

## **Identifying the Motives of Instagram Users (Case Study: Psychology Students of Semnan University)**

### **Rahman Marefat**

Assistant Prof., Department of knowledge and information science, Faculty of psychology and educational science, Semnan University & head of Hiilab (Human-Information Interaction Lab), Semnan, Iran.

Corresponding Author: [rmarefat@semnan.ac.ir](mailto:rmarefat@semnan.ac.ir)  
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5925-0210>

### **Mohammadagha Delavarpour**

Assistant Prof., Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran.

[mdelavarpour@semnan.ac.ir](mailto:mdelavarpour@semnan.ac.ir)  
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0131-9286>

### **Maryam Saberi**

Assistant Prof., Department of knowledge and information science, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran.

[msaberi@semnan.ac.ir](mailto:msaberi@semnan.ac.ir)  
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5942-0785>

### **Safura Arabian**

B.A. Student, Knowledge and Information Science, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran.

[semkis93@gmail.com](mailto:semkis93@gmail.com)  
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9807-5187>

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### **Abstract**

The new media and technologies in the information era have affected all aspects of individuals in the information society. This research aimed to investigate the motivations for using Instagram as a social network among students of the Psychology and Educational Science Faculty of Semnan University. The present study was a survey in terms of methodology and applied research in terms of purpose. The research population comprised 442 students in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at Semnan University. Totally, 205 individuals were selected through simple random sampling. Based on Gülнар, Balci and Çakir questionnaire (2010), a measure was provided for data gathering. To assess students' motives in using Instagram as a social network, exploratory factor analysis, one-sample t-test, and description analysis were used, and the collected data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 24). Findings showed that six factors of narcissism and self-expression, passing the time and entertainment, curiosity about events and memories, information seeking, creating social and emotional capital, and relationship maintenance were the most important motivations for students to use Instagram as a social network. The results further showed that three factors (i.e. information seeking, passing time, and relationship maintenance) were suggested as the three main motivations of students. Psychology students of Semnan University use social networks such as Instagram according to real-life conditions to compensate for their shortcomings and deficiencies and meet their needs.

**Keywords:** Instagram, Social Networks, Psychology students, User Motives.

### **Introduction**

Undoubtedly, the advent of the Internet and the spread of social networks as information and communication technology-based phenomena in the present century have affected various parts of human life. Because of their attractive features, such as facilitating information exchange through interactive platforms (Hassanzadeh, Saberi & Doroudi, 2020), social media have a crucial role in the new generation's life. The boundary between real and virtual spaces is being blurred, and the movement between the two is becoming imperceptible (Hasani & Kalantari, 2017). Social networks have quickly changed human life and the quality and quantity of communication (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011). Some researchers believe that users of these networks tend to publish literary sentences, movies, daily news, entertainment, photos, and text. They share some of their identities, images, and aspects of their personal lives with their friends and perceive virtual communication as an acceptable way to maintain friendships and communication (Rasouli & Moradi, 2010). Regardless of their brand, these networks serve different functions. They have made it easy for millions of people across the globe to access content and use the Web by organizing services, combining various information and communication tools, and promoting non-linear interactions among users (Sun, Liu, Peng, Dong & Barnes, 2014). Accordingly, they have gained ardent fans among different social strata, especially youth and teenagers. One of the reasons for the importance of studying social networks is their influence and expansion in the daily lives of users so that these networks have become a part of the daily lives of people who use them. Social networks, as part of social media, affect people's family and social lives because the time people spend on online activities is at the cost of giving up their family, social life, education, entertainment, or sports activities (Hejazi, Namdari, Ghasemi & Moghaddam-Zadeh, 2017).

