

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371306985>

Beautiful, Sexy, and Happy Celebrities: Perfect Mothers or Instamoms

Article · January 2023

CITATIONS

3

READS

440

1 author:



Ebru Güzel

fenerbahçe university

15 PUBLICATIONS 98 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Volume 25
Issue 3 *8th World Conference on Women's
Studies Special Issue: Global Women's
Precarity, Borderlands, Decoloniality, and
Transformative Change*

Article 8

April 2023

Beautiful, Sexy, and Happy Celebrities: Perfect Mothers or Instamoms

Ebru Güzel
Istanbul Fenerbahçe University, Turkey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Güzel, Ebru (2023) "Beautiful, Sexy, and Happy Celebrities: Perfect Mothers or Instamoms," *Journal of International Women's Studies*: Vol. 25: Iss. 3, Article 8.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss3/8>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

Beautiful, Sexy, and Happy Celebrities: Perfect Mothers or Instamoms

By Ebru Güzel¹

Abstract

The development of information technologies and the Internet has created an enormous economy. In line with this digital transformation, cultural change has come about. Global companies create new trends focused on vanity and pleasure in social media that follow the patriarchal capitalist ideology. Motherhood has also been included in this process, and “perfect motherhood,” as an extension to new generation motherhood, has been popularized on social media. Perfect motherhood requires mothers who are responsible for looking after children and the home to also be successful in their professional and personal lives while looking beautiful, young, chic, sexy, and fit. Recently the celebrification of motherhood, which can be seen on Instagram, became another quality added to the requirements of being a perfect mother. Heightened during the new post-COVID times, the “Instamom” phenomenon conceals the fact that women are driven to more states of increased precarity and vulnerability, alongside unemployment, exploitation, and ecological and economic crises. This study analyzes the perfect motherhood myth through Instamom case studies and attempts to show how Instamoms are perceived by mothers and mothers-to-be. By adopting the digital ethnography method, 30 Instamom accounts (with followers ranging from 135,000 to 3.5 million) in Turkey were observed for a year via passive participant observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Instamoms and 12 follower mothers and mothers-to-be. In conclusion, it was discovered that Instamoms were perceived by their followers as exemplars of knowledge and beauty. Furthermore, the study revealed that both groups were part of the celebrification and branding process, and those who shared knowledge based on experience were considered sincere and created a bigger impression on their followers. It was also discovered that when sharing on social media, these Instamoms attempted to look their best. Moreover, Instamom accounts that prominently use children to increase viewer interaction demonstrate issues related to the “commercialization of childhood.” Tangible advice for transformative change is included at the end of the research.

Keywords: Instamom, Perfect motherhood, Beauty, Celebrification, Children, Turkey

¹ Ebru Güzel is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Head of the New Media and Communication Department at Istanbul Fenerbahçe University. She is the author of three books, including *Eşikteki Çocuk #tween* (2019), which won a national book award; *Yeni Öncüler: Türkiye'de Toprağa Dönüş Hareketi ve Sağkalım* (2020), which won a national and an international book award; and *Janus: Güzelliğin "Çirkin" Yüzü* (2022). Her main areas of research include communication anthropology, gender/women/children, beauty, and social media. E-mail id: ebru.guzel@fbu.edu.tr

Introduction

Due to generalized, global patriarchal expectations regarding the role of women in child-rearing, society promotes the ideal of the perfect mother for women to aspire to in their personal development (Wilborn, 1976). In the post-COVID economic crisis, the unpaid, temporary, and precarious labor of motherhood is extensively shadowed, and women are encouraged to express and experience motherhood through new technologies. Due to the flexible labor policies brought about by neoliberal economic structures, various forms of insecurity, and the reduction in social services, women in Turkey are being encouraged to find cheap and unstable work in line with market needs, including care services and maternity-related activities (Kerestecioğlu, 2017). Sexualized posts that push against the supposedly holy sanctity of motherhood are tolerated on Instagram because it fulfills some of the functions of motherhood. While this new type of motherhood is realized through the Instagram phenomenon, the social, symbolic, and economic capital that celebrity status brings is considered to be something that is desirable for mothers and mothers-to-be.

