# The Evolving Nature of Celebrity Influence: Youth Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Vocational Choices in Bengaluru

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**Abstract**

The concept of celebrity has evolved with the rise of digital media, shifting from talent-based recognition to democratised fame. Social media platforms now enable ordinary individuals to achieve celebrity status, resulting in the rise of "micro-celebrities" who leverage personal branding for new vocational opportunities. This study explores the influence of micro-celebrity culture on the vocational aspirations and career choices of urban youth in Bengaluru, India. Results have shown greater self-awareness amongst the youth with respect to the veils of fame and the continuing need for traditional jobs but with a modern outlook. On the other hand, the notion of a gig economy based on side hustles from social media is also on the rise. The research provides insights into how the attention economy reshapes perceptions of work and success by analysing the interplay between social media, celebrity influence, and employment trends.

*Keywords:* Traditional celebrity, Instagram celebrity, Social media, Influence, Unconventional careers.

## Introduction

Traditionally, the term celebrity can be attributed to those unique individuals who catch the attention of the public eye and are of a higher status (Douglas & McDonnell, 2019). The nature of celebrity culture has been transforming as decades pass by with the advent of mass media. As media evolves, so does the concept of celebrity (Marwick, 2015).

Findings from this study may inform career guidance and counselling practices, helping educators and counsellors to better support youth in navigating their career aspirations influenced by celebrity culture. Educational institutions can utilise the insights from this research to design curricula and training programs that align with youth aspirations and the evolving job market dynamics, potentially uncovering new industries and job roles.

Thus, the study aims to explore how urban youth's aspirations and self-concepts are shaped by the celebrities they follow on social media. By analysing its impact on vocational choices, this research can provide insights into broader sociological trends regarding the aspirations, motivations, and career paths of young people. With this understanding, strategies can be developed to support urban youth in pursuing these new opportunities, enhancing their economic participation and ensuring they can find decent work in the digital economy. Furthermore, the topic can be effectively linked to Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, which promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

## Problem Statement

The study is significant as social media continuously influences youth perception and decision-making. The modern world is influenced by technology and digital media in all spheres of life, including employment and job opportunities, making it an important area that requires academic inquiry. The research also understands the dynamic of celebrity culture that has evolved with the onset of the attention economy.

## Literature review

### *History of celebrity culture- Till the 1970s*

Early forms of celebrity culture emerged in the 19th century with mass circulation newspapers and the entertainment industry. In contrast, the advent of radio and television in the 20th century further amplified celebrities' reach and influence.

C. Wright Mills (1957) conceptualised celebrities as individuals who possess fame without substantial achievements or qualifications; their status is derived from their celebrity rather than any inherent prestige. Boorstin further crystallised this idea with his formulation that a celebrity is "a person who is known for his well-known-ness," suggesting that their fame is self-perpetuating and not necessarily tied to notable accomplishments. This perspective, often summarised as being "famous for being famous," highlights a cultural shift where the recognition and visibility of an individual become the primary markers of celebrity rather than their achievements or societal contributions. The prevalence of Boorstin's perspective in the literature emphasized the surface-level facets of fame, neglecting the deeper sociological and historical elements of Mills' approach. This cultural pessimism, which highlights the transition from "hero to celebrity," has shaped both scholarly and public discussions on celebrity for many years (Vinovrski & Van Krieken, 2019). According to Rojek (2001), the contemporary concept of "celebrity" has its roots in the decline of religious authorities and the establishment of democratic governments and secular societies. Despite this, celebrities are often associated with divine attributes. The emergence of celebrity culture is closely tied to the overall decrease in organised religion, as well as the democratisation of society and the commercialisation of everyday life. As celebrity culture influence is more prominent than organised religion, they are often called "stars," offering a pathway to transcendence.

***History of celebrity culture from 1970 to 2000s- Onset of media***

The growing fascination with celebrity culture occurred with the rapid expansion in media during the 1980s, a transformational period that turned celebrities into commodities. These include their representations, sounds, and the products they associate with (Cashmore, 2006).

The intersection of media and celebrity culture has been extensively explored in scholarly literature, reflecting a mutual shaping where media constructs and reflects the phenomenon of celebrity. Print media, with newspapers and magazines, historically played a crucial role in creating celebrity culture by featuring stories and interviews, while the rise of

tabloid journalism in the early 20th century increased the focus on celebrities' personal lives. Broadcast media, particularly radio and television, brought celebrities into people's homes, making them more accessible. The rise of television has prompted discussions about changes in celebrity allure and the democratisation of fame, where everyday individuals achieve celebrity status through digital platforms (Epstein, 2007; Redmond & Holmes, 2007).

