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Fragmented Selves in Social Media Narratives: A Baumanian Reading of Pakistani Influencer Culture

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Abstract

This Study explores the phenomenon of fragmented digital identity in the context of Pakistani influencer culture, with a focus on the ways in which social media influencers perform multiple, sometimes contradictory, identities across multiple online platforms. The aim of the study is to analyze the ways in which fragmented identity performance is constructed through varied narrative styles, including persona development, emotional self-disclosure, and self-presentation on social media sites. The Study is important because, while the phenomenon of influencer culture has become the mainstay of identity development in the digital era, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the fragmented nature of identity in the non-Western world. The study is based on a qualitative thematic content analysis of publicly available content from Pakistani influencers on Instagram and TikTok from May to September 2025. The analysis is informed by the sociological perspective of Zygmunt Bauman, whose theory of liquid modernity understands the concept of identity as unstable, fluid, and continually reconstructed in the dynamic social environments. The results of the analysis show that the construction of the influencer identity is fragmented through the enactment of contradictory roles, the deployment of emotional vulnerability, and the adaptation of the self-presentation across different digital platforms. The fragmented construction of the influencer identity is an expression of the instability of the concept of digital identity in general. The analysis contributes to the field of digital identity and influencer culture by highlighting the fact that the fragmented construction of the influencer identity is not a deficiency of coherence but a fundamental feature of the construction of the concept of identity.

Keywords: Digital Identity; Identity Fragmentation; Influencer Culture; Social Media Narratives; Zygmunt Bauman; Liquid Modernity

Introduction

The role of social media sites has been significant in changing the way people develop and portray their identities in modern digital culture. Influencer culture has been at the center of this phenomenon as an important site for the constant development and production of individual identities using various online discourses and performances. Influencers use different social media sites such as Instagram and Tik Tok to portray and develop different versions of themselves by integrating personal and professional discourses. This has been an important factor in the development of multiple and fragmented identities for the individual. Various authors have noted that the use of social media sites has led people to constantly change and

modify their identities in response to the changing dynamics of the sites and the trends that are developing in the digital world (boyd, 2014; Abidin, 2016). In this context, the individual's identity has been less stable and more fragmented as they move and perform different roles.

Even though there is already a substantial amount of scholarly research that explores influencer culture and digital self-presentation, most of this research has been based in Western social media spaces. In this regard, most of this research has highlighted various issues such as online branding, authenticity, and engagement in social media spaces; however, there is a need to explore the fragmented influencer identity in non-Western online spaces. Specifically, Pakistani influencer culture has not been sufficiently explored in scholarly discourse in spite of the rapid development and expansion of social media usage in this country. In this case, most of this research has been based on coherent identity performance instead of a fragmented identity performance that is often evident in digital narratives.

The objective of this study is to explore the ways in which Pakistani social media influencers create a fragmented identity through their online discourses. In this regard, the present study seeks to explore the ways in which Pakistani social media influencers create contradictory identity roles, incorporate emotional vulnerability in their discourses, and create fragmented discourses through different social media platforms (Abdulwahab et al., 2026). To fulfill the objective of the present study, the researcher will attempt to answer the following questions: How do Pakistani social media influencers create contradictory identity roles through their online discourses? In what ways do Pakistani social media influencers incorporate emotional vulnerability in their discourses? In what ways do the identity roles of Pakistani social media influencers differ through different social media platforms?

The study is informed by the sociological theory of Zygmunt Bauman, with a specific focus on the idea of liquid modernity. Bauman contends that identity in contemporary societies is no longer predetermined but is, instead, a fluid and ever-evolving concept that is influenced by fluid social circumstances (Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 2005). This is particularly pronounced in digital media environments, where there is a constant need for identity to be performed, negotiated, and evaluated. This is particularly pronounced in the context of influencer culture, where there is a constant negotiation of multiple pressures.

The current research also makes an important contribution to the existing literature on the concept of digital identity and the phenomenon of influencer culture by exploring the fragmented dimensions of self-presentation in the context of the Pakistani setting. The current research also extends the theoretical debates surrounding the concept of identity and liquid modernity by exploring the potential of Bauman's theory for the analysis of the phenomenon of social media culture. The current research also highlights the potential of the concept of liquid modernity for the exploration of the dynamic and ever-changing dimensions of the concept of digital identity and the self as an ongoing and fragmented project.

Literature Review

Digital Identity and Social Media Self-Presentation

The rise of social media platforms has greatly influenced how individuals create their identities in contemporary digital culture. Unlike traditional forms of identity creation, which are often influenced by traditional social institutions such as family, community, and occupation, digital culture allows individuals to continually recreate their personal identities through their stories and visual performances in digital media (Ahmad, Rabi, Sardar, Khan, & Begum, 2025). Researchers have noted that social media platforms allow individuals to actively create their personal identities through selective self-presentation, narrative storytelling, and engaging with their audience (boyd, 2014; Marwick, 2015; Hussain, Danish, Rabi, & Rabi, 2025). This involves

strategic impression management, where individuals carefully manage their personal images to create a particular personal identity. This is particularly evident in influencer culture, where individuals actively create their personal identities to gain more followers, maintain audience engagement, and sustain their digital presence.

Research into the concept of digital self-presentation has shown that the development of identity in an online environment is influenced by the interplay of technology and social expectations. For instance, the use of Instagram and TikTok has been associated with the importance of visual storytelling and the use of algorithms for visibility and engagement with the audience (Hussain, Rabi, & Aziz, 2026). This has an impact on the development of the influencer's identity. For instance, the interactive structure of the platform has been shown to make the concept of identity performative. That is, the concept of identity is constantly displayed and negotiated in the context of the networked public. For this reason, the concept of digital identity may also be fluid and malleable.

Influencer Culture and Performed Identity

In this sense, influencer culture may be understood as a unique form of digital self-presentation in which individuals seek to convert their personal identity into cultural and economic capital. In most cases, influencers seek to integrate various aspects of their daily lives and representational style into a form of promotional culture that is deemed authentic and relatable to a wider audience. This form of culture has been characterized by various researchers as “micro-celebrity” culture in which individuals seek to construct a unique online identity to sustain their online presence and influence within digital culture (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2015; Khan et al., 2026). In this sense, authenticity becomes a significant aspect of influencer culture in which individuals seek to be perceived as authentic individuals and not purely promotional figures.