Mothers, who are highly interactive as individual personal brands, also collaborate with beauty, cosmetics, clothing, toys, diet, and food industries and share views into their private spaces such as the bedroom. Furthermore, during self-exhibition, they also explicitly use their baby's or child's bodies and faces (Abidin, 2015; Archer & Kao, 2018). This social issue, which has been conceptualized as the instrumentalization of motherhood, has transformed mothers and children into a commodity. According to Kojok, this rising Instamom phenomenon contributes to the exploitation of child labor: "By drawing on the increasing use of children as a means of monetization on social media through the Instamom, I assert an expanded definition of child labor where in the immaterial work of children via their mere visibility on digital platforms is understood as exploitative." (2022:1). And an article in *USA Today* asserts that "[i]n question are those who make a significant portion of their family's income from their children's participation in paid content" (Johnston-Legg, 2021). These combined trends deserve further investigation, as they exponentially expand the posters' impacts as they disseminate their messages across the borderless Instagram world.

This study analyzes the myth of perfect motherhood through Instamoms via the digital ethnography method, identifying the characteristics of Instamoms, how they perceive themselves, and how they are perceived. Thus, 30 profiles that appear on Instagram as influencer mothers were observed for a year using passive participant observations. In-depth semi-structured interviews were held with six Instamoms and twelve mothers and mothers-to-be that followed them on social media. The data were divided into themes and interpreted accordingly. In the literature section, motherhood's evolution from blogger to Instamom is discussed, along with personal branding, beauty, and celebrification—which are influential in the image formation of Instamoms—are examined.

From Blogger Mothers to Instamoms

The discussion of whether motherhood is biological/instinctive or is constructed historically, culturally, or ideologically has a long history in feminist literature. Simone de Beauvoir (1956), the pioneer of motherhood discussions, considered motherhood an institution imposed on women by various systems and argued that motherhood must be separated from the myth of holiness. Radical feminists like Ann Oakley (1972), Shulamith Firestone (1972), Kate Millet (1977), and Betty Friedan (2001), who rejected biological motherhood, stated that motherhood was a cultural structure that restricts the freedom of women. However, feminist researchers like Adrienne Rich (1995), Nancy Chodorow (1978), and Sara Ruddick (1980)

opposed this view. They argued that motherhood was an experience that liberated women and created a different and positive value. After the 2000s, the discourse of “intensive mothering,” a form of child-centered parenting, was added to these discussions (Arendell, 2000). D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein stated, “Momism is the normative or ideal ‘good’ mothering in affluent western countries, especially in America” (O'Brien-Hallstein, 2015).

Douglas and Michaels (2004) conceptualized the new generation of motherhood as “the new momism,” which appears to be pro-feminist because it gives women the power to determine their destinies. However, there are contradictions in this ideal because it subjugates mothers to children. Furthermore, they stated that the templates of perfection are imposed on women via the media: “The insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

Additionally, new-generation mothers operate as both therapists and smart consumers; they are always expected to be beautiful, well-kept, and fit (Morales, 2004). For this reason, motherhood-themed websites, Facebook groups, “mommy blogger,” and “Instamom” pages were created, providing many mothers with information about what to do and what to pay attention to in the vast world of motherhood-centered consumerism. Mom bloggers objected to perfect motherhood by writing about their failures as mothers (Arnold & Martin, 2016), which they posted on the Internet (Petersen, 2015). New mothers and mothers-to-be have started to use websites, blogs, and social media accounts as resources, since motherhood is being reconstructed through cultural ideologies based on capitalism, patriarchy, and technology (Rothman, 1994) under the imposition of good, sacred, ideal, intense, or perfect motherhood. Joining the blogosphere has been interpreted as a new tool for mothers to become visible in the public sphere (Lopez, 2009).

