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REDEFINING IDENTITIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI INFLUENCERS' POSTS AND CAPTIONS ON INSTAGRAM

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Abstract

The increasing influence of social media has transformed the ways individuals construct and communicate their identities, particularly through visual-centered platforms such as Instagram. While existing research has extensively examined influencer culture, limited attention has been given to the multimodal construction of digital identities in the Pakistani context. This study investigates how Pakistani social media influencers construct and redefine their identities through the interaction of linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive resources in Instagram posts and captions. Grounded in the theory of Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), the study adopts a qualitative research design and employs a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Halliday, 1978; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). A purposive sample of Instagram posts from Pakistani influencers was analyzed to examine how different semiotic resources contribute to identity construction. The findings reveal that influencer identities are not created through isolated communicative modes but emerge from the coordinated use of language, visuals, cultural symbols, and audience interaction. The analysis demonstrates that Pakistani influencers strategically negotiate cultural authenticity, religious values, emotional expression, and commercial branding to construct digital identities that are both relatable and aspirational. Furthermore, bilingual language practices, culturally significant symbols, and carefully curated visual aesthetics enable influencers to balance local socio-cultural expectations with global digital trends. By focusing on the underexplored Pakistani social media landscape, this research contributes to the growing body of multimodal discourse studies and provides insights into how digital identities are continuously performed and redefined in contemporary online environments.

Keywords: *Digital Identity, Identity Construction, Instagram, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Pakistani Influencers, Social Constructionism, Systemic Functional Linguistics*

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1. Introduction

Social media has transformed the ways individuals construct, perform, and negotiate their identities in digital environments. Among social media users, influencers have emerged as significant cultural actors who strategically combine language, visuals, symbols, and audience interaction to present identities that are both authentic and aspirational. On Instagram, identity is no longer communicated through text or images alone; instead, it is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources that together create meaningful representations of the self (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). This multimodal nature of communication makes Instagram an important platform for examining how identities are continuously shaped and redefined.

In the Pakistani context, influencers operate within a unique socio-cultural environment where global digital trends intersect with local cultural traditions, religious values, and linguistic practices. Consequently, their online identities often reflect a balance between modern lifestyles and culturally embedded expressions. Despite the rapid growth of influencer culture in Pakistan, limited research has explored how these identities are constructed through the combined use of linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive resources. Most existing studies have focused primarily on textual content or visual representation, overlooking the integrated nature of multimodal communication.

Drawing on the principles of Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), this study views identity as a dynamic and socially negotiated process that is continuously reconstructed through communication and interaction. To examine this process, the study employs a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework informed by Halliday's (1978) social semiotic perspective and the visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021). This framework enables a comprehensive analysis of how linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive modes function together to produce meaning and redefine influencer identities.

1.1. Problem Statement

Social media influencers, in particular, play a significant role in shaping digital culture by strategically combining images, captions, emojis, hashtags, and audience interaction to create meaningful online personas. Although influencer identity has received considerable scholarly attention, most existing studies have been conducted in Western contexts and have primarily focused on textual or visual aspects of communication independently. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how multiple semiotic resources interact to construct digital identities within non-Western cultural settings, particularly in Pakistan. Furthermore, few studies have employed a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework to examine the combined role of linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive resources in identity construction. To address this gap, the present study investigates how Pakistani Instagram influencers construct and redefine their identities through multimodal communication. Drawing on Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and SFL-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Halliday, 1978; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021), the study examines how different communicative modes work together to produce meanings that reflect cultural authenticity, emotional expression, commercial branding, and audience engagement.