In Richard Schickel's article "Celebrity" (1985), published in 'Film Comment', he critically analyses the nature and impact of celebrity culture, emphasising the role of media in this process. Schickel employs a qualitative approach, drawing on cultural and media analysis, historical context, case studies, and media content analysis to examine the phenomenon from sociological and psychological perspectives. He finds that the media is crucial in creating and perpetuating celebrity status, as it publicises and sensationalises the personal lives of celebrities. Schickel highlights the paradoxical relationship between the public and celebrities, where audiences crave intimate details about celebrities while maintaining idealised images of them. He also discusses the cyclical nature of celebrity culture, where the media builds up public figures only to tear them down later, reflecting broader societal values and anxieties. His work underscores the media's powerful role in shaping public perceptions of fame. It remains relevant for its insights into the symbiotic relationship between celebrities and the media, offering a critical lens for understanding the ongoing evolution of fame and public life (Schickel, 1985). Along similar lines, Gamson (1994) examines the construction of celebrity status in contemporary America, highlighting the role of media and public relations in shaping public perceptions and sustaining celebrity allure through strategic narrative construction and image management.

***Celebrity post-2000s- Change in media***

Entering the 21st century, the celebrity paradigm underwent further evolution. With the advancements in media, a significant change in celebrity culture over the past two decades can be noted by a definitive move toward the ordinary. In the past, celebrities attained fame for their exceptional talent or accomplishments. However, with the emergence of reality TV and the internet, regular individuals have gained access to the cultural spotlight. This shift signifies a change in how we view celebrities, emphasising their relatability over untouchable glamour. With fewer barriers to fame, ordinary individuals could bypass traditional gatekeepers such as publicists and directly connect with audiences (Gamson, 2011).

Again, in the late 1990s, a new category of celebrities emerged, with the media actively shaping celebrities and presenting fame as the ultimate reward, known as “media people” (Turner, 2014). Recent advancements in social media, such as Instagram, have allowed famous and ordinary individuals to create and share personal content, reaching wide audiences. This shift from broadcast to participatory media, along with the popularity of social media among young people, has led to significant changes in celebrity culture. Digital media and social media have revolutionised this culture, enabling direct interaction between celebrities and audiences, allowing celebrities to cultivate personal brands and engage with fans in real time, often bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. Research in psychology has examined the phenomenon of celebrity worship and its effects on self-esteem and identity (Maltby et al., 2004).

Traditional celebrities now use social media to connect directly with their fans. They share personal glimpses into their lives, creating an illusion of candid access and strengthening emotional connections with their audience. Social media has also enabled the rise of micro-celebrity, where individuals present themselves as public personas for others to consume and use strategic intimacy to engage with their followers. Even with a small following, these individuals can achieve a celebrity-like status through the same method. Micro-celebrities include fashion or food bloggers, activists, comedians, and social media users who interact with their followers. These changes have redefined celebrity as a set of practices and self-presentation techniques that spread through social networks. Nouri (2018) concludes that while both traditional celebrities and social media influencers wield significant cultural power, the latter's ability to interact with and shape audience perceptions through digital platforms directly marks a transformative shift in contemporary celebrity culture.

In this context, celebrity becomes a performative act rather than an inherent quality, existing on a continuum rather than as a binary status. In the age of social media, "celebrity" encompasses a range of techniques and strategies that anyone with a mobile device, tablet, or laptop can employ (Marwick, 2015). Collectively, these works highlight the multifaceted role of media in shaping celebrity culture and its profound impacts on societal values, individual aspirations, and cultural dynamics.

***Influence on youth***

Instagram, since its inception in 2010, has been one of the fastest growing social media platforms (Manikonda et al., 2014). A cultural juggernaut, it boasts over 1.4 billion users (Statista, 2024) with its emphasis on visual storytelling and curated realities and has fundamentally reshaped how we connect, consume, and construct identity. Thanks to the World Wide Web and the Internet, culture is no longer limited by geography, nation-states, or borders. The internet facilitates cultural flows, disseminating values, social rules, and behaviours across national borders (Schachtner, 2015). Culture is no longer a 'self-contained sphere' as once believed. This interconnectedness has led to a global culture's emergence, potentially diminishing individual nations' prominence (Poster, 1999).

Perhaps the biggest influence of Instagram on culture has been its rise of influencers. While celebrities were seen as unattainable, influencers on the app seem much more like the 'girl-next-door' (Einarsdóttir, 2017). Influencers play a dual role, being role models and friends, a game that has allowed greater interaction between fans and neo-celebrities. Influence is portrayed through the use of charismatic power, a tool that has been used to influence children and adults in arenas of consumption, spirituality, wellness, and tourism amongst others. Charismatic authority, in particular, has been used as a lens to understand the changing nature of social institutions and societal developments (Kantola, 2009). It also builds a community of people who share likeminded ideas, develop parasocial relationships with the influencer, and develop new social orders as influencers take on a variety of roles from mother, to business owner, or even market themselves as a brand (Cocker & Cronin, 2017). Setting up such a brand is easier today considering the effect of algorithms, powered by human interest. As long as brands conform to the trend cycle, developing a personal brand allows the influencer to keep up with their milieu of roles to cater to the interest of multiple types of fanbases.

The biggest effect of the changing nature of celebrities is arguably the biggest consumers of social media, which includes the modern youth. The youth of India are increasingly looking towards the digital space to develop identity, knowledge, and digital literacy (Sarwatay & Raman, 2022). The interaction with influencers and the youth in India has been a relatively recent area of study, with many focusing on the buying behaviour and consumption patterns that the digital age brings about. Along with other majorly used social media apps, the reach of Instagram influencers is rivaled only by the reach of YouTube influencers (Kadam et al., 2021).