One of the most widely used networks in the world right now is Instagram. Instagram is a social network that allows users to share photos and videos for free. According to statistics provided in 2017, this social network has about 700 million users worldwide (Sadegh-Zadeh, Dourtaj & Monadi, 2018). This social network that can be installed on smartphones as an application facilitates and accelerates the possibility of communication among people. Research shows that, in recent years, the use of Instagram has grown significantly among the younger generation; this use can have several positive and negative consequences (Baek, Cho & Kim, 2014; Brandtzæg, 2012; Chou & Edge, 2012).

At first glance, it seems social networks have attracted people, but a deeper look shows that it is the users who have entered these networks with different desires and motives and have made these networks prosper by producing content (e.g., text, photos, videos) (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011). Personal motivations and social users become one of the most critical and influential goals in using social networks. Experts in social psychology believe that a feeling of need forms human motivation and ultimately leads to behavior that can be a response to meet the same need. This variable can be an essential basis for explaining theories of human behavior (Sadegh-Zadeh et al., 2018). According to Hjørland (2002), all human behavior stems from his/her motivations and needs. Accordingly, research on the quantity and quality of use of social networks will not be fruitful without recognizing users' motivations. At the same time, assessing users' motivations is a complex task and completely dependent on the culture of human societies. For this reason, several studies have been conducted in different societies and conditions to explain these motives. Due to the influence of culture, the research results have been different in other societies.

For example, Cheung's (2014) research on Hong Kong University students can be

mentioned as evidence. In this study, "information seeking", "self-disclosure", "interpersonal communication", and "escape from reality" have been suggested as the four main motivations for users to use the Instagram network. A study by Sheldon and Bryant (2016) on American students found that other factors, such as "watching/knowing others," "documenting moments," "pleasure," and "innovation," were the primary motivations for using Instagram. Hassan, Dias and Hamari (2018) also showed emotional, informational, and social feedback received along with the users' expected usefulness as the factors affecting users' continuous use of social networks. Wang, Amon and Keep (2019) cited the "desire to belong" as one of the factors influencing users' continued use of social networking sites such as Instagram. These researchers introduced the social support of friends as a sub-scale affecting users' desire to belong.

Although several studies have been conducted focusing on the motivation to use social networks among different groups, especially students and the younger generation, it seems that young people use Facebook with the motivation of self-expression, personal development, immersion in the media, access to information, filling leisure time and keeping in touch with friends and entertainment, respectively. These motivations differ in girls and boys (Moradi, Rajab-Pour, Kian-Ersi, Hajlou & Radbakhsh, 2014).

Lotfi harsini (2017) examined the motivations for using social networks by students of information science and epistemology. The results showed that the variables of information search, relationship maintenance, entertainment and leisure, scientific and research activities, and personal status are the most important motivations for students to use social networks. Saraji, Habib-Zadeh and Sharifi –Rahnamou (2017) conducted a similar study on high school students. Their findings showed that this group of users use virtual social networks with motivations such as acquiring new information, entertainment, recreation, communication and interaction with others, and self-expression. The primary motivations of these users to use virtual social networks included acquiring information, entertainment, communication and interaction, and self-expression.

Other researches in the field of social network studies include the analysis of Latifi, Riahi-Nia, Ghaedi and Babaie (2018) with a qualitative approach. These researchers identified the motivation of students to use a set of widely used social networks (Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram). The results showed that "communication and interaction with others", "freedom of expression and self-expression", "information seeking and sharing", "fun and entertainment," and "filling leisure time" are the main factors in students' use of these social networks. Sadegh-Zadeh et al. (2018) studied students' motivations on Instagram with a qualitative approach. The novelty of Instagram, the encouragement and approval of peers, keeping up with the latest news, filling leisure time, continuing old friendships and starting new relationships, self-expression, and being realistic were the most important motivations for students to use Instagram.

According to the results of foreign and domestic research on the motivations for using social networks in general and Instagram in particular, the research results are different in different societies due to cultural, social, and demographic differences. However, some degree of similarity is observed in the results among different societies and at different times. Due to the widespread use of Instagram among students, the present study seeks to determine the most important reasons for students of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Semnan University to use Instagram as a critical social network. The main question of this study is "what are the most important motivations to use Instagram from the perspective of the psychology students of Semnan University?" In addition, determining the extent or intensity of

motives of these students to use Instagram is another aim of the researchers.

### Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted using a descriptive-survey method. The statistical population included all students of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Semnan University. The number of students in this faculty at the time of the research was 442 people, and the sample size was 205 using the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970). 161 students (78.5%) from 442 were females, and the rest were males.

To determine and assess the motives of students in using Instagram, a questionnaire was used, which is developed by Gülnar et al. (2010). This research aimed to collect information about the motives of students using Instagram as a social network. The questionnaire consists of 33 items or phrases with which the respondents determine their agreement or disagreement based on a 5-point Likert scale. The researchers identified seven sub-factors for the questionnaire: narcissism and self-expression, media drenching and performance, passing time, information seeking, personal status, relationship maintenance, and entertainment. Gülnar et al. (2010) administered this questionnaire to 728 students and confirmed its validity using the factor analysis method. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is equal to 0.93 for the whole questionnaire. For its factors, the coefficients are as follows: narcissism and self-expression (0.89), media drenching and performance (0.80), passing time (0.76), information seeking (0.73), personal status (0.65), relationship maintenance (0.57), and entertainment (0.77).

To assess students' motives in using Instagram as a social network, some changes were made in the instructions and some items of this questionnaire. Using exploratory factor analysis, One-Sample T-Test, and calculation of the frequency and percentage of students' responses, the collected data were analyzed using SPSS software version 24.

### Findings

The questionnaire items were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis to identify students' motivations in using Instagram. Before the analysis, the adequacy of the sampling was assessed using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO value was equal to 0.90, and the chi-square obtained by Bartlett's test ( $\chi^2=3567.580$ , d.f=528,  $P < 0.0001$ ) indicated the sample's adequacy and the hypothesis's establishment. In addition, varimax rotation, the two criteria of Scree Plot (Figure 1), and eigenvalues of more than one were used to identify the underlying factors in this questionnaire (i.e., the main motivations of students in using Instagram). Given these conditions, a factor analysis test was performed, presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis of Instagram Motivation Questionnaire*

Item No.	First factor	Second factor	Third factor	Fourth factor	Fifth Factor	Sixth factor
2	0/83					
3	0/81					
1	0/76					
7	0/71					
8	0/67					
6	0/66					

5	0/65					
4	0/58					
17		0/79				
18		0/77				
32		0/77				
16		0/70				
20		0/53				
33		0/50				
14			0/79			
13			0/72			
11			0/71			
10			0/59			
12			0/55			
22				0/81		
23				0/78		
21				0/73		
24				0/67		
26					0/66	
25					0/62	
15					0/41	
29						0/64
31						0/62
30						0/61

As can be seen in Table 1, the results of factor analysis identified six underlying factors or motivations for the Instagram Motivation Questionnaire. According to the content of the items and theoretical foundations, these factors or motives include "narcissism and self-expression," "passing the time and entertainment," "curiosity in events and memories," "information seeking," and "creating social and emotional capital" and "relationship maintenance". The factor loadings of the items are in the range of 0.41 to 0.83. In this analysis, items 9, 19, 27, and 28 were omitted due to weak factor loading or loading on more than one factor. In general, the identified factors described 61.63% of the variances of the questionnaire of the motivations for using Instagram.

After identifying the students' motivations, the amount or intensity of these motivations among students was examined. For this purpose, using the One-Sample T-Test (see table 2), the students' status in each identified motivation for using Instagram was analyzed. In addition, in each motivation, the status of students in each relevant phrase was measured by calculating the frequency and percentage of students' responses to each phrase (see Table 3). Notably, a one-sample t-test is used when the study aims to compare the mean of a distribution with the mean of the population or a standard mean. In the present study, the mean midpoint of each factor was used as the mean of the criterion.