2. Literature Review

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed how individuals communicate, interact, and construct their identities. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have become important spaces where users create, negotiate, and redefine their identities through the

integration of textual, visual, and interactive resources. Identity has long been studied across sociology, psychology, and linguistics. Earlier perspectives viewed identity as relatively stable, whereas contemporary scholars argue that it is socially produced and continuously reconstructed through interaction (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959). Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain that reality and identity are socially constructed through everyday interactions, while Bucholtz and Hall (2005) emphasize that identity emerges through linguistic and social practices rather than existing as an inherent personal trait. Similarly, Giddens (2023) argues that modern identity is reflexive, requiring individuals to constantly revise their self-concepts in response to changing social conditions. Digital media has significantly transformed identity formation by enabling users to selectively present and manage their online personas (Boyd, 2008; Hogan, 2010). Unlike offline communication, social networking platforms allow users to edit and strategically display personal information before it reaches audiences, making identity an ongoing performance influenced by technological affordances, audience responses, and cultural expectations (Papacharissi, 2015; Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Recent research also highlights that identity development results from continuous interaction between users, online communities, and platform algorithms, encouraging users to modify their self-presentation according to audience engagement (Sebre & Miltuze, 2021; Soh et al., 2024).

The growth of social media has also introduced influencers as a new category of digital opinion leaders. Influencers build credibility through consistent content creation and close interaction with followers, distinguishing themselves from traditional celebrities by appearing more accessible and relatable (Khamis et al., 2017; Marwick, 2013; Abidin, 2016). Instagram, with its emphasis on visual communication, provides an ideal environment for identity performance by allowing users to combine photographs, videos, captions, hashtags, emojis, stories, and reels into carefully designed online personas (Van Dijck, 2013). According to Abidin (2016), influencers engage in "visibility labour," producing continuous content to maintain audience attention and platform visibility. Likewise, Marwick (2015) argues that "Instafame" is achieved through sustained identity performance, where everyday experiences are transformed into engaging digital narratives. Authenticity has become central to influencer culture, yet it is often strategically constructed. Audrezet et al. (2020) explain that influencers balance sponsored content with personal storytelling to preserve credibility, while Duffy and Hund (2019) describe this challenge as the "authenticity bind," requiring influencers to appear genuine while promoting commercial products.

Self-branding further contributes to digital identity construction. Influencers strategically manage their visual style, language, interaction patterns, and audience engagement to establish recognizable personal brands that generate social influence and economic opportunities (Hund & McGuigan, 2019). In Pakistan, influencer identity is additionally shaped by cultural and religious expectations. Pakistani influencers often negotiate global fashion and lifestyle trends while maintaining modesty, family values, and religious identity. Studies show that Pakistani influencers integrate local cultural values with contemporary digital practices and negotiate gender expectations through their online self-presentation (Farrukh et al., 2021; Salam, 2020; Aksar et al., 2023). Digital communication is inherently multimodal because meaning is produced through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources rather than language alone. Social media platforms combine written text, images, videos, emojis, typography, colour, gestures, layout, and interactive features to communicate messages simultaneously (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010). Kress (2009) defines multimodality as the integration of multiple communicative modes, each contributing distinct functions to meaning-making.

For example, language provides explanation, images communicate emotions, colours convey symbolism, and visual composition shapes audience interpretation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Instagram exemplifies multimodal communication because posts integrate captions, images, hashtags, emojis, and location tags into unified meaning-making systems (Zappavigna, 2018). Research also suggests that multilingualism frequently coexists with multimodality, enabling users to negotiate multiple identities and express cultural belonging through combinations of languages and visual resources (Leppänen et al., 2017; Androutsopoulos, 2015). Consequently, multimodal discourse analysis has become an essential approach for understanding how linguistic and visual resources jointly construct meaning in digital communication (Jewitt, 2013). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday (1978, 1994), provides a functional approach to language by viewing it as a social semiotic system through which people create meaning within particular social and cultural contexts. Unlike traditional linguistic theories that focus mainly on grammatical structures, SFL emphasizes how language functions in communication. According to Halliday (1978), language simultaneously performs three metafunctions: the **ideational metafunction**, which represents experiences and ideas; the **interpersonal metafunction**, which establishes relationships between speakers and audiences; and the **textual metafunction**, which organizes information into coherent discourse (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). These metafunctions enable researchers to examine not only what language communicates but also how it constructs meaning within specific social contexts.