Nevertheless, studies have shown that authenticity is, in many cases, created through performance rather than spontaneous self-disclosure. For instance, influencers share their personal lives while, at the same time, engaging in professional branding and promotional activities (Abidin, 2016; Latif et al., 2026). Therefore, there is a blurring of boundaries between personal life and performance, where personal identity is transformed into a form of labor. As influencers strive to meet their audience needs while, at the same time, meeting their promotional obligations, their identity may take a multifaceted form (Tabasum et al., 2025). This, in turn, leads to the creation of fragmented identity narratives where various aspects of identity are presented in different contexts.

Fragmentation of Identity in Digital Environments

The idea of fragmented identity is an emerging theme in current discussions about digital culture. Social media sites allow people to express different aspects of their identity across various contexts, audiences, and platforms. Instead of having a singular identity, people have developed multiple personas that express their roles, interests, and emotions. Studies have suggested that digital media environments exacerbate the fragmentation of identity through the promotion of constant visibility and self-expression (Turkle, 2011; Papacharissi, 2012; Swati et al., 2026). When people transition across platforms and audiences, their online identity becomes disjointed or contradictory.

In the context of the world of influencers, fragmentation may take several forms. For example, an influencer may portray an idealized version of themselves in one context and vulnerability/emotional struggle in another. Another form may be the creation of different identities by the influencers and the adaptation of the stories they tell according to the context of the different digital spaces. For example, Instagram may focus more on aesthetics and lifestyle

branding, while TikTok may focus more on humor and storytelling (Rabi, Ahmad, Hussain, & Ullah, 2025). This may lead the influencers to change the way they perform their identities.

Emotional Vulnerability and Digital Storytelling

Another significant aspect of the construction of digital identity is the expression of emotional vulnerability in the form of an online narrative. Many influencers in recent times have been sharing personal struggles and emotions of vulnerability as part of their online narratives. For instance, the stories may include discussions of personal challenges or difficulties faced by the influencers (Rabi, Bibi, Mukhtiar, & Zahir, 2025). This creates the perception of an authentic and relatable digital identity. Researchers have suggested that the use of emotional storytelling is a way of developing intimacy and trust among the members of the online community.

However, there remains a concern regarding how such vulnerability in the narratives of influencers might function as a means of navigating the lines between emotional expression and strategic self-presentation (Rabi, Zahir, Aziz, Mukhtiar, & Bibi, 2025). Such narratives, as a means of emotional expression, might be seen as having a certain spontaneity to them; however, it is also important to recognize that such emotional expression might also occur within a context of digital mediation as a means of public (Rabi, Hussain, Ahmad, & Rabi, 2026). This, in turn, might serve to further reinforce a sense of fragmentation in terms of identity as a function of navigating emotional expression and strategic presentation as a means of gaining visibility as an influencer.

Identity Instability and Liquid Modernity

The idea of the fragmentation of digital identities can also be linked with other sociological discussions regarding the instabilities of identities in modern societies (Ullah, Rabi, Khan, & Ahmad, 2025). Zygmunt Bauman explains the modern concept of identity as no longer being based on stable social structures but as being characterized by fluidity and uncertainty. In the context of his theory of liquid modernity, Bauman explains that modern individuals are constantly required to redefine themselves based on the changing conditions of culture and society (Bauman, 2000). This has resulted in the development of identities that are flexible and adaptive but also instable and fragmented. The use of digital media has enhanced this phenomenon by requiring the constant display and assessment of identities by the audience. Social media sites are considered arenas of visibility where individuals are required to display themselves. Within the context of the culture of influencers, this has been observed as being particularly prominent as the influencers are required to constantly reinvent themselves in order to remain relevant. The fragmented identities discussed in the context of the culture of influencers are thus part of the larger phenomenon of modern identity as being constantly reinvented and as being characterized by fluidity and contradiction.

Theoretical Framework

Identity in Liquid Modernity

The current discourse on digital identity is closely associated with other sociological theories about the changing nature of identity in modern society. One of the most important theories in this respect is that proposed by Zygmunt Bauman under the term "liquid modernity." In this theory, Bauman suggests that in modern society, individuals are no longer able to rely upon traditional social structures that provided a sense of identity in the past, such as family ties, class identity, religious affiliations, and professional status. Therefore, identity is no longer a predetermined attribute but a process that individuals must constantly construct and reconstruct throughout their lives (Bauman, 2000). In liquid modern society, individuals must constantly seek to reconstruct and redefine their identity in accordance with changing cultural values, economic conditions, and social relations.

Such a transformation significantly changes the process of identity development. In the past, social contexts were marked by stable identities, as they were linked with stable social organizations. However, in the modern world, as proposed by Bauman, the modern human lives in a world filled with uncertainty, fluidity, and flux. In such a world, identity is flexible, allowing individuals to take on new roles as they seek new ways of adapting to the fluidity of the world. While the fluidity of identity allows for self-expression, there is insecurity as the modern human must constantly seek ways of establishing identity in the absence of stable social organizations. The development of digital communication technologies has exacerbated these conditions by offering spaces in which performance and display of identity are required. Social media sites are an important example of such spaces in which people are constantly encouraged to perform and display their identities. From the viewpoint of the theory of liquid modernity, the development of digital culture has resulted in the extension of liquid modernity as a form of modernity in which the performance and display of identity are required.

Identity as an Ongoing Project

One of the key aspects of Bauman's theoretical framework is that identity, in modern societies, is a project rather than a social position. There is a need for individuals to continually create their own narratives of identity, using symbols, styles of living, and social affiliations. There is a sense of agency, as well as pressure, to develop identities that are significant to individuals while, at the same time, seeking recognition from others (Bauman, 2005).