Table 2

The results of the One-Sample T-Test to assess the status of students' motivations

	Mean	SD	Standard mean	df	T statistics	Sig. level
Narcissism and self-expression	19.48	6.73	24	204	-9.62	0.0001
Media Drenching and Performance	12.79	4.20	15	204	-7.54	0.0001
Passing Time	19.97	4.85	18	204	5.82	0.0001
Information Seeking	13.48	3.28	12	204	6.44	0.0001
Creating Social and Emotional Capital	7.6	2.52	9	204	-7.96	0.0001
Relationship Maintenance	9.68	2.38	9	204	4.07	0.0001

The results in Table 2 indicate that the mean score of students in the motive of narcissism and self-expression has a significant difference ( $P=0.0001$ ,  $t=6.40$ ) from the related standard mean ( $M=24$ ). A comparison of the means showed that the mean scores of students in narcissism and self-expression are significantly lower than the average level. More precisely, based on the frequencies and percentages of Table 3, it can be said that in the context of motivation, the most reported motives of individuals were "expressing personal characteristics and interests" (item 7 with a frequency of 54 or 34.6% of agreeing on choice) and then, the highest reported motive was related to "creating a good mentality in the minds of others" (item 8 with a frequency of 54 or 34.6% of agreeing on choice). On the other hand, the least reported motive is related to "the person's desire for people to be informed of his/her information" (item 3 with a frequency of 133 or 64.9% of disagreeing on choice) and "providing the possibility or opportunity to express oneself by Instagram" (item 6 with a frequency of 117 or 57.1% of disagreeing on choice).

Regarding the motivation of curiosity in events and memories, the results of the T-Test showed a significant difference ( $P\leq 0.0001$ ,  $t=-7.54$ ) between the mean scores of students and the standard mean ( $M=15$ ). In this analysis, the mean score of students is less than the standard score, and, therefore, the level of students' curiosity in events and memories is lower than the average level. The study of the calculated frequencies and percentages also shows that, in the motive of curiosity in memories and events, the highest reported motive is related to Item 14 (with a frequency of 56 or 27.3% of agreeing on choice), according to which "one wants to gain information about certain people through curiosity in them in albums." In the next rank, the highest motive is related to Item 13 (with a frequency of 52 or 25.4% of agreeing on choice), according to which the person states his/her motivation in using Instagram as "finding the photo/video album of certain people". In contrast, the least reported motive is related to Item 12 (with a frequency of 127 or 62% of disagreeing on choice) and Item 10 (with a frequency of 104 or 50.7% of disagreeing on choice), according to which individuals have little motivation to "discuss certain people in Instagram-related albums" and "turning Instagram photo and video album reviews into a part of their lives".

Table 3

Frequency and percentage of students' motives in each of the questionnaire items

Items	Disagree		No idea		Agree	
	f	%	f	%	F	%
1. To make more friends.	95	46.3	62	30.2	48	23.4