Although SFL was initially developed for linguistic analysis, its principles have been successfully extended to the study of visual communication through Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). Instagram provides a clear example of multimodal communication because posts integrate photographs, captions, hashtags, emojis, typography, colours, and layout into a unified communicative system. Meaning is therefore created through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources rather than language alone. Jewitt (2009, 2013) emphasizes that multimodal analysis offers a more comprehensive understanding of digital communication by examining how different communicative modes work together. Likewise, Van Leeuwen (2005) argues that social semiotics enables researchers to investigate how linguistic and visual choices collectively construct social identities and cultural meanings.

In the present study, SFL-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis serves as the analytical framework for examining how Pakistani female influencers redefine their identities on Instagram. By analysing captions together with visual features, the study investigates how linguistic and visual resources interact to communicate authenticity, professionalism, cultural identity, and personal branding. This integrated analytical approach is particularly suitable for Instagram, where textual and visual elements operate simultaneously to construct online identities. The theoretical foundation of this study is **Social Constructionism**, proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966). This theory argues that reality and identity are not naturally given but are continuously created and reconstructed through human interaction. Individuals develop meanings through everyday social experiences, and these meanings gradually become accepted as shared social realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2015). From this perspective, identity is viewed as a dynamic and evolving social process rather than a fixed personal characteristic.

A central concept within social constructionism is the **Externalization–Objectivation–Internalization (E–O–I) cycle**. Individuals first externalize their beliefs, experiences, and identities through communication and social practices. These expressions are then objectivated when society

accepts, challenges, or validates them. Finally, individuals internalize these social responses, leading them to reconstruct and reshape their identities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Hogan (2010) argues that social media allows individuals to carefully curate online exhibitions of the self, while Papacharissi (2015) emphasizes the emotional and interactive dimensions of digital identity formation. Together, these perspectives reinforce the view that digital identity is socially constructed, continuously negotiated, and influenced by interaction between users, audiences, and digital platforms. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that social media influencers construct identities through self-branding, authenticity, visual storytelling, and audience engagement (Abidin, 2016; Khamis et al., 2017; Audrezet et al., 2020). International studies have shown that multimodal resources, including images, captions, hashtags, and emojis, play a central role in shaping online identity and increasing audience engagement (Marwick, 2015; Duffy & Hund, 2019; Zappavigna, 2018). More recent studies further indicate that identity development is influenced by platform affordances, algorithms, and evolving digital practices, highlighting the dynamic nature of online identity construction (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Soh et al., 2024).

Despite these contributions, research within Pakistan remains comparatively limited. Existing Pakistani studies have explored gender identity, digital self-presentation, and language practices among social media users (Salam, 2020; Farrukh et al., 2021; Aksar et al., 2023). However, these studies mainly focus on textual communication or general online behaviour and pay limited attention to the interaction between linguistic and visual resources. Furthermore, very few studies have examined Pakistani female Instagram influencers using **Systemic Functional Linguistics** together with **Multimodal Discourse Analysis**. The relationship between captions, images, emojis, hashtags, and cultural symbols in constructing digital identities remains underexplored, particularly within Pakistan's socio-cultural context.

2.1. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- How do different multimodal resources (linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive) interact in Instagram posts to construct the digital identities of Pakistani social media influencers?
- How do Pakistani social media influencers use Instagram posts and captions to redefine their identities?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design to look at how Pakistani social media influencers create and change their identities through using many ways to communicate on Instagram. A qualitative approach made sense because the study is about the meanings of how things are. How different ways of showing meaning work together, not about numbers (Creswell & Poth 2018).

3.2. Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Social Constructionism created by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in The Social Construction of Reality. The theory says that reality is made by people through talking and acting together. So identity is not something fixed but changes through talking, sharing experiences and doing things together. Berger and Luckmann (1966) talk about how social reality is made through the Externalization–Objectivation–Internalization (E-O-I) Cycle. Externalization means putting ideas, feelings, beliefs and identities into the world around us. On Instagram influencers share their identities through photos, videos, text, stories, hashtags, emojis and other ways of showing meaning.