The digital media environment heightens this phenomenon by making the individual's identity visible and performative. Social media sites offer individuals the opportunity to use tools that enable the creation of images, sharing personal experiences, and direct engagement with the audience. This has led to the development of a sense of individuality among the members of the audience. Nevertheless, the competitive attention economy in the digital environment forces the individual to adjust in their identity. This has led to the development of a culture where the individual updates and transforms their identity based on the trends.

A good example of this phenomenon is the concept of influencers. The concept of an influencer is closely associated with the idea of visibility and engagement. Influencers are required to constantly generate fresh content that retains the interest of the audience and reinforces their digital identity. In this context, they develop an identity that is associated with personal expression and self-presentation. This concept reinforces the idea proposed by Bauman that the concept of modern identity is not static but dynamic.

Fragmentation of the Self in Digital Culture

Although Bauman's theory of liquid modernity has stressed the fluidity of human identity in modern society, his theory has also highlighted the instability and fragmentation that may arise because of this fluidity. For instance, the constant pressure of adapting one's identity to changing circumstances may lead to the fragmentation of the individual's self. That is, the individual may no longer have a unified and stable identity but rather a fragmented collection of roles and performances. The use of digital media may also contribute to the fragmentation of the individual's self because it allows the individual to address multiple audiences and contexts simultaneously. For instance, the individual may assume different aspects of their identities depending on the context of the social media platform they are using. For instance, an individual may assume a professional role in one context and a humorous or vulnerable role in another.

This is especially true in influencer culture because influencers are present in various online spaces and have different audiences in each space. Each online space has its unique culture and demands from users and influencers alike. This leads to a fragmented sense of self because influencers may have different strategies for presenting themselves in each space. For example,

Instagram may require a sense of aesthetic beauty and a high-end lifestyle, while TikTok may require a sense of humor and spontaneity.

Emotional Vulnerability and Identity Performance

Another aspect of identity fragmentation in digital environments is related to the rising visibility of emotional vulnerability. Influencers often tend to include emotional stories of personal struggles, emotional lives, and daily challenges in their narratives. This is often a strategy to enhance their audience relationship through a sense of authenticity and relatability. However, at a theoretical level, this also represents an interesting case of the interplay between emotional expression and strategic identity performance.

The study of Bauman on modern identity has indicated that emotional expression can also become part of a broader strategy of self-construction in modern societies. This is particularly so as individuals strive to maintain their personal identities in a context of uncertainty in terms of social environments. They might use narrative storytelling and emotional expressions to achieve a sense of connection and recognition. This is also visible in digital environments, as social media platforms tend to disseminate such strategies of emotional expression on a wide scale. Influencers might use emotional narratives to enhance their personal brand.

At the same time, the fact that these expressions of vulnerability are occurring in a public space means that there is a level of mediation involved, as the influencers may be revealing certain aspects of their vulnerability while keeping others hidden, in order to create a narrative that is authentic while still fitting in with the larger content strategy. This, in turn, adds to the idea of fragmented identity, as there may be several emotional narratives across several posts without there being a cohesive narrative.

Applying Bauman's Theory to Influencer Culture

Liquid modernity is a concept that can serve as a theoretical framework to explain the fragmented identities found in influencer culture. Influencers live in a digital world where there is a constant need to be visible, flexible, and connected to their audiences. To stay relevant in these environments, influencers must continually reinvent their identities through new stories, partnerships, and self-presentations. These processes result in identities that are fluid, multiple, and sometimes contradictory.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, the fragmented identities found in influencer culture, as presented in their narratives, are not just about individuals choosing their identities, but rather about how these fragmented identities reflect the social world. The fluidity of digital identity is a representation of the fluidity found in today's world, where individuals must constantly navigate their way through shifting cultural landscapes. Social media sites exacerbate these processes by providing spaces where identity is constantly performed and judged by their audiences.

Through the application of Bauman's theoretical perspectives, this research aims to shed further light on how global processes of digital modernity impact local identity construction. The fragmented identities presented within these influencer narratives show how individuals manage the multifaceted requirements of visibility, authenticity, and connectivity within these complex digital spaces. Thus, influencer culture is shown to offer a highly interesting case study of how identity is constructed as a fluid process within modern societies.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design to examine how Pakistani social media influencers develop their fragmented identities through their online narratives. Qualitative research is best suited to exploring the concept of identity in the context of digital media because it enables researchers to examine identity in depth, especially with regard to meaning, narrative, and

symbols found within social media content. Rather than using identity as a dependent variable, qualitative research enables researchers to explore how identity is constantly created, negotiated, and re-created through communicative processes in a digital context. In the context of social media influencers, identity is created through visual narratives, written content, and their interactions with their audiences. Therefore, a qualitative research design enables researchers to explore identity in depth, especially regarding how social media influencers present their multiple identities across multiple digital spaces, creating their fragmented identities.

The research is centered around the search for patterns of self-presentation that manifest the contradictions, emotions, and discontinuities in the stories of the influencers. Through the analysis of the patterns, the research aims at exploring the role of the digital environment in the creation of fragmented identities. The qualitative research also resonates with the theoretical framework of Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman's theory of liquid modernity highlights the fluidity and instability of modern identity.

The data for this research has been collected from the publicly available social media posts and content created by the influencers in the Pakistani context. The choice of the platforms is because they represent two of the most popular and prevalent social media environments in the context of Pakistan and are pivotal in the development of the concept of influencers. Both platforms offer the opportunity for the influencers to create digital narratives in the form of images and videos and engage with the audience through comments and responses. The data for this research consists of the posts created by the influencers within the five-month period from May to September 2025. The period has been chosen because it allows for the collection of a significant amount of data while also ensuring consistency in the period. Within this period, the influencers have created several posts that include updates, reflections, and responses for the engagement of the audience. The study also examines the engagement aspects such as captions and comments. These are important in terms of the context they offer for the way in which the concept of the influencer's identity is portrayed. With this approach, the research can examine the overall narrative structure that creates the fragmentation of the concept of the influencer's identity.