Items	Disagree		No idea		Agree	
	f	%	f	%	F	%
2. To be better known among people.	117	57.1	48	23.4	40	19.5
3. I want people to know more about me.	133	64.9	50	24.4	22	10.7
4. To make a romantic relationship.	168	82	20	9.8	17	8.3
5. To give information to others about my own interests.	100	48.8	57	27.8	48	23.4
6. It gives me the opportunity to express myself.	117	57.1	62	30.2	26	12.7
7. To create a good mentality of myself in the minds of others.	99	48.3	52	25.4	54	26.3
8. To describe my characteristics and interests.	71	34.6	63	30.7	71	34.6
10. To examine photo / video albums (mine/ my audience and third parties) is a part of my life.	104	50.7	67	32.7	34	16.6
11. I constantly check photo / video albums if they are up-to-date.	90	43.9	67	32.7	48	23.4
12. We talk about specific people in albums of this type of websites.	127	62	61	29.8	17	8.3
13. To find photo / video albums of certain people.	95	46.3	58	28.3	52	25.4
14. I get information about certain people through these albums.	78	38	71	34.6	56	27.3
16. It helps to spend time in the normal course of the day.	40	19.5	70	34.1	95	46.3
17. In total, it allows passing time.	37	18	73	35.6	95	46.3
18. It helps to pass the time when I do not have a better job to do.	38	18.5	59	28.8	108	57.5
20. I spend a lot of time checking photo and video albums without realizing it.	76	37.1	68	33.2	61	29.8
32. It entertains me.	19	9.3	55	26.8	131	63.9
33. They create happy moments for me.	35	17.1	85	41.5	85	41.5
21. It gives me a lot of things I want to see.	39	19	78	38	88	42.9
22. It provides me with information on various issues.	23	11.2	65	31.7	117	57.1
23. To get information related to my culture.	46	22.4	81	39.5	78	38
24. To pursue new technologies.	38	18.5	65	31.7	102	49.8
15. It gives me a sense of belonging to a group.	100	48.8	65	31.7	40	19.5
25. To find soothing new photos or video albums.	78	38	68	32.2	59	28.8
26. To be supported (socially / emotionally) by others.	135	65.9	40	19.5	30	14.6
29. To contact someone who has forgotten me.	103	50.2	57	27.8	45	22
30. To connect with people I know.	17	8.3	59	28.8	129	62.9
31. It makes us get together with my family and friends.	46	22.4	57	27.8	102	49.8

Regarding the third motive, namely passing time and entertainment, there is a significant difference between the sample's mean and the standard mean ( $P \leq 0.0001$ ,  $t=5.82$ ). However, in the case of this motive, students' scores are higher than the standard mean ( $M=18$ ). This result shows that the motivation of students to use Instagram for passing and entertainment is above average. The results for each of the statements of the motive of passing the time and entertainment also indicate that the most reported motive is "self-entertainment" (Item 32 with

a frequency of 131 or 63.9% of agreeing on choice) and then "liberation from unemployment or not having an activity to do" (Item 18 with a frequency of 108 or 57.7% of agreeing on choice). In contrast, students reported that the least important motive is to "have fun and spend time unknowingly and drown in using Instagram" (Item 20 with a frequency of 76 or 37.1% disagree on choice).

The results related to the motive of information seeking indicate that the difference studied through a one-sample t-test is significant ( $P \leq 0.0001$ ,  $t = 6.44$ ). A comparison of the mean score of students with the standard mean ( $M = 12$ ) shows that the motive of students to use Instagram for information seeking is higher than the standard mean, and, therefore, it is higher than the average level. According to the results in Table 3, the most reported motives in the information-seeking dimension are "access to information in various fields through Instagram" (Item 22 with a frequency of 117 or 57.1% of agreeing on choice) and then "pursuing new technologies via Instagram" (Item 24 with a frequency of 102 or 49.8% of agreeing on choice). In contrast, students reported the lowest motives for "getting information about their culture through Instagram" (Item 23 with a frequency of 46 or 22.4% of disagreeing on choice).

According to Table 2, the results on the motive of creating social and emotional capital confirm the existence of a significant difference ( $P \leq 0.0001$ ,  $t = -7.96$ ) between the two means. A comparison of the mean score of students with the standard mean ( $M = 9$ ) shows that the motivation of students to use Instagram to create social capital is lower than the standard mean. The results of Table 3 also indicate that the most reported motive of individuals in the dimension of creation of social capital was "achieving peace through new photos or video albums shared by others for the public" (Item 26 with a frequency of 135 or 65.9% of agreeing on choice). On the other hand, students reported the lowest motivation for "gaining the social/emotional support of others through Instagram" (Item 23 with a frequency of 46 or 22.4% of disagreeing choice) and "achieving a sense of group belonging through Instagram" (Item 15 with a frequency of 100 or 48.8% of disagreeing on choice).