Objectivation is when the ideas people create become accepted by others through interaction. On Instagram likes, comments, shares, saves and growing followers are ways people show they agree with what's posted. Also the way the app works can make popular posts more visible (Marwick, 2015; Cotter, 2019).

Internalization is when people take in the things others agree with and use that to understand themselves. In places influencers watch how people react and change what they post based on what they see. They follow what people like, how things are done and what is popular(Abidin,2018; Marwick, 2015). This study looks mostly at Internalization because it explains best how Pakistani influencers change who they are. Externalization and objectivation explain how they show who they are and get approval. Internalization shows how they change after seeing what others think and what society expects.

Social Constructionism is very important for Pakistani culture, where influencers deal with traditions, religion, family rules and new digital culture. They may create a mix of identities by combining things with old values like wearing Western clothes but being modest speaking English but using Urdu or Roman Urdu doing business but keeping family values or talking about religion but also about daily life.

3.3. Analytical Framework

To study how these identities are made the study used Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). SFL sees language as a way to make meaning based on the situation (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). The method looks at how language helps show ideas how people talk to each other and how the text is put together. Because Instagram uses more than words the study also used the Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) way of looking at types of meaning. This helped look at words and pictures including images, colors, how things are arranged, who is looking how people act and other ways of showing meaning. Social Constructionism explains why identities are made by people while SFL-based MDA explains how these identities are shown through words, pictures, symbols and how people interact.

3.4. Sampling and Data Selection

The study used sampling to pick cases that had a lot of useful information for the research goals (Patton, 2015). The group was focused on Pakistani female Instagram influencers with more than one million followers because they are very visible and have a big effect on online people. Only Instagram posts that were public and had both images and text were chosen. A total of 2 Instagram posts were picked from the lifestyle, fashion and entertainment areas. The posts covered topics like family life, cultural events, religious times, travel, fashion ads, brand deals and personal thoughts.

3.5. Data Collection & Analysis Procedure

The Instagram posts that were chosen were taken from profiles. Each post was considered as a way of showing meaning including its image, text, hashtags, emojis, location tags and what people did with the post. Each Instagram post was the main thing being looked at. Treating each post as a communication event lets the study see how different ways of showing meaning worked together instead of just looking at words and pictures alone. The data was looked at in three steps.

Stage 1: Descriptive Analysis

Each post was first looked at to find out what kind of identity was most shown, what cultural signs were there, what language was used and what way of talking was used. Identity types included religious personal, professional and commercial identities. Cultural signs included clothes, religious

symbols, local festivals, family values and places that have cultural meaning. Language use included English, Urdu, Roman Urdu and switching between languages. Ways of talking included telling a story, encouraging selling something, teaching and sharing thoughts (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Stage 2: Multimodal Analysis

The step involved looking closely at the posts using the SFL-based MDA method. Four main ways were studied:

Linguistics mode: Captions, hashtags, word choices, emojis and switching languages were looked at to see how influencers shared experiences, feelings, ads and identities.

Visual mode: Clothes, faces where people look, how they stand, how the picture is put together colors and where the picture was taken were studied using the visual rules from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

Symbolic mode: Traditional clothes, religious things, signs of being from a country, family images, location tags, brand names and ads were looked at as signs that mean something culturally.

Interactive mode: Likes, comments, mentions and tagging were looked at as ways people talk and show they agree with what is posted (Marwick & boyd 2011).

Step 3: Interpretive Analysis

The third step brought together the findings from the language, pictures, symbols and interactions to explain how these parts worked together to show identities. Special attention was given to realness being cultural values selling things and personal identity.