With increased social media use after 2010, mommy bloggers started accounts on social media sites such as Instagram and were defined as “Instamoms,” an abbreviation of “Instagram-mothers” (Howorth, 2017). Instamoms that have risen to celebrity-status through their social media reach are characterized by perfect beauty, a fit and sexy appearance, luxury brands, and a luxury lifestyle. It is argued that Instamoms, interpreted as an idealistic and romanticized image of motherhood, can create unrealistic expectations, which causes parents who cannot meet these expectations to feel guilt and anxiety about their parental competence (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017). Since the goal is to reach a wider audience and become famous, Instamoms see Instagram as a source of income, especially with the rise of online marketing.

On the other hand, the process of digital transformation has increased in the post-COVID era, and mothers have been impacted by the new regulations. Although uncertainty and insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in changes and regulations, the effects continue in post-COVID times, resulting in a home-based lifestyle that largely affects women. The Instamom identity may appear as a reward for mothers’ domestic labor because it may seem easy to achieve with home-produced content. However, very few of the millions of users are able to generate an income. Moreover, it could be argued that Instamoms, who spend their earnings on beautification, are obliged to please their followers through a temporary, competitive, and precarious identity.

Personal Branding and Instamoms

Through the concept of “personal brand,” Tom Peters (1997) states that everyone is a potential brand. Roffer (2000) states that a brand strategy needs to be created with distinct features, such as career goals, talent, and image. Labrecque et al. (2010) also contend that personal brands are shaped by the contents and interactions created with different techniques in digital

environments. Thanks to personal branding activities, which can be summarized as people marketing their image to their target audience on blogs, personal web pages, or social networks, Instamoms have become individual brands. They also use their spouses and children in their posts to increase the credibility of the advertisement by enriching it with their experiences.

Instamoms have become popular in online marketing because they have gained the trust and sincerity of users and can reach larger audiences faster and with less cost. Since the demand for tested products is high, children have also become a part of advertising content. Parents' excessive use of children in social media, also known as "sharenting," is debated because it violates children's right to privacy. New draft laws have been adopted in some countries to prevent this violation. However, children are now marketing products and services through personal branding strategies and self-representations (Abidin, 2015) inherited from their mothers. Now, more children are mastering self-working, entrepreneurship, and self-branding because of the attractiveness of wealth and fame (Güzel, 2020) as they increase their personal brand status, fame, and Instagram followers.

Beauty and Celebrification

For Instamoms, the essential condition of the perfect mother is beauty. The presence of masculine power authorities in fields such as science, art, economy, and media has undoubtedly shaped beauty ideals, which women have pursued throughout time. The giant companies of the patriarchal capitalist system that have transformed into the beauty industry are marketing a standard of beauty that may be impossible to reach.

According to Foucault (2007), increased "body" value is related to the growth and settlement process of bourgeois hegemony. In a present dominated by bourgeois body politics, the issue is what the body represents in cultural, historical, economic, and political terms. As Wolf asserts, "[t]he contemporary economy depends right now on the representation of women within the beauty myth" (1991). Ultimately, beauty ideals should also be seen as a power mechanism tool because the arrangement of the female body according to the new beauty standards increases the profitability of the beauty industry.

Women are standardized with the unwritten command to correct their flaws immediately to have a perfect image, reputation, and prestige. The pathological understanding of beauty is relentlessly emphasized along with fame through social media. In the influencer economy, as values that make the personal brand shine, beauty and fame have turned into a model that provides power, status, and financial gain. Therefore, Instamoms who have turned their online identities into a business model continue the celebrification process through their millions of followers. As Driessens notes, "[h]ere celebrification captures the transformation of ordinary people and public figures into celebrities, whereas celebritization is conceptualized as a meta-process" (2013). In this process, the image of the perfect mother is kept alive through beauty and fame, which inevitably intersects with and promotes the commodification of motherhood.

Method

This research used the digital ethnography method, which investigated the myth of perfect motherhood through Instamoms and analyzed the perception of Instamoms among mothers and mothers-to-be. Unlike classical ethnography, digital ethnography allows the researcher to follow the participants online and observe their social behaviors and interactions (Androutsopoulos, 2008). Digital ethnography uses the Internet as its research realm where data is obtained by observing and examining online content, such as websites, blog pages, digital videos, and digital pictures (Scaramuzzino, 2012).