Influencers' charisma comes from their general likeability and an emulation of their followers' sense of normalcy (Cocker & Cronin, 2017). The barrier between the screen and person is ignored, making the influencer as significant as a friend or sibling (Berryman & Kavka, 2017). In a collectivistic community like India, the closeness of these relationships may impact the youth in terms of deciding career options, influencing consumption, and shaping ideals. The paper aims to study the amount of influence on major decisions of the Indian youth including their consumption, ideals and career options. Further, the Indian market boasts 362 million users which make it the country with the largest number of Instagram users (Statista, 2024).

However, the lack of dedicated studies on the impact of Instagram's growth on India's cultural influence has been woefully left behind. Cultural influence spans a series of interconnected variables, including the effect on career options and social interactionism. To bridge this gap in the literature, the authors of this paper attempt to answer the cultural impact of Instagram, focusing on the changing nature of a celebrity with the rise of the popular social media app. Additionally, this study explores the vocational aspect, investigating how Instagram has transformed career opportunities and professional practices within the sphere of celebrity culture.

**Conceptual Framework**

Celebrity culture is a pervasive phenomenon where public figures achieve widespread fame and recognition, often accompanied by intense public interest in their personal lives and actions (Marshall, 1997). The Victorian era witnessed a boom in celebrity culture. Factors like print media, urbanisation, and a growing audience fueled the rise of modern celebrity (Rojek, 2007). This 'triad' of the individual (the celebrity), industry (the media and entertainment sector), and audience (the public) created a cultural apparatus for fame (Rojek, 2007). The Victorian public sphere further embraced celebrity. Theatre stars and authors achieved national fame (Richards, 2014). Writers like Dickens and Wilde navigated commodification while connecting with readers (Booth, 1985). Understanding Victorian celebrities requires examining individual figures, media, and social changes. This framework helps us see the evolution of celebrity in this era.

Jerslev and Mortensen (2018) posit a significant transformation, such as fame, in exploring celebrity within the social media landscape. They contend that the rise of platforms

like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter has empowered a new breed of celebrities: online personalities who cultivate followings through direct audience engagement. This interactive dynamic blurs the traditional boundaries between public and private spheres, fostering a seemingly more intimate and authentic connection with fans (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2018). Furthermore, the authors highlight the continuous production and consumption of personal content as a defining characteristic of this new form of celebrity. This relentless content creation fuels engagement and popularity, shaping the very identity and trajectory of the online celebrity.

The burgeoning landscape of online celebrities has witnessed the rise of a unique phenomenon: the micro-celebrity (Rahmawati, 2019). Defined by their ability to cultivate a substantial online following on platforms like Instagram, micro-celebrities achieve a level of fame without necessarily garnering mainstream recognition. Their path to stardom is paved through the strategic use of self-presentation and audience engagement on Instagram. Rahmawati (2019) argues that micro-celebrities capitalise on authenticity and ordinariness to forge a connection with their audience. They deliberately present themselves as relatable and ordinary individuals, fostering a sense of closeness and familiarity with their followers. However, this perceived authenticity is often a carefully constructed performance. The author argues that Micro-celebrities meticulously manage their online identities, curating content and interactions that cultivate and maintain a loyal following. This phenomenon reflects a democratisation of celebrity culture. This democratisation, however, comes with its own complexities. The need to constantly manufacture authenticity raises questions about the genuineness of online personas and the potential pressures micro-celebrities face in maintaining this carefully constructed image.

**Theoretical Framework**

The rise of Instagram has transformed celebrity culture, reshaping how fame is attained, maintained, and perceived. This study explores the changing nature of celebrity culture, highlighting the shifting dynamics of social influence and evolving mechanisms through which contemporary celebrities are constructed and consumed.

Impression management, a concept introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman, refers to the conscious and subconscious processes through which individuals attempt to influence the perceptions of others by portraying themselves in a favourable manner (Goffman, 1949).

Celebrities utilise impression management strategies to maintain or enhance their positive social image, ultimately gaining more social and economic capital (Guo & Ren, 2020). Social media platforms provide a venue where celebrities can present controlled information, images, and videos to shape public perception (Paliszkiewicz, 2016; Tuominen et al., 2022). Studies highlight that celebrities' use of impression management in media interviews and online interactions allows them to influence their audience, encouraging fans to emulate their values and lifestyles (Fraser & Brown, 2002; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The media acts as a stage for celebrities' self-presentation, where they can cultivate trustworthiness, credibility, and influence among their followers.

A similar theory, referent power, proposed by French sociologist Michèle Duval (1964) thrives on the concept of referent power, a social psychology theory introduced by . Referent power suggests that individuals influence others by aligning themselves with desirable qualities or groups (McLeod et al., 2008). Celebrities, by virtue of their fame, wealth, and perceived success, embody a specific image of attractiveness, achievement, and social status. People admire and aspire to be like celebrities, making them influential figures. This admiration translates into a willingness to imitate their behaviours, choices, and preferences (O'Guinn & Ritchie, 2010). For instance, fans might adopt the clothing styles, hairstyles, or products endorsed by their favourite celebrities. Social media amplifies the influence of celebrity referent power. Celebrities leverage platforms like Instagram and Twitter to curate their image and connect directly with fans. This constant exposure reinforces their perceived desirability and strengthens their power to influence consumer choices and cultural trends (Abidin & Hassan, 2018).