The sampling strategy adopted in this study is a purposive sampling strategy, which selects influencers according to their digital content showing their participation in performing their identity online. Purposive sampling is a common sampling strategy in qualitative studies, as it allows the researcher to study cases that are particularly important to the study (Patton, 2002). In this study, the sampling strategy has been conducted according to certain criteria, such as their presence on Instagram/Tik Tok, their content creation during a specific time frame, and their interaction with their audience through posts, comments, etc. The sampling strategy has chosen a variety of content types, such as lifestyle, fashion, humor, etc. This allows this study to investigate how fragmented identity performances occur through various types of digital content while focusing on influencer culture at the same time. This sampling strategy has been conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of how identity fragmentation occurs in a particular digital context.

Moreover, the choice of an influencer with a presence across different platforms will allow research to explore the dynamics of how identity may change across different online environments. This is because different platforms will have different communicational and visual discourses, and thus the influencer may change their self-presentation strategy. This is particularly relevant in the analysis of how fragmented identities may be created in social media discourses.

The study employs thematic analysis as an approach for exploring the patterns of identity fragmentation. Thematic analysis is an established qualitative research methodology that facilitates the exploration and interpretation of themes in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to this methodology as an effective tool for exploring data. The methodology has been considered appropriate for the analysis of the data because it facilitates the exploration of the explicit and implicit meanings of the data. The study employed the following steps for the analysis. First, the data was reviewed several times with the objective of developing an acquaintance with the narratives provided by the influencers. In this context, the study explored the way the influencers narrate their experiences and lifestyles and the way they engage with the audience. Second, the study employed the development of initial codes with the objective of exploring the significant elements associated with the performance of identity. For instance, the study explored the changes in tone, the presence of contradictions, emotions, and differences in the performance of identity.

In the third stage of the analysis, the identified codes were then aggregated to broader thematic categories that encompass different aspects of fragmented identity. Three major themes were derived from the analysis: the existence of contradictory personas in the stories of the influencers, the construction of emotional vulnerability in the stories created by the influencers, and the construction of fragmented stories across different social media platforms. These themes serve as the guide in analyzing the construction of fragmented and multidimensional identity by the influencers.

The research follows the guidelines of existing ethics for research conducted on publicly available online data. All the content for the research was retrieved from publicly available social media accounts of the influencers. No personal or restricted content was used for the research. The influencers under study are public figures who deliberately share their content with the public. However, the research is conducted on the performance of identity rather than personal opinions about the individual influencers. To conduct the research ethically, it is important for the research to prioritize the study of narrative structures and digital identity instead of personal characteristics of the individual influencers. Any personal content is discussed in a manner that highlights the broader cultural context instead of individual behavior. This is important for maintaining the dignity of the individual influencers while providing useful research.

Analysis

In this section, the construction of fragmented identities by Pakistani social media influencers will be discussed. For this purpose, the study will rely on the thematic analysis framework suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) for the study of the existing content by the influencers on Instagram and Tik Tok. The interpretation of the findings will be based on the theoretical framework suggested by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman's theory of liquid modernity has been used as a framework for the interpretation of the findings because it discusses the concept of fluid and dynamic identity.

In this context of analysis, the term fragmentation points to the situation in which the concept of identity is not experienced or portrayed as a singular entity but as a series of multiple and sometimes conflicting performances of identity. Influencers are situated in an environment that requires constant visibility and engagement with the audience and the ability to respond and adapt to shifting trends in culture. In this way, the narratives presented by the influencers are characterized by contrasting performances of identity as they move between different roles and emotions. Three significant aspects of fragmented identity are noted in the analysis of the influencers' narratives.

Contradictory Personas in Influencer Narratives

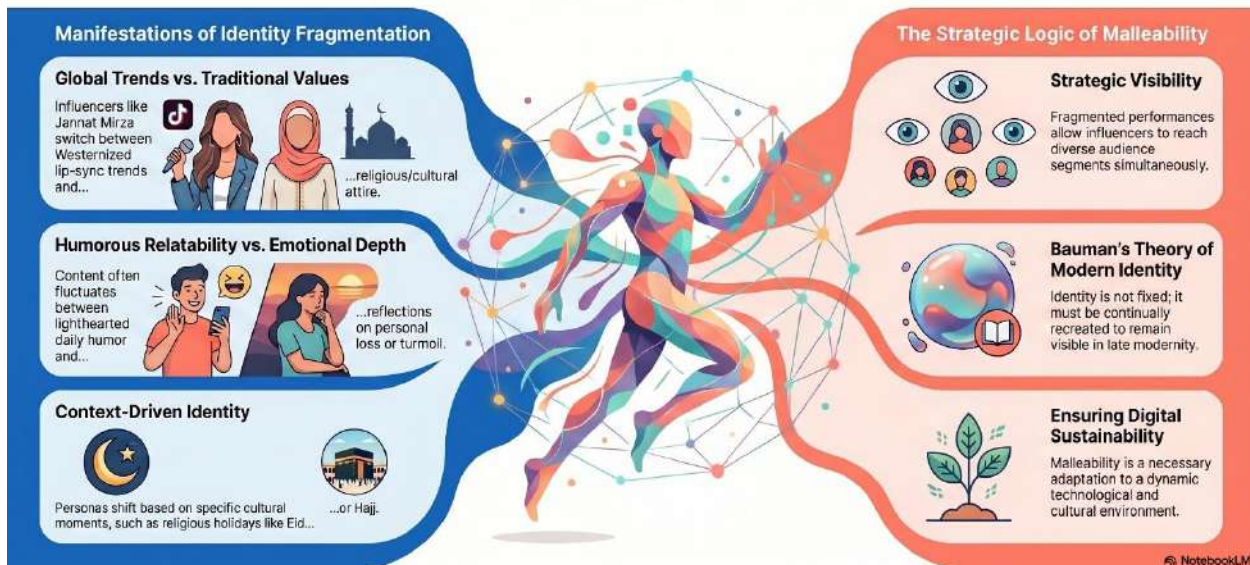
One of the most prominent manifestations of identity fragmentation for Pakistani influencers is the display of contradictory personas through their digital media. This is characterized by the frequent switching between contrasting identity roles based on the context of the posts they share, the expectations of their audience, and the cultural meanings assigned to specific moments. This leads to an online persona that is complex but also contradictory in nature. One such manifestation is the switching between globalized popular culture and traditional cultural or religious values. The digital media shared by the influencer personalities such as Jannat Mirza is a prominent example of this phenomenon. In most cases, Jannat Mirza is seen in playful lip-sync videos wearing Western clothing and participating in globalized digital media trends. This is consistent with the current cultural values of contemporary TikTok culture, in which humor, fashion, and relatability are important aspects for audience engagement. However, during cultural or religious celebrations such as Eid or Hajj, Jannat Mirza is seen wearing religious attire and emphasizing her spiritual identity and cultural affiliations.