The sample group for the research consists of 30 Instamom accounts, in which users introduce themselves as a “mother” on their Instagram profile and whose number of followers varies between 135,000 and 3.4 million. The study began in April 2020, and the first data were obtained through the passive participant observation technique. The passive participatory method in digital ethnography is used when the researcher follows the event and phenomenon from afar, and other people do not know about their research-gathering presence (Spradley, 1980).

The second stage of the research included reaching out to Instamoms through the direct message function within Instagram. A semi-structured interview was conducted with six people who agreed to participate in the research. A total of 18 people, including 12 mothers and mothers-to-be who followed 30 Instamoms, were interviewed for four months. The participants were between 29 and 49 years old; 12 were active Instagram users, 11 were university graduates, and five were employed. The identities of all participants, including the public account holders, were kept confidential, and the role of the researcher was limited within the framework of ethical rules.

Passive Participant Observation Data

Of the Instamoms profiles, two are described as influencers, three as writers, four as well-known people, four as content creators, two as athletes, four as health/beauty promoters, two as actors, two as designers, one as an academician, one as a personal blogger, one as a musician, and one as a beauty guru. Twelve of the Instamoms own a company/brand. Among the Instamoms that earn advertising revenue, only five continued their regular jobs. Instamom profiles generally contain links, contact numbers, and e-mail addresses of their brands or companies. In the majority of the accounts, “Xmom,” “mommy,” and “mom of 2/3,” etc., are written; and in all the accounts, children's posts are visible to viewers.

Apart from the four accounts that post on business, art, culture, and scientific subjects, the others post about beauty, cosmetics, fashion, clothing, Pilates, yoga, recipes, and daily life. Content emphasizing the meaning and significance of the day—such as Mother's Day, birthdays, new year, religious or national holidays, femicides, terrorist incidents, and disasters—is also frequently shared. Symbols such as Atatürk (considered the father of the Turks), the Turkish flag, Christmas trees, pajamas, books, coffee cups, and pets are commonly shared. It was observed that only one mother, who did not receive advertising content and did not share her summer vacation, decorated her page with images and shared images of her child three times a year. Except for a few mothers, most Instamoms share holiday poses, and some share bikini poses with their children. Among the Instamoms, some seem to need to share every moment while others seem to have a sensitivity to over-sharing, using their children primarily for story sharing that automatically disappears after 24 hours.

Instamoms widely use Instagram effects and filters in their stories; more than half of them advertise products and generally have a similar look with voluminous lips, thick eyebrows, slanting cheekbones, and coiffed hair when they post sexy images wearing full makeup. In truth, the content of these posts resembles Hollywood celebrities. Instamoms typically share photos of themselves trying the products they advertise and share a link that leads to the brand, which serves as the main method to direct followers to purchase various items. Depending on the duration and content of the advertising campaign, they successfully manage influencer marketing ad activities, such as event participation and grouping in featured stories.

The popularity and reach of these Instamoms cannot be overestimated, as there are accounts with 16 million followers in the USA, 1.3 million in Germany, 1.2 million in Italy, 4.2 million in Korea, 4.6 million in Spain, 354 thousand in Sri Lanka, and 15 million in Russia. Similar content

was found in these accounts that ranked first in each country (Starngage.com, 2023). The Russian Instamom account particularly includes many indicators of the “perfect mother” identity.

Apart from Instamoms, who showcase their love for their spouse, take care of their children, do arduous tasks easily, or promote their advertising content like supermodels, some Instamoms share simple and down-to-earth content but those are among the minority. This distinction can become blurred when creating a caring, hard-working, and happy image. Moreover, perfect motherhood is also encouraged by the Instamoms followers with emojis such as hearts, applause, kisses, and compliments.

In-Depth Interview Data

The Impossibility of Perfection

All of the interviewed mothers, whether anonymous or public, emphasized that they try to adapt to the responsibilities that come with motherhood. They also mentioned that they could not experience self-worth while carrying out these duties. The interviewees interpreted motherhood as “giving up on oneself” due to the difficulty of gender roles and said that they overcame these difficulties thanks to their feelings of love and compassion for their families. Instamom 1 noted that “... it [motherhood] had unexpected aspects, so it is difficult,” while Instamom 2 said “I'm not working, but still, no matter how much I love it, with the second child it's overwhelming. I don't exist.” In addition to the prevalence of feelings of love and compassion for their families, the fact that unrewarded care causes gender inequality (Rich, 1955) was expressed in the discouraged statements of mothers.

