies, whereas females tend to befriend someone with a similar lifestyle.

Social factor

The Social factor refers to various aspects that influence how interactions and social relationships are formed among users on Instagram. In terms of the social factor, knowing someone in real life is a factor that was commonly chosen by the informants, with 62% responding 'strongly agree,' 35% responding 'agree,' 2% being 'undecided,' 2% 'disagree,' and 0% 'strongly disagree.'

From the results of this research, knowing someone in real life is one of the important factors that drive individuals to form friendships on Instagram. This is because there is a desire to extend existing relationships, as making friends on Instagram allows individuals to stay connected despite geographical distance or circumstances that may restrict physical meetings.

Instagram can help the audience connect with relatives or friends, both those we've known for a long time and those we haven't met yet. This can include individuals who are very close to us or those who are far away, allowing us to reconnect with old friends and find new ones we desire (Nainggolan, 2018). Moreover, Instagram also provides its users with various features like text messaging, comments, and even shared stories. These features offer a more relaxed and convenient way to interact, without being restricted by schedules or physical locations. This allows friendships to continue to develop even when there may not be an opportunity to meet in person in the near future.

Among the diverse responses to the open-ended questions, the researcher found one answer with the highest percentage. The informants mentioned that someone with an interesting lifestyle is a reason for forming friendships on Instagram, with a percentage of 15%. An interesting lifestyle can be a factor for someone to establish a connection on Instagram because Instagram itself is an audio-visual-based social media application, where individuals can share various moments of their lives, travels, daily activities, and even achievements. When someone sees a post from a person with an appealing lifestyle, it creates a sense of admiration and interest in getting to know them better, often with the intention of learning from their lifestyle. However, it's essential to note that this not only has a positive impact but can also have negative consequences, as mentioned by Agianto (2020) Influence of negative occurrences include having hedonistic tendencies or spending money recklessly, being easily swayed by what they see, and following the lifestyles of others.

The factor of posts

The indicator of post factors refers to how content uploaded by an individual can influence or pique the interest of others to engage, follow, or establish friendships with them. Based on research

findings, individuals are inclined to form friendships with those who frequently upload entertaining content. This is substantiated by percentage values, with 58% responding very positively, 40% agreeing, 2% expressing uncertainty, and no one choosing to disagree or strongly disagree. Entertaining content can assist Instagram users who view it in relieving stress and monotony from their daily routines, with such content manifesting as amusing, engaging, and distinctive photos or videos.

Entertaining content can also serve as the starting point for an interaction. Comments made with humor and comedy can trigger similar responses, opening opportunities for mutual communication. Someone who uploads entertaining content feels they gain new experiences, new friends as their number of followers grows, alleviate boredom and stress, particularly in their work, and can inspire each other (Dehasen, 2017).

In contrast, for open-ended questions, the most common response was posts that present educational content, with a percentage value of 29%. There are several reasons why people tend to form friendships through interactions with content that provides education. Posts in the form of photos or videos containing useful information, tips, or tutorials can help Instagram users learn new things and self-improve. When someone comes across educational posts, they are likely to interact with the post owner by liking, commenting, or even following their account. These interactions can be the starting point for a friendship between two Instagram users. Interactions of this kind encourage the formation of deeper and more meaningful friendships because they are built on the foundation of personal growth and the desire to positively influence each other through knowledge.

There are differences between male and female respondents in their choices, with males preferring the factor of presenting entertaining content, while females tend to prefer the factor of presenting content containing knowledge.

The factor of purpose

The indicator of the purpose factor refers to the specific intentions or reasons that drive someone to seek and form friendships on Instagram. In terms of purpose, the primary reason for someone to establish new friendships on Instagram is to connect with individuals who can help them develop their skills. Instagram is one of the social media platforms where many people have various expertise, and they typically post content related to their skills. Through these posts, individuals can share information and tips related to their expertise, which can assist others in developing their abilities in areas they are interested in. For example, someone passionate about photography looking to enhance their skills can form friendships with professional photographers and learn from the experiences and tips provided by these professionals.

Building friendships with individuals who can help in personal development also enables someone to gain access to a professional network that can assist in advancing their career or expertise.

In open-ended questions, 42% of the informants answered that their purpose in forming friendships on Instagram is to establish relationships with new people. According to Edwin (2023), Instagram serves as one of the means or platforms for teenagers to build social relationships within society. The universal nature of the social media platform Instagram allows anyone to establish connections with anyone, without exception. According to Edwin's explanation, Instagram enables individuals to expand their social networks without geographical constraints. Through interactions with people from various cultures, one can gain new insights. Therefore, it is important to form friendships on Instagram as it offers the opportunity to establish a social network that can be helpful in the future.

4. Conclusion

In this study, it can be concluded that the main factors leading individuals to form friendships on Instagram include impressive profile pictures, school similarities, real-world acquaintances, entertaining content posts, and those who can assist in personal development. Additionally, the research reveals that on the Instagram platform, there are differences between men and women in their decisions to establish friendships. Men tend to use Instagram for entertainment purposes, as they often befriend those who share common interests, tastes, and enjoy entertaining posts. In

contrast, women use Instagram for self-development, as they not only befriend those with similar interests but also appreciate informative and knowledge-based posts.

The findings of this research have significant practical implications. In order to enhance the efficiency of audience targeting when promoting a product on Instagram, companies can consider the audience based on the research findings, aligning their target audience accordingly.

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