The theory of hyperrealism, as articulated by Jean Baudrillard, can be linked to the phenomenon of celebrity culture, particularly in the digital age. Baudrillard's concept of "hyperreality" describes a society saturated with "a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truths, of the lived experience" (Baudrillard in Lindholm, 2007, p. 53). This is evident in the rapid and often perceived instant success of Instagram stars, which can create a distorted reality for young, impressionable social media users. This hyperreal projection suggests that financial success can occur overnight with minimal effort, a notion that is rarely reflective of real life. Baudrillard's idea that hyperreality serves as an "alibi for the loss of the real" (Ward, 2010, p. 98) underscores the need to reconsider what we define as reality and its reproduction. Turner (2014) further explores this in the context of celebrity

authenticity, noting that commercial motives often drive artists' pursuit of an authentic image, as it attracts a loyal fan base and enhances long-term career prospects. The line between reality and hyperreality is increasingly blurred, especially with the rise of digital platforms like Instagram, where virtual personas often overshadow real-life experiences.

**Research objectives**

- To examine the change in the nature of celebrity culture with the rise of Instagram.
- To investigate the attitudes of youth in Bangalore towards Instagram celebrities, comparing these with perceptions of traditional celebrities.
- To construct the modern perception of unconventional vocational choices owing to the influence of Instagram

**Methodology**

The methodological approaches in studying celebrity culture include qualitative methods like interviews. Key findings reveal that celebrity culture influences identity and self-perception, affecting body image and aspirations (Brown & Tiggemann, 2021), and significantly impacts consumer behaviour through endorsements and social media presence (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Nouri (2018) employs a comparative methodology, analysing qualitative and quantitative data to examine how traditional celebrities and social media influencers cultivate and maintain their influence. The study finds that while traditional celebrities often rely on established media channels and public relations strategies to maintain their status, social media influencers leverage direct audience engagement and authenticity to build influence.

***Qualitative Data Collection***

The authors collected in-depth interviews with a smaller sample to gain more detailed insights into individual experiences. This allowed for probing specific topics and capturing personal narratives. Purposive sampling selected participants who could provide rich and diverse perspectives.

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed without emphasising rigidity, allowing the participant to lead the conversation. It focused on personal experiences with Instagram influencers, perceived impacts on career choices, consumption patterns, and personal ideals. We collected 15 interviews until the data reached saturation.

## Results

The study presents the findings from in-depth interviews on how Instagram has redefined celebrity culture and shaped youth aspirations in Bangalore. The results are organized into three themes: the transformation of celebrity culture, youth perceptions of Instagram versus traditional celebrities, and the impact on vocational choices.

### Theme 1:

#### *Subtheme 1: Definition of Celebrity owing to ease of attaining celebrity status*

When individuals think about the term 'celebrity,' they often first think of traditional celebrities rather than Instagram celebrities. This indicates that the concept of celebrity has not changed, but our research has shown a definite shift in the perception of influence. With the increasing prominence of Instagram, celebrities are now viewed as more accessible, relatable, and built on personal branding rather than formal industry recognition. This shift has given rise to the new terms 'micro-celebrity' or 'influencer,' referring to individuals who may not be traditional celebrities but still have a wide-reaching influence. Our study participants have clearly outlined the distinctions between traditional celebrities and micro-celebrities, as evidenced by their responses.

Participant SH stated,

"*A traditional celebrity showcases their talent in the form of skill or anything to entertain people, for example, in movies, music or media. Celebrities on Instagram include influencers and those who influence others through their passion, art, or social life.*"

Emphasizing the importance of followers, Participant AK stated,

*"Traditional media celebrities have a fandom and fan bases, whereas modern celebrities or influencers don't need a fandom or fan base, they just need followers."*

Along with this, Participant AA stated,

*“A celebrity on Instagram is someone you see frequently, unlike in traditional cinema, where a celebrity is someone you see on the big screen.”*

The responses highlight the key distinctions between the two and place greater emphasis on factors such as relatability and influence. Micro-celebrities rely on their dedicated following for recognition and, in return, wield influence over their followers. They are perceived as more approachable than traditional media celebrities and, therefore, have a greater impact.