Home-based jobs with no security that began with COVID-19 have been shaped by technological hegemony. During this process, the definition of home was altered, and women were more confined to their homes. Due to this confinement, communication technologies have now become a source that puts women in a race to achieve the perfect mother image. This can be linked to why motherhood on Instagram has been touted as an entrepreneurial project and turned into an opportunity. In the words of Follower 2, motherhood is perceived as a profession on Instagram because it provides economic and social gain, which can be heard in her statement, “Now motherhood means being famous. After becoming mothers, their careers shine. Their paths are wide open. I am both a mother and a woman, I have a job, I am social! Gifts, money, free holidays... It pays dividends, that's why it is popular!” All of these statements lead to questions about the happiness brought to content creators as well as the role and social impact of influencers.

According to Marwick (2015), with its non-egalitarian nature, Instagram reinforces the existing celebrity hierarchies, where iconographies of glamor, luxury, wealth, good looks, and connections are digitally rewritten. Marwick points out that the element that “stirs the desire” of users is the “lifestyles of the rich and famous” marketed on Instagram—an image that is generally an unreachable limit. The chance of becoming a phenomenon increases for those mothers who perform perfectly during the celebrification process and amaze other women by showing them that they have something that their followers do not. In intense motherly self-exhibitions, the praise of “perfection” bestowed by their followers keeps Instamoms motivated. Consider Instamom 1's complex post:

My followers write, ‘you are an excellent mother,’ but I don't think I am at all. When they see this from Instamoms, they think it's the definition of a perfect mother. However, the more you seek perfection, the more imperfect you become. This race fuels consumption. In my opinion, it is a circle of chaos to make up for the lack of perfection!

In this response, the Instamom comments on the relentless, futile, and self-perpetuating cycle of striving for perfection. However, a question remains: is the Instamom authentically concerned with this issue or merely performing humility?

Social media platforms thrive on idleness, watch-time, attention-drawing entertainment, and the transformation of users into subscribers with each new application. Although users may criticize social media, they cannot stay away from it and exhibit similar digital behaviors. For example, Instamom 1 desires to look perfect in posts that contradict her words. Follower 1 is aware of a falsification of the truth when Instamoms exit the delivery room with perfect makeup, regain their former appearance while still in the puerperium, happily breastfeed, and are stylish at all hours of the day. Follower 1 states with frustration:

Is a house with children ever tidy? You can't even find one of their socks. When they sleep, there is no break so you can sleep too. Everyone knows that these are not true. Maybe you know more than them, but you see them as an expert. Even if you don't follow them, you see them in the discover section. She can serve a candlelight dinner to her husband, everything is perfect, but there is no such thing. Do I not do the same thing? I shared a photo of my husband, me, and my child; the pose says I'm happy, but we were in a fight.

Her need to show that she has the ideal family even when in a fight shows that Instamoms influence her.

However, for followers who are stuck between what is real and fake, Instamom images fuel great insecurities. Vulnerable mothers overwhelmed by the perfect presentation of Instamoms live in a constant dilemma. The insecurity creates depression for followers who see the contrast between their reality and what is being advertised as the norm. In the global post-COVID economic conditions, which are becoming more strained, fairy tale Instalives do not reflect the truth. Consider Instamom 3's post:

Everyone asks how you get it all done, if you plan the day, how I arrange the house cleaning, the market, dinner, the hairdresser, my child, etc. I'm also launching a new brand. But I don't think it's a fairy tale. Anyone who looks like that has a team in the background.

As seen above, Instamom 3 also successfully fulfills gender roles in her seemingly perfect life. The narrative exemplifies that childcare and motherhood, which radical feminists reject, are feasible to balance and perfect. Seeing gender roles as normal or a cultural constant that no one can change makes internalization easier (Butler, 2008). Perhaps the need to fill the void highlighted in Instamom 1's statement turns some women into superwomen.