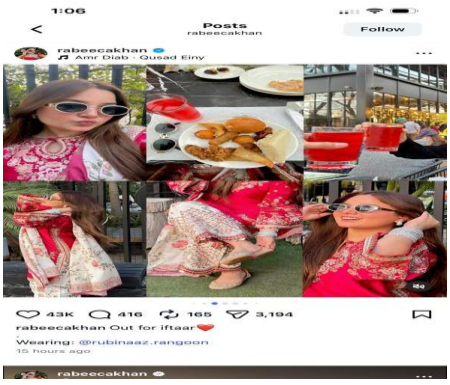
3.6. Ethical Considerations

To make sure the study was good the same way of looking at things and coding was used for all the posts. Interpretations were guided by Social Constructionism. SFL-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis to keep things clear and the same (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Ethical rules were also followed. Since only public Instagram posts were looked at there was no contact with the people. The study looked at things that were already out in the open and followed the rules of fairness and proper showing, in school work.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents the qualitative analysis of selected Instagram posts of Pakistani social media influencers using a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework. The analysis examines how linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive resources work together to construct and redefine influencer identities in digital spaces. Each post is first analyzed in terms of its identity construction, followed by an examination of the multimodal resources that contribute to identity refinement.

Figure 1



Caption:

"Out for iftaar ❤
Wearing: @rubinaaz.rangoon"

Table 1.1

Feature	Description
Influencer Type	Fashion and lifestyle influencer
Identity Presented	Modern, socially active Muslim woman balancing tradition and contemporary lifestyle
Cultural Markers	Traditional red embroidered outfit, iftaar setting (Ramadan context), desi food
Language Use	Simple English caption with cultural term "iftaar" and brand tagging
Hashtags	(Not visible, but brand mention functions as promotion)
Identity Strategy	Cultural hybridity + lifestyle display + brand promotion

The influencer constructs a hybrid identity that blends cultural tradition with a modern, urban lifestyle. The reference to "iftaar" situates the post within a religious and cultural context, while the stylish presentation and outdoor dining environment reflect a contemporary and socially active persona. The traditional outfit reinforces cultural roots, yet its fashionable styling and coordinated accessories present a curated and aspirational identity. Additionally, the inclusion of a brand tag highlights the commercial aspect of influencer identity, where self-presentation is closely tied to promotion and digital branding. Overall, the post redefines identity by merging religious, cultural, and lifestyle elements within a visually appealing social media narrative.

Multimodal Resource	Features Used	Role in Identity Refinement
Linguistic	English caption; phrase "Out for iftaar"; red heart emoji (❤); brand tagging (@rubinaaz.rangoon)	Frames religious practice (iftaar) within social, out-of-home context; heart emoji signals warmth and enjoyment; brand tagging integrates commercial collaboration into personal moment
Visual	Evening setting; traditional/designer attire; soft ambient lighting; elevated framing	Presents aspirational lifestyle while maintaining cultural authenticity; signals sophistication and fashion consciousness
Symbolic	Iftaar context (breaking fast during Ramadan); designer brand mention; crescent moon emoji (🌙) in preceding text	Anchors identity in Islamic religious observance while simultaneously positioning influencer as fashionable and socially engaged; balances piety with modernity

Interactive	Location tag implied by "out"; brand credit; high engagement metrics (43K likes, 3,194 comments)	Invites followers into a shared religious and social experience; positions influencer as accessible aspirational; acknowledges collaborative fashion network

Table 1.2

The multimodal resources refine the influencer's identity as religiously observant yet socially and fashionably engaged. **Linguistic** resources frame the sacred act of iftaar within a contemporary social outing, while brand tagging signals commercial awareness. **Visual** and **symbolic** resources—traditional designer attire paired with the crescent moon—construct a persona that seamlessly integrates Islamic faith with modern, aspirational lifestyle branding.

Figure 2



Caption:

"Hal-e-Dil 💕"

Table 2.1

Identity Construction in Instagram Post

Feature	**Description**
Influencer Type	Lifestyle and digital content creator
Identity Presented	Emotionally strong, introspective, and independent individual
Cultural Markers	Use of Urdu phrase "Hal-e-Dil" reflecting local linguistic identity
Language Use	English quote expressing emotional resilience and selective vulnerability
Hashtags	(Not visible; emotional text itself functions as message)
Identity Strategy	Emotional self-expression + relatability + authenticity

The influencer constructs an introspective and emotionally resilient identity through the combination of visual minimalism and textual expression. The quote emphasizes independence and selective vulnerability, portraying the influencer as someone who values emotional strength while acknowledging meaningful social connections. The use of the Urdu phrase "Hal-e-Dil" adds a cultural layer, grounding the identity in local linguistic context while the English quote broadens its relatability to a wider audience. This blending of languages reflects a hybrid digital identity that resonates with

both local and global audiences. Overall, the post redefines influencer identity by shifting from purely visual self-presentation to emotional authenticity and personal expression.