The consensus among participants is that Instagram has democratized fame, providing a channel for individuals to attain celebrity status more easily compared to traditional media. This shift is credited to the platform's accessibility, the influence of algorithms, and the potential to cultivate a following naturally. Participant SH expressed this sentiment, saying,

*"Instagram has made it easier for individuals to achieve celebrity status as it offers a way to connect with others. Anyone can share their talents and showcase them to their followers on Instagram. The rise of social media platforms, especially Instagram, has inspired many individuals to share videos featuring their talents."*

Moreover, Participant NB brought forth the importance of the algorithm by saying,

*“It has become easier to be a celebrity because Instagram has a large reach, and with three videos, you can reach a large number of people if the algorithm likes your videos. However, the Instagram algorithm doesn't always work in favor of talented individuals, and any mediocre person can become a celebrity.”*

Thus, it can be understood that Instagram has definitely made it easier to attain the status of a celebrity, especially with a supportive community of followers. One participant even expressed that Instagram serves as a platform for individuals with talent who are unsure of how and where to showcase it. Furthermore, attaining celebrity status on Instagram has become more accessible due to the minimal requirements needed for creating content. Unlike in the past, when expensive equipment was necessary, today, content can be produced using a simple and affordable smartphone.

***Subtheme 2: Content Creation and Creativity***

The content created by Instagram celebrities is often seen as more diverse, personal, unscripted, and frequent compared to traditional media. All participants believe that their specific interests are well-represented, with many mentioning that Instagram celebrities specialise in niche areas, which further enhances their popularity. This can be further understood by Participant RD's statement -

> *"Traditional media appeals to a much larger audience, which leads to a restriction of creativity and innovation. Instagram allows for the creation of niche content that caters to specific types of comedy and psychology. Instagram offers more scope for creativity and innovation because there are no restrictions in terms of content creation."*

Furthermore, AG stated,

> *"Instagram celebrities produce content that is more personal, unpolished, and spontaneous. Their content reflects day-to-day experiences, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and moments of vulnerability. They craft their narrative through unfiltered posts and direct interactions with their audience."*

This demonstrates that Instagram celebrities create personalised content based on their passions or interests, in contrast to content produced through traditional media such as films and movies. The ease of shooting content on a phone has normalised content creation. Furthermore, content has become increasingly diverse, spanning many genres. Participants also recognise that influencers and social media celebrities put a lot of effort into their posts to keep their community of followers engaged.

***Subtheme 3: Aspirational Lifestyle and Negative Publicity and Scrutinity***

The appeal of the aspirational lifestyle, fame, and financial success associated witah Instagram celebrities may serve as a source of motivation for individuals considering careers in social media-related fields. Nevertheless, our study findings indicate that, despite the glamorous appeal, this lifestyle has not deeply influenced the general population. This could be attributed to the awareness that certain aspects are staged. Some participants expressed admiration for the aesthetically pleasing nature of the job but cited concerns about its stability. Participant AS uses Instagram as inspiration for what to do in their daily life and follows influencers based on health, dance, decor, and fashion. However, it doesn't make

them want to change their career. Nonetheless, it has expanded people's perspectives and inspired them to view it as a potential source of supplementary income. This can be observed in Participant ND's response -

> *"Aspects of Instagram celebrity culture, particularly around lifestyle and financial success, significantly influence my career aspirations. Seeing influencers live life on their own terms, often achieving financial independence, inspires me to explore careers in social media, content creation, and digital marketing. Their ability to monetize creativity and passion is appealing, especially in a world where traditional jobs can feel limiting. The aspirational lifestyles they portray serve as both motivation and a blueprint for what's possible, pushing me to consider how I can carve out a niche for myself in the evolving digital landscape."*

On the same lines, Participant AG stated,

> *"Instagram celebrities share their journeys, highlighting the challenges and rewards of entrepreneurship and how social media can be leveraged to create multiple income streams."*

This has encouraged AG to consider career paths that prioritize flexibility, creativity, and independence over conventional jobs.

Both traditional and Instagram celebrities are susceptible to negative publicity and scrutiny. However, Instagram influencers may encounter more direct and immediate criticism due to their close connection with followers. On the flip side, this close relationship allows for prompt resolution of any issues. Participant RD's statement aptly captures this dynamic -

> *"Celebrities in traditional media have a harder time maintaining their image because they appeal to a larger audience, which means there are more people to scrutinise them. When traditional celebrities make mistakes, it generates negative publicity and impacts their reputation. On the other hand, social media celebrities are less impacted by their mistakes because their audience is smaller and tends to be more niche."*

Additionally, Participant MD stated,

*"Instagram celebrities can present themselves in a way that aligns with their personal brand because they create and share their content directly. They can respond to audience feedback quickly and adjust their image as needed."*

Instagram celebrities are perceived to have greater control over their public image compared to traditional celebrities who depend on media outlets and PR teams. One of the participants conveyed that unlike traditional celebrities, who are subject to the decisions of agencies, Instagram celebrities are 'independent' and experience fewer restrictions on how they portray themselves.

This can be established by Participant NB's statement -

*"Instagram influencers have more control over their image because they can tell their side of the story whenever needed. As independent creators, they have more freedom of expression because they don't have a PR or media team to monitor their content."*

Participant RK also reiterates the same lines:

*"Instagram celebrities have far more control over their public image compared to traditional celebrities because they can craft and adjust their image in real-time. They have flexibility and accessibility in addressing controversies or personal issues without having to go through media or PR outlets."*

The consensus among the participants was remarkable - Instagram celebrities are perceived to have greater autonomy over their public image and how they handle negative publicity. In contrast, traditional celebrities tend to be more cautious with their public statements, often relying on media outlets, publicists, and agents to manage their public image and shield them from any backlash or negativity.