A similar phenomenon can also be seen in the content of Romaisa Khan, as it also seems to fluctuate between humorous content meant for entertaining the audience and emotionally charged content. On one hand, Romaisa posts short videos that are meant for entertaining her audience by focusing on her daily experiences and playful interactions with her audience. This is an example of a humorous online personality that is meant for achieving the highest level of relatability. On the other hand, there are also posts by the same influencer that seem to reflect personal loss, emotional turmoil, or the challenges of being an adult. This is an example of emotionally charged content that is vastly different from the online personality of Romaisa.

From a theoretical point of view, such contradictions do not necessarily imply a lack of sincerity. They may, in fact, be a product of the very conditions of contemporary digital culture. As Bauman's theory of modern identity formation suggests, in the late modern world, people need to continually recreate themselves to remain visible and relevant in a rapidly changing social world. In this context, the very concept of identity is not fixed but malleable. The contradictory personas of the influencers may be a product of this very condition. They may not be insincere in their shifting roles and identities; rather, the very logic of the digital world may require them to be malleable and adaptable. In this regard, the fragmented identity performances of the influencers may be regarded as a strategic move. In this case, the presentation of different aspects of the self in different contexts may help the influencers reach different segments of the audience while remaining culturally relevant. Contradictory personas may be regarded as an important means through which the sustainability of digital identity is ensured in a dynamic environment of cultural and technological change.

Malleable Identities: The Strategic Fragmentation of Influencer Personas

Pakistani influencers navigate a "malleable" digital landscape by frequently switching between contrasting identity roles as a strategic response to shifting audience expectations.



Emotional Vulnerability and Digital Self-Disclosure

Another dimension of identity fragmentation can also be seen through moments of emotional vulnerability and personal self-disclosure in influencer narratives. Influencer culture, as mentioned earlier, can often revolve around glamour, lifestyle aspirations, and personal self-presentation; however, there are also moments wherein personal emotional vulnerability is shared between an influencer and their audience. Moments of emotional vulnerability can also create another dimension of identity performance, which can become complicated in relation to other more curated aspects of influencer culture. Influencers can sometimes share personal struggles, emotional exhaustion, and mental health reflections through their personal narratives. For instance, moments of emotional vulnerability can be seen in Romaisa Khan's personal reflections during religious occasions such as Ramadan, wherein she discusses themes such as family, loss, and healing. This can also become a departure from her more comedic personality as an influencer, wherein a new dimension of identity performance can also be seen.

Likewise, other influencers, such as Hira Attique, have also used the platform of social media sites for reflecting and commenting on the social expectations and pressures faced by women in modern society. In this type of narrative expression, the influencer takes the role of the reflective and critical self as they comment on issues such as societal norms and pressures. These types of narrative expression are quite different from the commercial and lifestyle-based expression that is more common with the concept of an influencer. The presence of emotional vulnerability in the narratives of the influencers creates the fragmentation of the digital self in two important ways. First and foremost, the presence of this vulnerability creates a disruption in the overall coherence of the influencer's public self by the inclusion of elements that do not fully fit with the more aspirational self that is typically promoted by the influencer. Secondly, the presence of emotional vulnerability highlights the tension between the authentic and the performative self that is characteristic of the concept of the influencer. Although this type of emotional vulnerability may represent the genuine personal experiences of the individual, it also represents a form of communicative strategy.

From the perspective of Bauman's theory, the above dynamics may be understood in relation to the concept of liquid intimacy. Emotional expressions in digital environments in contemporary

society have both personal and public aspects. The influencer shares aspects of their personal life but also transforms this into a means of maintaining public engagement. Thus, emotional expressions in digital environments have a hybrid character in relation to identity performances. Vulnerability does not necessarily solidify the influencer’s identity but contributes to its fragmentation through the additional layers of narrative that this creates in relation to the influencer’s public identity. The influencer is simultaneously an entertainer, an entrepreneur, and an emotionally expressive individual, resulting in a complex digital identity in the form of multiple identity performances.

The Fragmented Digital Self: Liquid Intimacy in Influencer Culture



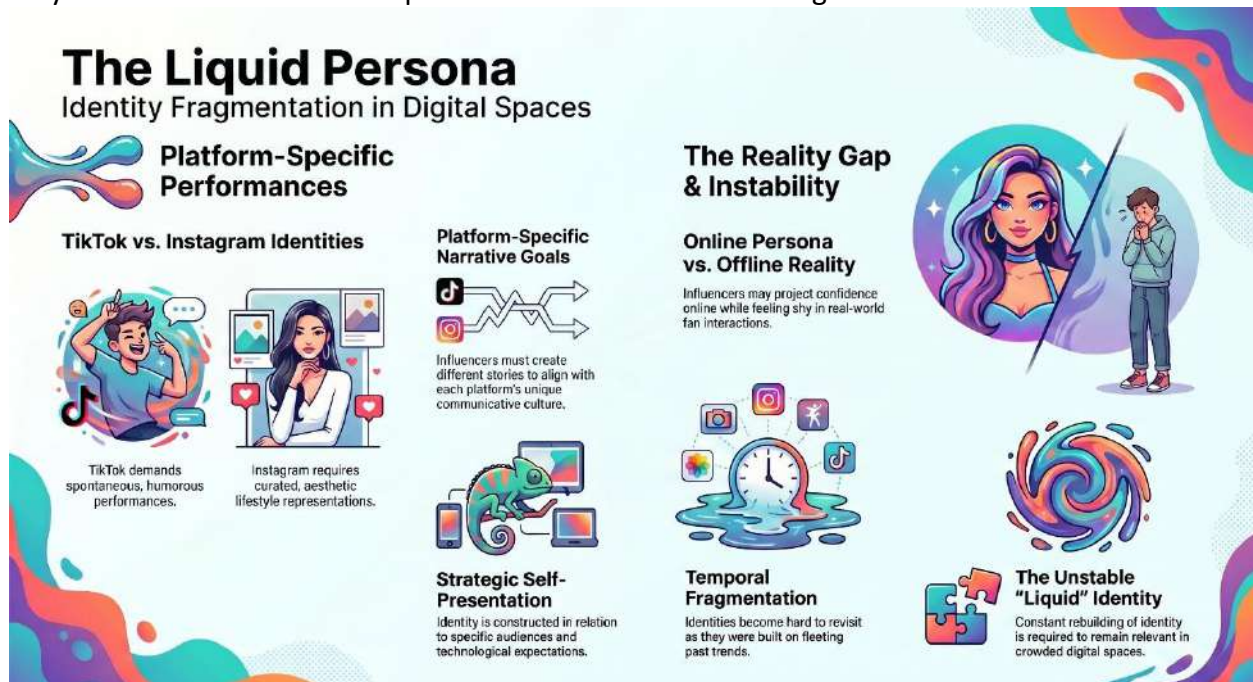
Fragmented Narratives Across Digital Platforms