Table 2.2

Multimodal Resource	Features Used	Role in Identity Refinement
Linguistic	English reflective quote "I may never ask for help, but I will never forget those who offered"; Roman Urdu phrase "Hal-e-Dil" (Condition/State of the heart); red heart emoji (❤)	Establishes persona of quiet strength, pride, and deep loyalty; Roman Urdu adds emotional depth and cultural authenticity; heart emoji signals vulnerability and warmth
Visual	Minimal text layout; soft or muted aesthetic implied; no excessive branding or hashtags	Presents identity as introspective rather than performative; signals emotional depth over commercial or promotional intent
Symbolic	"Hal-e-Dil" as a poetic Urdu expression referencing matters of the heart; gratitude theme; music credit "Arsalan Hasan · Khushi" (Happiness)	Anchors identity in South Asian poetic and emotional traditions; constructs persona that values loyalty and remembers kindness; music choice (Khushi) contrasts reflective caption with underlying hope
Interactive	High engagement (45.3K likes); date stamp (22 August 2025); no direct call to action or tagging	Invites quiet emotional resonance rather than active participation; positions influencer as authentic and emotionally mature; fosters intimacy through shared understanding rather than explicit solicitation

The multimodal resources refine the influencer's identity as emotionally deep, quietly proud, and profoundly loyal. **Linguistic** resources combine an English declaration of self-reliance with the Roman Urdu phrase "Hal-e-Dil," creating a bilingual persona that bridges universal emotional themes with culturally specific South Asian poetic expression. **Symbolic** resources anchor identity in traditions of emotional authenticity and gratitude, constructing a persona that values unspoken bonds and remembered kindness over performative social interaction.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Pakistani Instagram influencers strategically employ multiple semiotic resources to construct and redefine their digital identities. Rather than relying solely on visual appearance or textual captions, identity is produced through the interaction of linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive modes. This finding supports the principles of Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which argues that identity is not fixed but is continuously created and reconstructed through social interaction. On Instagram, influencers actively negotiate their identities by combining cultural values, personal experiences, commercial interests, and audience engagement into coherent multimodal narrati**ves.**

The analysis of the first Instagram post reveals that identity construction extends beyond self-presentation to include the integration of religious and cultural practices within a contemporary lifestyle. The use of the culturally significant term *iftaar*, together with a traditional embroidered outfit and the depiction of an outdoor dining experience, constructs an identity that balances Islamic traditions with modern urban living. The inclusion of a fashion brand further demonstrates how commercial collaborations are embedded within everyday cultural practices rather than presented as separate promotional activities. This suggests that influencer identity is increasingly shaped through the combination of authenticity and commercialization. These findings support previous research indicating that influencers establish credibility by blending personal experiences with sponsored content instead of treating advertising as an independent activity (Abidin, 2016; Marwick, 2015).

The multimodal analysis further illustrates that meaning is generated through the interaction of different communicative resources rather than through language alone. The linguistic resources frame the occasion as a personal and enjoyable religious experience, while the visual elements, including the designer attire and carefully composed setting, communicate sophistication and aspirational living. Symbolic resources such as references to Ramadan strengthen the influencer's cultural authenticity, whereas interactive features including audience engagement and brand tagging position the influencer within a broader digital network. These findings align with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) argument that visual communication operates alongside linguistic communication to create integrated meanings that cannot be understood independently.