**Theme 2:**

***Subtheme 1: Impact on youth culture***

Instagram celebrities play a significant role in shaping youth culture in Bangalore, particularly in terms of trends, career aspirations, and perceptions of success. Respondents often cited how Instagram celebrities have made unconventional career choices seem more attainable. For example, one respondent mentioned, "Seeing influencers making a career out

of something like content creation or fashion makes me think its possible for me too." The influence of Instagram celebrities in encouraging youth to pursue creative and unconventional paths, such as social media influencing or entrepreneurship, is significant. This impact can be linked to Jean Baudrillards theory of hyperreality, which argues that media-saturated environments blur the line between reality and simulation. Instagram celebrities often project an image of overnight success and glamour, making the youth believe that such careers are effortlessly attainable. The digital content that emphasizes luxury, easy success, and an appealing lifestyle fosters an idealized, hyperreal version of success that may not always reflect the hard work or struggles behind the scenes. Youth culture in Bangalore is shaped by this hyperreal image, where the simulation of success through social media takes precedence over the often more difficult reality of career building.

***Subtheme 2: Relatability, Trust and Authenticity***

A key differentiator between Instagram celebrities and traditional celebrities is the formers perceived relatability. Many respondents highlighted that they trust Instagram celebrities more than traditional celebrities because of their ability to connect directly with their audience. One respondent shared, "They share their real-life struggles and experiences, so it feels like they're just like us." This perceived authenticity often leads to a greater sense of trust, with respondents more likely to engage with and follow recommendations from Instagram celebrities than from movie stars or other traditional figures. This phenomenon can be analysed through Erving Goffman's concept of impression management, which explains how individuals tailor their self-presentation to influence other's perceptions. Instagram celebrities engage in strategic self-presentation, often curating content to seem more relatable and approachable while maintaining a carefully crafted image of authenticity. Their frequent posts showing behind-the-scenes content, personal experiences, or struggles contribute to their perceived transparency, creating the illusion that they are being authentic and trustworthy. In contrast, traditional celebrities are often seen as distant, polished, and unattainable, leading to a lower level of relatability. Furthermore, referent power comes into play here. Instagram celebrities gain influence because of their perceived similarity to their audience. They are seen as figures who have achieved success through hard work and perseverance—qualities that the youth can relate to and aspire to emulate. The relatability of their content amplifies their referent power, as followers begin to look up to them not just for their fame but for the lifestyle, values, and achievements they represent.

One of the most common themes in the responses was the perceived authenticity of Instagram celebrities, who are often seen as more genuine than traditional celebrities. Respondents appreciated the unfiltered content, such as behind-the-scenes footage, vlogs, and personal stories that made these influencers appear more approachable and human. One respondent noted, “They show their real lives, not just the glamorous parts.” This again ties into Goffman’s impression management. While Instagram celebrities may appear more authentic, they are still engaging in strategic self-presentation. By showing "authentic" glimpses of their lives, they create an image of transparency that resonates with their audience while still maintaining control over what aspects of their life are shared. This managed authenticity helps build trust and increases their influence over their audience. The referent power of these influencers grows as they cultivate an image of honesty and approachability, making their followers feel more personally connected to them.

***Subtheme 3: Inspiration and entertainment***

Youth in Bangalore often follow Instagram influencers for both inspiration and entertainment. Many respondents mentioned the motivational and entertaining aspects of the content these influencers produce. For instance, a respondent said, “I follow fitness influencers for workout tips and inspiration to stay healthy.” Others mentioned how they enjoy the diverse content available, including comedic sketches, fashion tips, or travel blogs. This blend of inspiration and entertainment seems to drive engagement and loyalty among followers. This can be connected to referent power, where Instagram celebrities influence their followers by embodying qualities or lifestyles that the youth find aspirational. Whether its fitness goals, entrepreneurial success, or fashion sense, influencers create a model that followers want to emulate. The psychological gratification of following someone who provides both entertainment and valuable life insights builds a strong bond between influencers and their audience. These influencers effectively use their personal brand to engage the youth through content that resonates emotionally.

***Subtheme 4: Algorithm and reach***

Many respondents expressed awareness of how Instagram's algorithm impacts which content gets visibility. Some voiced frustration with how algorithmic favouritism often boosts influencers who follow certain trends while limiting the reach of others who might be more talented but don’t align with the platform's algorithmic preferences. One respondent

remarked, “I feel like Instagram promotes the same kind of content, and sometimes the most talented people don’t get the attention they deserve.” This connects to Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality, where what is promoted and consumed on Instagram does not necessarily reflect the most authentic or valuable content but rather what the algorithm prioritises. The platform's algorithm creates a curated reality, giving more exposure to certain types of content while obscuring others. This distortion affects how youth perceive success and creativity, making it appear as if aligning with the algorithm is the key to becoming an influencer rather than talent or hard work alone.