A third type of identity fragmentation is based upon the way in which influencers create different stories across various social media platforms. Digital media such as Instagram and TikTok have unique communicative cultures and aesthetic representations that are unique to each platform. Therefore, it is necessary for influencers to create different identity performances that align with each platform’s unique expectations and representations. For example, TikTok often requires influencers to be spontaneous and humorous in their content creation and representation, while Instagram may require more aesthetic and lifestyle representations. Therefore, it is necessary for influencers to create different stories that align with each platform’s unique requirements and representations. In this case, identity fragmentation is based upon a fragmented digital identity in which various versions of identity are presented in various digital spaces.

Evidence of this fragmentation may also be seen in the statements of the influencers. For instance, Jannat Mirza discussed her past Tiktok videos in an interview for a podcast and said that it had become hard for her to watch her past videos because they were mostly created with the objective of joining the trends that were popular at the time. This is an example of the temporal aspect of the fragmentation of the digital identity. There is also the aspect of the difference between online and offline identity. For instance, Jannat Mirza also said in the same interview that although her videos show her as a confident and charismatic person, she feels shy around her fans. There is a likelihood that the confident and charismatic personality portrayed by the influencer may not be the same as the personality of the individual.

These fragmented narratives may be indicative of broader changes in the ways in which identity is constructed in contemporary society. The digital platforms offer a space in which individuals

may negotiate different versions of the self, each of which is constructed in relation to different audiences and different technologies. In the context of Bauman's notion of modernity, the identity constructed in such a space is necessarily unstable. The individual is required to continually adapt their self-presentational strategies in response to changing social conditions. In the case of the influencer, this instability is a core feature of their professional lives. The need to remain relevant in the crowded space of social media requires them to continually engage with new trends and new technologies. As a result, the influencer is required to continually rebuild their identity in response to the demands of the digital world. The fragmented narratives may thus be indicative of a response to the demands of the digital world.



Fragmentation as a Structural Feature of Influencer Identity

Moreover, the cumulative effect of these patterns that have been identified in this analysis suggests that identity fragmentation is not merely a coincidental effect of influencer culture but a structural aspect of digital self-presentation. Influencers present themselves in a social media environment that values novelty, emotional engagement, and flexibility. Such a context is more prone to generate multiple and contradictory identity performances. The contradictory identity performances, emotional vulnerability, and media-specific identity narratives are significant in developing a digital self that is constantly evolving and never static. Influencers move between cultural traditions and global trends, between authenticity and brand identity, and between online and offline experiences that are all adding more layers to identity fragmentation.


From the perspective of Bauman's sociological theory, the phenomenon of fragmentation is an expression of the general dynamics of contemporary society. In the liquid modern world, the concept of identity is not associated with any social structure but is instead a continuous process of self-creation. Individuals need to be in a state of permanent adaptation to the changing social environment, new technologies, and culture. The phenomenon of influencer culture adds to this process the core element of identity performance in the context of professional success. The phenomenon of fragmented identities is an expression of the general transformation of the concept of identity in the digital age. The phenomenon of identity performances of the influencers studied in the study is not associated with a unified identity but is instead a complex of interconnected identities. The phenomenon of identity performances is an expression of the

general dynamics of the unstable and changing world of modernity in the context of the social environments of the digital world.


FRAGMENTATION AS A STRUCTURAL FEATURE OF INFLUENCER IDENTITY

Identity fragmentation is not accidental in influencer culture— it is a structural outcome of the digital environment.


1. KEY PATTERNS IDENTIFIED



CONTRADICTIONARY IDENTITY PERFORMANCES
Influencers present different, even opposing, versions of self across contexts.



EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY
Sharing intimate feelings creates authentic connection but adds another layer to the fragmented self.



MEDIA-SPECIFIC IDENTITY NARRATIVES
Different platforms demand different selves, leading to multiple, platform-tailored identity stories.

2. MULTIPLE TENSIONS SHAPE IDENTITY



CULTURAL TRADITIONS

↔



GLOBAL TRENDS



AUTHENTICITY

↔



BRAND IDENTITY



ONLINE EXPERIENCE

↔



OFFLINE EXPERIENCE

↓

These constant shifts add more layers, resulting in a fragmented and evolving identity.

3. THE STRUCTURE OF IDENTITY FRAGMENTATION

MULTIPLE & CONTRADICTIONARY PERFORMANCES
Shifting between roles, personas, and expectations.

EMOTIONAL EXPOSURE
Vulnerability builds connection but never reveals the whole self.

PLATFORM-SPECIFIC SELVES
Each platform encourages a different version of "me".



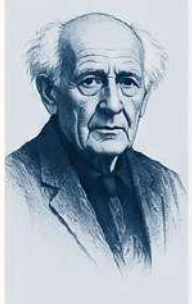
CONSTANT ADAPTATION
Responding to trends, audience expectations, and algorithmic changes.