Sometimes, the silent agreement between spouses fuels the freedom given to women due to the contribution made to the family finances by being a celebrity mom. Morales (2004) states that Instamoms fulfill most of the roles expected of a mother, such as being a therapist, caregiver, and smart consumer all while being fit and well-groomed. Similar to Instamom 3, who stated that there is not one photo of her not wearing a well-thought outfit on Instagram and that she does not neglect her child, Instamom 2 is also an influencer that shares the same indicators: "I'm one of the first in this business, I had a lot of followers. I realized it was drawing me in like a blackhole. When I had my second child, I decided to freeze it." This Instamom states that as someone who has turned her online identity into a personal brand, she could not live in the moment because of the increased responsibilities that came along with motherhood and the content-sharing demands of social media.

She admits that she could not stand the “meta-process” in the celebrification stage mentioned by Driessens (2013). Douglas and Michaels’ (2004) expression of perfect motherhood, which seems to give freedom to women yet subjugates them to the child, is revealed here through the excessive burden brought on by social media presence. Moreover, embellishing motherhood with new images on social media before being freed from the problems brought by traditional gender roles leaves women in a secondary position under the guise of perfection created by consuming only commoditized motherhood.

The Two Faces of Instamoms: Knowledge and Beauty

The interviewers evaluated Instamoms and placed them in two groups: “informative” and “existing only with their beauty/appearance.” Follower 3 noted, “[t]here are two kinds of mothers: Those who move from the blog to Instagram and famous beauties ... their message is: be perfect.” Those in the first group are usually mothers who previously owned a blog. As Lopez (2009) stated, these mothers, who report their motherhood experiences on their blogs, are now part of the public sphere with the Instamom identity. However, these mothers also feel the need to emphasize that they are popular for more than their appearance: “If it happens with the way you look, beautiful clothes, and luxury things, then they want to continue, but I don't need to bother. People loved me for the useful information I gave them” (I5). Instamom 5 notes the tangible benefits she offers to her followers that extend beyond the superficial image elements.

On the other hand, Instamom 4 oscillates between sharing the ideal content that is expected of her and criticizing the perception of beauty imposed by the system: “A part of me likes to show off on social media, to dress well and to be liked. Another part of me hates it.” Instamom 1, a former beauty queen who garners tens of thousands of likes for her posts, also complains about the same problem. Instamom 1 asserts, “I try to give a message: You follow me because of my physique, but that's not all I am,” suggesting that she does not want to be perceived as someone who is trying to achieve success with her beauty alone.

As a result, whether they are a knowledge-based content creator or trying to create or highlight their fame with their beauty, both Instamom groups aim to upload the best photos on social media. Instamom 6 claims “I became a more photogenic mother who could pose and play with filters. I think Instagram has influenced us all.” Hence social media has transformed women's perceptions of ideal beauty and motherhood.

Organic Accounts, Fake Followers, and Interaction

Mothers with anonymous Instagram accounts state that the feature they look for in the person they follow is “sincerity.” In digital language, whether for information, parody, beauty, or products, they define an Instamom account they find sincere as an “organic account,” as in the following comment from Follower 1:

There is a mother with twins; I say, “let's see what she shared today.” She posts when there is a gift or ad. These are not sincere. There is this woman, X, for instance, who shares information. If I were a new mom now, I would benefit from her; I also learned about my panic attack from the Internet.

Follower 1’s statement highlights that the Internet and social media are reliable sources. However, it should not be forgotten that there are mothers on these platforms who are not experts in the subject but only share their experiences.

Some mothers say that they became conscious through social media due to reasons such as the commercialization of health, political polarization, and disinformation. Follower 6 explains, “I look to social media to raise awareness because the news is old school, and we now have social media.” It is thought that there is a knowledge gap, especially concerning the field of health. Review Instamom 5’s perspective:

What percentage of people can access a doctor? But everyone has a cell phone. Can you take more than 15 minutes of a doctor's time? It is so valuable to find experience and theory together. I write to my doctor friend about a subject that is beyond me, and I do not act like a doctor. I write about the most recent research in America, combined with my own experiences. But I will never answer questions about a drug. Even doctors have been following me for the past eight years because I have protected that fine line well.