**Theme 3:**

***Subtheme 1: Unconventional Career Choices and Appeal of Traditional Vocational Paths***

Unconventional choices are more or less accepted by today’s youth as a changing facet of the world. One interviewee cited the study on changing career choices amongst youth as cited in the literature review. For most, the appeal of unconventional career paths lies in the opportunity for entrepreneurship, the flexibility of work hours, and the ability to do what one loves. These were highlights of some of the answers. One interviewee claimed that being on Instagram has shown him career paths that he did not know enough about, not even Google. Another aspect of Instagram influencers that today’s youth find fascinating is how anyone from any walk of life can achieve instant fame on social media. Examples of truck drivers and village dancers were provided along with more modern technologically driven content like gaming and e-sports. As put succinctly by participant MD,

> *Their success stories showcase how non-traditional paths can lead to fulfilling careers. By sharing their journeys—complete with challenges and triumphs—they inspire others to consider alternatives to conventional employment. In a city like Bangalore, where innovation and startups thrive, these influencers serve as role models, demonstrating that creativity and passion can translate into viable careers. lifestyle and financial success significantly influence my career aspirations. Seeing influencers live life on their own terms, often achieving financial independence, inspires me to explore careers in social media, content creation, and digital marketing. Their ability to monetise creativity and passion is appealing.*

The major keywords used include obtaining a wider perspective of the world, glorifying unconventional career choices on the internet, and utilising these unconventional

career paths as a secondary source of income. Today's youth are often looking at multiple income streams from newer job opportunities like video streaming, e-sports, and small businesses like jewellery making or art. To most, it was a way of connecting their passions and their need to create monetary revenue out of their interests.

However, a majority of the participants still felt the need to continue with traditional vocational paths. One interviewee, SV, claims his chosen career path is biotechnology which has not been influenced by social media in any way. Another participant, NV, hopes her social work degree can be highlighted more on Instagram as she has taken an unconventional path, which is not often seen on social media. Nearly all participants brought up engineering and medicine when asked to provide examples of traditional job opportunities. They emphasised social norms as being stronger than social media influence as well as the notion of stability that advocates of traditional jobs often perpetuate. One participant said that while traditional paths have lost their appeal, in India, the stereotypical job has not lost its hold on youth aspirations.

***Subtheme 2: Job Stability and Sustainability and Instant Gratification and Effort***

The stability of jobs on social media, however, has been always perceived as fickle. It is this that has made many hesitate about joining social media or picking up an unconventional career path for themselves. Thus, through this, we can see greater awareness of the work that goes beyond the screen. As interviewees had mentioned, they are aware of the tie that goes behind creating and disseminating these videos, despite the videos or content being limited to 30 seconds or a singular post. They are well aware of the factor of luck that plays heavily into becoming an Instagram celebrity, and with most of our interviewees currently pursuing their undergraduate degree, they claimed they did not have the time or energy to work as hard on social media along with managing their studies that will eventually lead them to a conventional career path.

As for the stability aspect, there were some interesting results. Most participants did agree that the stability aspect of Instagram was nearly non-existent. They reminisced about YouTube celebrities and influencers they used to watch who are no longer relevant. However, they did claim that despite having barely 15 minutes of fame, those who truly made an impact in the short term are still considered Instagram celebrities or influencers despite not seeing as much engagement with their posts. This multifaceted view of instant stardom leads us to

question if the term influencer is time-bound or all-encompassing regardless of the time of fame that one finds oneself in.

This awareness is best explained by this quote by participant MA,

> Because I just still think that you don't know everything about it and I don't think it's a stable choice. It has its highs, and it's not going to, like you know, you're not going to be at peak for a very long time

If someone did follow the path of becoming an Instagram influencer, it would be for one of the following reasons

a. They would like to utilise their 15 minutes of fame to build more sustainable businesses

b. They would like to utilise this fame as a secondary source of income rather than a primary source of income

c. Along with partaking in a traditional career path, they would use their Instagram platform to devote time to their passions and crafts, which is not otherwise encouraged as a career in Indian society.

Instant gratification on Instagram is seen as a major reason for the lack of job stability. Since people curate their feeds, any content that is seen as too long or too repetitive is immediately removed from their constant field of view. Since our participants have often been on the viewer side of Instagram, they are aware of how they would be perceived if they were to become an Instagram celebrity which makes their opinion on unconventional career choices so poignant. In a digital age, this illusion of glamour is less upheld as people drive the algorithm as compared to traditional media where marketing and star power drove the algorithm of movie business. To sum up, a quote by the interviewee AG, explains the common sentiment amongst all fifteen of our participants.

> *It offers a level of flexibility and independence that traditional jobs don't provide. While traditional jobs are often seen as more stable, Instagram has shown that it's possible to create a career based on passion and personal brand, which can be equally sustainable.*

## Analysis and Discussion

It is clear that the perception of celebrity has undergone a transformation, largely driven by social media platforms. The traditional notion of celebrity, once limited to figures in film, television, and music, has expanded to include individuals who may not have industry-wide recognition but possess significant influence within niche digital communities. This shift aligns with the literature that emphasises the democratisation of fame in the social media era, where micro-celebrities and influencers achieve recognition based on their personal branding and direct engagement with followers (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2018).