LAYERED IDENTITY
Interwoven identities create a complex, never-static sense of self.

PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVE
Identity performance becomes a pathway to visibility and success.

The result: a digital self that is ever-evolving, never fixed.


4. THEORETICAL LENS: BAUMAN'S LIQUID MODERNITY





-  **LIQUID MODERN WORLD**
No stable structures—everything is fluid, uncertain, and temporary.
-  **IDENTITY AS A PROCESS**
Identity is not inherited; it is continuously created and recreated.
-  **PERMANENT ADAPTATION**
Individuals must constantly adjust to new social environments, technologies, and cultures.
-  **INFLUENCER CULTURE AMPLIFIES THIS**
Identity performance becomes central to visibility, relevance, and success.


“ In liquid modernity, identity is not discovered—it is performed, negotiated, and constantly reconstructed. — Zygmunt Bauman ”

5. KEY TAKEAWAY

 Influencer identity is not unified—it is a complex of interconnected and shifting identities.

 Identity fragmentation among influencers reflects the broader transformation of identity in the digital age.

 What we see is not a single "real" self, but a dynamic performance shaped by context, platforms, audiences, and culture.

 The phenomenon of identity performances is an expression of the general dynamics of an unstable and changing world of modernity in the digital environment.



Influencer identity fragmentation is a structural reality of digital modernity— fluid, performed, and always in the making.

Discussion

The aim of the present study is to explore the ways in which Pakistani social media influencers create their fragmented identities within the virtual world. The results of the study indicate that the identity of the social media influencer is not fixed or monolithic but is constructed through a dynamic process of negotiation in different cultural, emotional, and technological contexts. The discussion of the results of the study provides empirical evidence to support the notion that the concept of digital identity in contemporary society reflects the instability and fluidity of the concept of identity in the theory of liquid modernity proposed by Bauman.

One of the major insights that can be derived from this analysis is that, rather than being a mere consequence of influencers' activities, fragmentation is inherent to the process of self-presentation in the digital world. Indeed, influencers must operate in a highly competitive environment, where constant visibility is mandatory. In such a scenario, rather than trying to develop a unique identity, influencers must develop multiple personas that can accommodate different social requirements. Furthermore, the presence of contrasting personas, such as those between modernity and tradition, humor and seriousness, or glamour and modesty, is a further indicator of how influencers manage to deal with multiple social requirements. Such phenomena have strong implications within the sociocultural context of Pakistan, where traditionalism coexists with globalized digital cultures. Therefore, influencers must manage to reconcile cultural authenticity with modern self-presentation, thus creating fragmented identities that are highly contextual.

The results also point to emotional vulnerability as an important factor in understanding the fragmented digital identity. Influencer culture is often seen as a form of idealized self-presentation, but as shown through this study, there is a growing trend of emotional vulnerability in the narratives presented by social media influencers. This includes moments of emotional openness, such as talking about personal loss, mental health, or pressures of society. This adds a new dimension to their identity performance, but it also further complicates the influencer's identity. Emotional expression is both an authentic expression of their personal life and a performance to create relatability and engagement. This dual function of emotional expression can also be seen as an expression of liquid intimacy, as described by Bauman, in which personal relationships and emotional expressions are influenced by broader social and technological factors. Intimacy, as a concept, is mediated through visibility on social media, creating a new form of personal narrative that fragments their identity.

Another significant aspect of the study is related to the role of digital platforms in identity fragmentation. Instagram and TikTok, as communicative environments, promote different modes of self-presentation. Thus, influencers adjust their content according to the unique characteristics of each platform, which leads to a fragmented identity of influencers, where multiple versions of self-coexist. Furthermore, the differentiation between online and offline identity contributes to identity fragmentation. As shown through the reflections of influencers, their online identity, characterized by confidence, may not always reflect their offline personality, thus creating a dissonance between their self-presentation in the digital environment and their real self. This demonstrates the role of technology in self-presentation, emphasizing its impact on identity construction.

The above discussion of fragmentation also needs to be located within the larger context of the economic and cultural context of the world of influencers. The influencers are not just individual performers of self but also part of a digital economy that values attention, visibility, and engagement. There is a constant pressure of reinventing and diversifying the self because of the pressure of being relevant in the world of influencers. There is constant performance of different

aspects of the self by the influencers to reach out to different segments of the audience and to satisfy the requirements of different brands. This is also in line with the idea of Bauman that the concept of identity in the world of liquid modernity is also influenced by the world of consumer culture, where the individual must constantly reinvent and market the self.

At the same time, the study's findings also challenge the idea that fragmented identity is, in and of itself, a negative concept. Rather, it is argued that the idea of fragmentation must be understood as a form of adaptive identity that is particularly well-suited for the realities of digital modernity. This is evidenced by the ways in which the influencers can navigate multiple social worlds simultaneously, integrating aspects of tradition, modernity, personal experience, and global culture into their digital stories. This adaptive capability is, in turn, a reflection of a broader shift in the understanding of identity as a stable essence and instead as a fluid process. Fragmentation, in other words, can be seen as a form of resilience that allows the individual to adapt to the complexities of contemporary social reality.

However, it also raises questions about what this means in terms of individual well-being and social interactions. There is a sense in which this ongoing need to perform and manage multiple identities may have a negative impact upon well-being and a sense of disconnection between different aspects of self-being. There is recognition from influencers for the pressure involved in maintaining a high profile and delivering to meet audience demands. There is a sense in which there may be tensions between online and offline that cannot be fully captured within online narratives.

Additionally, there are cultural implications of this study's findings in terms of Pakistani culture. Influencers are cultural intermediaries who influence cultural understandings of identity, lifestyle, and culture. By projecting hybrid forms of identity that blend local culture with global culture, there is a transformation of cultural values and culture. The fragmented forms of identity that have been identified in this study reflect a cultural negotiation between tradition and modernity in Pakistani culture as a whole. Influencers negotiate cultural values in a way that reinforces them while also challenging them at the same time, thus indicating the importance of influencer culture as a cultural form.