The findings also demonstrate that Pakistani influencers negotiate global digital trends while maintaining local cultural values. Although English is used as the primary language of communication, culturally significant expressions such as *iftaar* retain their original linguistic form. This bilingual practice enables influencers to communicate with diverse audiences while preserving cultural identity. Previous studies have similarly argued that multilingual communication on social media allows users to negotiate local belonging alongside global visibility (Androutsopoulos, 2015). In the present study, language functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a marker of religious and cultural authenticity. The second Instagram post expands this understanding by demonstrating that influencer identity is not limited to lifestyle representation but also includes emotional authenticity. Instead of emphasizing fashion or commercial branding, the post constructs an identity based on emotional resilience, gratitude, and introspection. The Roman Urdu phrase *Hal-e-Dil*, combined with an English reflective statement, creates a bilingual expression that resonates with both local and international audiences. This linguistic blending reflects a hybrid digital identity that simultaneously values cultural heritage and global accessibility.

The emotional tone of the second post indicates that authenticity has become a significant component of influencer identity. Rather than projecting perfection, the influencer presents vulnerability in a controlled manner through selective emotional disclosure. This finding supports research suggesting that audiences increasingly value influencers who appear genuine and emotionally relatable rather than excessively idealized (Abidin, 2016). By expressing gratitude and emotional strength without directly seeking audience sympathy, the influencer constructs a trustworthy digital persona that encourages long-term audience connection. Visual and symbolic resources further strengthen this identity. The minimalist aesthetic, absence of excessive promotional content, and use of culturally meaningful expressions shift attention from external appearance to internal emotional experience. The symbolic reference to *Hal-e-Dil* draws upon South Asian poetic traditions,

demonstrating that identity construction on Pakistani social media is deeply influenced by local cultural narratives. These findings extend previous multimodal studies by showing that symbolic resources rooted in indigenous cultural traditions remain central to influencer communication despite the global nature of Instagram.

Across both analyzed posts, multimodal resources function collaboratively rather than independently. Linguistic choices provide explicit meanings, visual resources establish social positioning and aesthetic identity, symbolic elements reinforce cultural values, and interactive resources strengthen relationships with audiences. This interaction reflects Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics, which proposes that meaning is simultaneously realized through ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The findings indicate that identity construction emerges from the coordinated operation of these metafunctions across multiple communicative modes rather than from isolated linguistic features. The findings also contribute to the growing literature on multimodal discourse analysis by demonstrating that influencer identity in Pakistan reflects a distinctive balance between modernity and tradition.

Overall, the findings reinforce the applicability of Social Constructionism and SFL-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis for examining digital identity. The analysis demonstrates that Instagram provides Pakistani influencers with a space where identities are continuously performed, negotiated, and reconstructed through the strategic integration of language, images, cultural symbols, and audience interaction. These findings contribute to the limited body of research on Pakistani social media influencers by highlighting the culturally specific ways in which multimodal communication supports identity construction in the digital age.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how Pakistani social media influencers construct and redefine their identities on Instagram through multimodal communication. Using a qualitative research design and a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework, the study explored the interaction of linguistic, visual, symbolic, and interactive resources in selected Instagram posts. Guided by Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), the findings demonstrate that digital identity is not static but is continuously shaped and reconstructed through the strategic use of multiple communicative modes. The analysis revealed that Pakistani influencers create identities that combine cultural authenticity, religious values, emotional expression, and commercial branding. Rather than presenting these elements separately, influencers integrate them into coherent multimodal narratives that reflect both local cultural traditions and global social media practices. Linguistic choices, including bilingual expressions and culturally significant terms, work alongside visual aesthetics, symbolic references, and audience interaction to communicate identities that are authentic, relatable, and aspirational. This highlights the importance of understanding identity as a multimodal and socially negotiated phenomenon rather than one based solely on textual or visual communication. Although the study is limited to a small sample of Instagram posts, it provides valuable insights into the ways Pakistani influencers negotiate tradition and modernity through digital communication. Future research may expand the sample size, include influencers from different regions and social media platforms, and adopt comparative or longitudinal approaches to further examine the evolving nature of digital identity in diverse cultural contexts.

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