Participants in the study echoed this sentiment, differentiating between traditional celebrities, who gain fame through industry achievements, and Instagram celebrities, who attain influence through personal branding and relatability. As discussed in the literature, this shift reflects the rise of participatory culture on social media, where the boundaries between public figures and audiences blur, and celebrity status becomes accessible to ordinary individuals through content creation and follower engagement (Marwick, 2015). Participant responses, such as those by RD and SH, illustrate this transition, highlighting how Instagram has made it easier for anyone, regardless of background, to attain celebrity status through platforms that cater to niche interests.

The ease of attaining celebrity status on Instagram is another significant change highlighted in both the research and the literature. This resonates with studies emphasising that the rise of micro-celebrities is largely facilitated by the accessibility of content-creation tools and the ability to amass followers organically (Rahmawati, 2019).

Adding to that, the content creation process on Instagram is characterised by creativity, personalisation, and relatability, as noted by the study participants. The literature supports this by showing how social media celebrities can curate content that caters to specific interests or niche audiences, thus fostering a stronger connection with their followers. Unlike traditional media, which often appeals to broader audiences and requires substantial resources, Instagram allows for more creative freedom, as influencers can craft personalised and spontaneous content using minimal equipment (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2018). Participant RD's assertion that Instagram celebrities cater to niche areas like comedy or psychology underscores the platform's capacity for creativity and innovation, a theme that the literature also emphasises.

The evolution of celebrity culture on Instagram can be understood through impression management. According to Erving Goffman's impression management theory, individuals consciously or subconsciously shape their public persona to influence perceptions (Goffman, 1949). Instagram celebrities exemplify this by curating content that emphasises their relatability, transparency, and authenticity. Unlike traditional celebrities who rely on media and PR teams, influencers control their image directly, posting frequent and unfiltered content that fosters a sense of intimacy with followers. This self-presentation helps them build trust and credibility, enhancing their appeal and increasing engagement through personal storytelling (Fraser & Brown, 2002).

The allure of the aspirational lifestyle associated with Instagram celebrities has been a significant driver of their influence, particularly among youth considering careers in content creation or digital marketing. While participants acknowledged the glamorous appeal of social media fame, they also expressed scepticism regarding the stability and sustainability of such careers. This reflects the literature's findings that while Instagram offers an enticing model of flexibility and independence, it also comes with inherent risks related to the transient nature of online fame and the fickleness of algorithms (Nouri, 2018).

Referent power, rooted in social psychology, explains how people emulate individuals they admire and identify with (McLeod et al., 2008). Instagram influencers leverage this by projecting desirable lifestyles and inspiring youth to pursue unconventional careers such as content creation and entrepreneurship. The authenticity associated with influencers fosters admiration and trust, making their influence more impactful than traditional celebrities (O'Guinn & Ritchie, 2010). The frameworks of impression management, referent power, and hyperreality provide a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram has reshaped celebrity culture.

Our respondents' perceptions do not align with Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, where Instagram celebrities project an image of success that blurs the line between reality and illusion. Respondents are well aware that the work that goes on behind the scenes is equally, if not more, taxing than a traditional career.

While non-traditional paths are appealing, many youth still value the stability and social recognition associated with traditional careers, such as engineering, medicine, or biotechnology. The literature similarly discusses how traditional vocational paths, with their

clear structures and societal validation, continue to dominate youth aspirations, especially in countries like India, where family expectations and cultural norms exert a powerful influence on career decisions. Respondent's awareness of the challenges and uncertainties associated with Instagram fame—including its ephemeral nature and dependence on algorithms—reflects the findings that digital fame, while attractive, is often perceived as fleeting and unstable (Nouri, 2018). Moreover, the appeal of instant gratification and the allure of quick success often conflict with the desire for long-term stability. Several participants highlighted that while Instagram provides opportunities for short-term fame, this fame can be fleeting, and long-term sustainability often requires leveraging that fame for more stable ventures, such as establishing a business or maintaining multiple income streams. This acknowledgement of the transient nature of social media fame is in line with the literature on the attention economy, where the rapidly shifting focus of online audiences creates a precarious environment for those seeking to build a career solely on platforms like Instagram (Marwick & Boyd, 2014).

The transformation of celebrity culture, particularly with the rise of social media, has profoundly altered how individuals become famous and maintain their status. This new dynamic fosters a sense of intimacy and connection previously absent in traditional celebrity culture, where public figures were more distant and broadly accessible only through media representations such as television, magazines, or film (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2018).

In conclusion, the balance between unconventional and traditional career paths reflects both the opportunities and challenges of the digital age. Social media platforms like Instagram offer unprecedented access to fame and entrepreneurship, enabling individuals to bypass traditional gatekeepers and pursue passion-driven careers. However, traditional careers continue to appeal to youth in Bengaluru due to their perceived stability and long-term security. This juxtaposition highlights an evolving landscape where creativity and self-expression are increasingly seen as viable career options, though societal norms and job stability still influence decisions. The rise of Instagram has fundamentally transformed celebrity culture, making fame more accessible and personal, driven by direct audience engagement. This shift in celebrity influence not only alters the perception of celebrity but also shapes the career aspirations of a new generation influenced by the allure of social media success.

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