Regarding the last motive identified by students in using Instagram, i.e., relationship maintenance, the results showed a significant difference ( $P = 0.0001$ ,  $t = 4.07$ ) between the sample's mean and the standard mean ( $M = 9$ ). According to this result, the mean score of students was higher than the standard mean. Therefore, it can be concluded that the motivation of students to maintain relationships through Instagram is above average. Based on frequencies and percentages, the most reported motive in the dimension of relationship maintenance is "the ability to communicate with people they know" (Item 30 with a frequency of 129 or 62.9% of agreeing on choice) and then "the possibility of communicating with family members or friends via Instagram" (Item 31 with a frequency of 102 or 49.8% of agreeing on choice). In contrast, students reported the lowest motivation for "connecting with someone who forgot them" (Item 29 with a frequency of 103 or 50.2% of disagree on choice).

To present a clearer picture of the students' motivation profile in using Instagram, a diagram of the students' motivation profile is drawn in Figure 1.



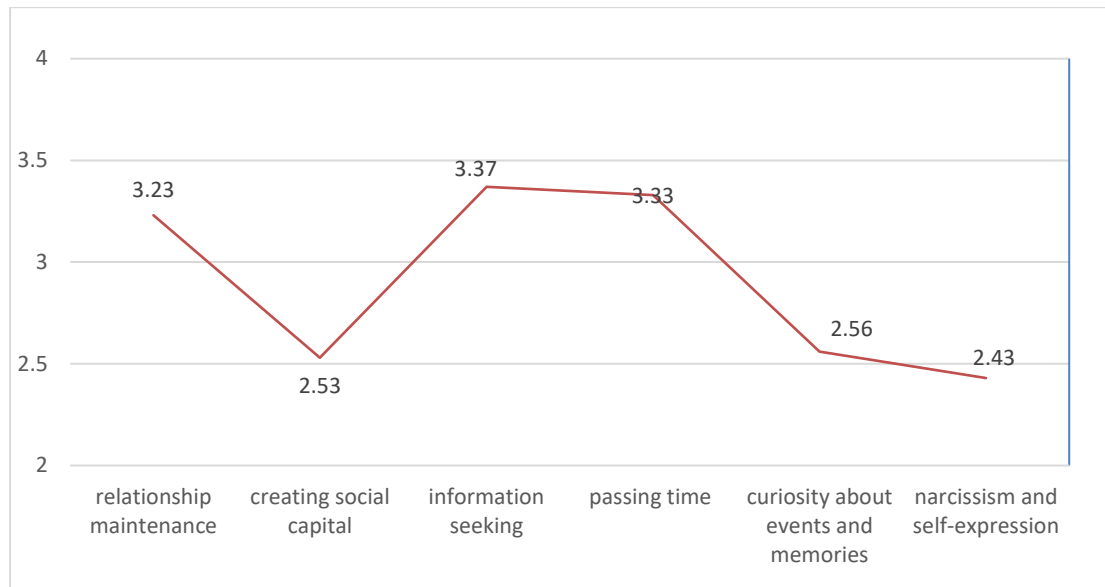


Figure 1: Motivation in terms of the weighted mean of students' score

As can be seen in Figure 1, information seeking, passing time, and relationship maintenance are the three main motivations for students to use Instagram. On the other hand, narcissism and self-expression, creating social capital, and curiosity about events and memories are the lowest reported motivations of students who use Instagram.

### Discussion

This study aimed to identify psychology students' motivations for using Instagram as a key social network. For this purpose, using a descriptive survey method, students' motivations were examined. As noted at the beginning of the paper, the activities of social network users have led to the identification and prosperity of these networks. These activities are rooted in the motivations and desires of users, which vary from person to person. Every human has unique values, beliefs, and needs (Sadegh-Zadeh et al., 2018) that cause differences in their desires and motivations. A review of the results of research conducted in and outside the country also confirms that the motivations and inclinations of users for using social networks such as Instagram are very different in different groups and periods.