From a theoretical point of view, the current study adds value to the existing framework proposed by Bauman, as it shows the applicability of the concept in a non-Western digital setting. Although the concept of liquid modernity was originally proposed in the context of Western cultures, the current study shows that the phenomenon of unstable identity in the Pakistani influencer culture is, in fact, a part of the same process, albeit with certain unique factors, such as the role of religion, family, and society, in the lives of the participants.

Thus, in brief recapitulation, it may be said that the above discussion has shown that fragmented identity is a significant aspect of influencer culture in the digital environment of today. The construction of identity by influencers is a complex process that involves a mix of contradictory identities, emotions, and online narratives. Such a process is a manifestation of a larger change in identity in the digital age in which identity is constantly being negotiated and rebuilt in accordance with changing social, cultural, and technological contexts. In this respect, this study's findings have provided a nuanced understanding of identity in digital environments in accordance with Bauman's theory.

FRAGMENTED IDENTITIES OF PAKISTANI SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A study through the lens of Bauman's Liquid Modernity

STUDY AIM



To explore how Pakistani social media influencers create their fragmented identities within the virtual world.



KEY FINDING


Influencer identity is not fixed or monolithic but is dynamically constructed through negotiation in cultural, emotional, and technological contexts.

 Cultural
  Emotional
  Technological


1. FRAGMENTATION IS INHERENT TO DIGITAL SELF-PRESENTATION

Influencers operate in a highly competitive environment that demands constant visibility. They develop multiple personas to meet different social expectations.


Contrasting Personas



Modernity vs. Tradition




Humor vs. Seriousness



Glamour vs. Modesty

Sociocultural Context of Pakistan



Traditionalism coexists with globalized digital cultures. Influencers reconcile cultural authenticity with modern self-presentation, creating fragmented identities that are highly contextual.

2. EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY COMPLICATES IDENTITY

Influencers share emotional vulnerability—loss, mental health, societal pressures.

This serves a dual function:

- Authentic expression of personal life
- Performance to build relatability & engagement



Emotional expression reflects Bauman's "liquid intimacy"—intimacy mediated through visibility and technology, fragmenting the self further.

3. ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Different platforms encourage different modes of self-presentation.

INSTAGRAM

Curated, aesthetic, lifestyle-oriented



TIKTOK

Short, trend-driven, spontaneous



Influencers tailor content to each platform, resulting in multiple versions of self.

ONLINE vs. OFFLINE IDENTITY



Online Identity: Confident, idealized, curated

Offline Identity: Real, private, often different

This dissonance shows how technology shapes self-presentation and leads to identity fragmentation.

4. ECONOMIC & CULTURAL PRESSURES

Influencers are part of a digital economy that values attention, visibility & engagement.

 Attention
  Visibility
  Engagement
  Income

Constant pressure to reinvent, diversify and perform different aspects of self to:

- Reach diverse audience segments
- Meet brand expectations
- Stay relevant in a fast-changing space

In line with Bauman: in liquid modernity, identity is shaped by consumer culture—the self must be constantly reinvented and marketed.

5. FRAGMENTATION: ADAPTATION, NOT JUST A PROBLEM

Fragmented identity is an adaptive strategy for digital modernity.



Influencers navigate multiple social worlds simultaneously.



They integrate tradition, modernity, personal experiences, and global culture.



This adaptability shows resilience and ability to thrive in complex realities.

BUT, CHALLENGES REMAIN

- Pressure of performing multiple identities can impact well-being.
- Tension between online and offline selves can create disconnection.
- Constant need to meet audience demands leads to stress.


6. CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN PAKISTAN

Influencers act as cultural intermediaries.

 Shape identity, lifestyles & cultural norms
  Blend local & global cultures
  Negotiate, reinforce and challenge values

Fragmented identities reflect the ongoing cultural negotiation between tradition and modernity in Pakistani society.

7. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION



Extends Bauman's Liquid Modernity theory to a non-Western digital context.

Identity instability in Pakistani influencer culture is part of the same global process, influenced by unique factors like religion, family, and society.

8. CONCLUSION

- Influencer identity is complex, fragmented and constantly negotiated.
- Built through contradictory personas, emotions and platform-specific narratives.
- Reflects broader transformation of identity in the digital age—fluid, dynamic and context dependent.
- This study offers a nuanced understanding of digital identity through the lens of Bauman's Liquid Modernity.

“ In the digital age, identity is not a fixed essence, but a fluid process of becoming—constantly negotiated, performed, and reimagined. ”

Conclusion

In this regard, this current research aimed to explore the fragmentation of digital identity in the context of influencer culture in Pakistan by examining the ways in which digital influencers present and perform multiple and contradictory versions of their digital identity across various social media platforms. This current research used qualitative thematic analysis to examine the ways in which digital identity is constructed and performed by digital influencers in Pakistan. The research aimed to demonstrate that digital identity is not an essential or singular concept but rather a dynamic and constantly evolving process that is subject to cultural context, audience expectations, and platform-specific requirements. This current research also aimed to demonstrate that the digital identity constructed and performed by digital influencers in Pakistan is subject to the characteristics of liquid modernity as conceptualized by Zygmunt Bauman. This means that digital identity in the context of influencer culture in Pakistan is characterized by fluidity, instability, and constant reconstruction in response to changing social and technological conditions.

On a broader level, this study contributes to the understanding of digital identity, especially by emphasizing fragmentation as a feature of identity, rather than perceiving it as a symptom of incoherence or even inauthenticity. In the sociocultural context of Pakistan, influencers must deal with intricate balances between tradition and modernity, selfhood and performativity, local identity and global recognition. Thus, their fragmented identity performances show how individuals manage multiple social realities in networked digital spaces. At the same time, there is a need to think about the viability of such identity performances, especially regarding emotional well-being and the pressure of continuous performativity. This study, by extending Bauman's theory to a non-Western, digital space, not only shows the global validity of liquid modernity, but also emphasizes the significance of cultural specificity in identity construction. Future studies can expand on these ideas by examining how audiences receive these identity performances, how identity changes over time, and how socio-economic and gender factors affect identity construction in digital spaces.

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