Accordingly, the present study investigated the motivations of the Faculty of Psychology of Semnan University students with a quantitative approach and a survey research method. The results of the present study can be considered in two dimensions as follows.

First, it can be addressed by identifying the factors affecting students' use of Instagram. Given that the tool proposed by Gülnar et al. (2010) was designed to determine the motivations of Facebook users, factor analysis of these tool items showed six main factors that affect students' use of Instagram; these include love of self-expression, passing the time and entertainment, curiosity about events and memories, information seeking, creating social and emotional capital, and relationship maintenance.

Some of these factors have also been introduced as factors affecting the use of social networks such as Instagram in previous studies: self-expression (Cheung, 2014; Moradi et al., 2014; Sadegh-Zadeh et al., 2018; Saraji et al., 2017), entertainment (Latifi et al., 2018; Lotfi harsini, 2017; Moradi et al., 2014; Saraji et al., 2017), information seeking (Cheung, 2014; Lotfi harsini, 2017). This suggests that these factors, regardless of cultural, demographic, and social

differences, can be considered factors are influencing virtual social networks' use in all societies and times. However, other factors are unique ones proposed only at this time and place for a specific community as influential factors in the use of Instagram. In other words, factors related to the social and cultural conditions of the present research population are proposed as significant factors in using this social network.

Second, it can be studied to investigate the intensity and weakness of the factors affecting the use of Instagram by students. Examination of the answers provided by the students showed that the intensity of influence of the six factors introduced is not the same. Information seeking, passing time, and relationship maintenance were suggested as psychology students' main motives for using Instagram. Comparing this finding with the findings of domestic research conducted on students (adolescents and young people) indicates that passing the time is a common factor influencing the use of virtual social networks in all domestic research studies. This finding also shows that in the research context, due to the lack of cultural, recreational, and entertainment facilities for the young generation, virtual social networks are used as a tool to fill young people's leisure and entertainment time, which is not only completely different from the primary function and task of these tools, but it will also lead to specific harms and challenges that can be a separate research topic. Also, the "information seeking" factor, which in the present study is proposed as one of the most influential factors in using Instagram, was earlier offered as a significant factor in using virtual social networks in the studies of Lotfi harsini (2017) and Cheung (2014). Considering that the research population in all of these researches (current research and those mentioned ones) are students (in different universities), it seems that "information seeking" can be recognized as an influential factor in the use of virtual social networks among students (regardless of demographic characteristics). This suggests that media and information literacy should be taught to students to acquire the necessary skills to analyze and evaluate the retrieved information and information resources (Moghaddas-Zadeh & Safahie, 2018; Marefat & khademi, 2022). On the other hand, the "relationship maintenance" factor proposed as an influential factor in this study has not been considered in any previous studies. It seems that the remarkable capabilities of Instagram as a social network compared to other virtual social networks (Telegram and Facebook) in the possibility of communicating with friends and relatives and maintaining previous relationships with those who are not near us now play an essential role in making this factor an influential factor in this regard.

### Conclusion

Finally, it should be accepted that users of social networks turn to these networks based on a sense of need, and this need forms the primary motivation for using these networks. In other words, students use social networks such as Instagram to compensate for their shortcomings and meet their needs in line with actual life conditions. This requires the serious attention of policymakers and decision-makers to plan to teach the optimal use of these social networks and prevent potential challenges and harms considering the cultural and social conditions of the present society. Otherwise, serious problems would be observed shortly due to the ignorant, inappropriate, and unconventional use of social networks such as Instagram among the younger generation. This work was on psychology students and is recommended to be repeated in other groups. It is suggested that users' motivations in different age groups be examined as well. It is also suggested that appropriate entertainment be provided for students at the university.

According to the results, information retrieval is not necessarily fruitful, and the results are ambiguous; thus, it is suggested that the identification of information content be considered in future research.

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