Considering that well-educated women are in the minority in this group (Instamom 5 said she started her undergraduate education in psychology), and that the demand for information from social media is high, mothers’ feelings of trust are open to exploitation.

Adapting to the slippery grounds of the new order, Instamoms can become dangerous factors because of their influence upon their followers. Follower 10 presents a tale of warning: “A friend of mine was very fond of this famous mother with twins. She was following her like crazy. She immediately had a second baby because she wanted to hold one in one arm and the other in the other. With a thousand regrets, she is depressed now.” The interaction power of Instamoms, which are seen to influence mothers and mothers-to-be, is not left to chance and is analyzed by companies. Organic accounts are preferred because the sales volume desired by the brand cannot be achieved in accounts where followers are purchased. In Instagram jargon, an account with fake followers is called a “fake/imposter account.”

Therefore, brands are also looking for interaction power to gather increased sales. Despite many dangers, from the violation of the child’s privacy rights to traumatizing abuse, Instamom 6 asserts that people prefer posts with children due to a sense of authenticity and interaction. She blogs:

She has 1 million followers but got 1000 likes? When we look at their followers, we see “fake/imposter accounts.” These are completely fake. Brands pay attention to these because the interaction is important, not followers. An Instamom earns around 20 percent commission over a swipe-up link in a post. Kids make the account look organic and increase engagement.

As can be seen, social media plays a transformative role not only in mothers but also in companies. While mothers turn into a more influencing form of Instamoms for their followers, digital marketing techniques are also transforming to keep up with the trends.

The Commercialization of Children

In literature, people themselves become brands, which is a result of personal branding strategies as described by Peters (1997), Roffer (2000), and Labrecque (2010). With the Instagram story feature, when a product is promoted, it allows adding a link, gift, or tag—and the advertisement is made attractive with fun effects. In recent years, the number of advertisements with children has increased due to the unification of companies that market children’s products and followers who seek trust in the product through experience. Instamom 5 explains “[if] it's a toy promotion, I can't just test it myself. I do not like to endorse it without a child having a look

first, but if it is a nice product, I will share it.” Or, Instamom 1 shares, “We have had advertising business with children twice. We introduced a food supplement, and my eldest daughter became a Barbie for a water company.” Both Instamoms find it natural to include their children in advertising to provide a fun, authentic experience. As Instamom 6 said, “You can use children in one way or the other, and spouses are convinced it's okay when money comes into play. This job has serious payoffs.” To accomplish these influencer goals, they post friendly, creative images, including pets, landscapes, spouses, and/or children.

Instagram becomes attractive for kids through early tween influencers who wear makeup and are featured with their mothers. These young influencers—even at the age of four—can be found under the label of “children's makeup” on Instagram. Being praised for their beauty, images of “the most beautiful girl in the world” on search engines, and tween baby girl posts under the tags “fashionista,” “kidsfluencers,” “star,” and “model whose age is 13” are also luring factors. As Güzel (2020) notes, “The success in branding and the ability to identify with digital representations give tweens the opportunity to become celebrities in one or more of the beauty, music, cinema, or entertainment industries in the celebrity-industrial complex.” As children open accounts to seize this opportunity, Turkey, which ranks 6th in Instagram usage rate, challenges usage rates of social media worldwide (We are Social, 2022). Follower 12 asserts, “Of course, I see that there are people who open a page for their babies. My aunt is one of them. She puts photos of her child and gives messages imposing his language. Celebrity children also sprung up. They all look commercialized.” However, most parents on Instagram seem to ignore the risks of online marketing for children and the effects of embedded advertising on children's personality development or purchasing behavior.

While there is the problem of child labor, Wong states that “some parents of influencers point out that the kids are having fun or are barely conscious of what they are doing” (2019). Moreover, the problem here is the commercialization of children and childhood. As Follower 8 said, “In the past, the child was an obstacle to work, now everyone gives birth just because they can. Children became an accessory, became business.” As Linn (2010) interprets, we are raising a generation that has been commercialized on an unprecedented scale:

The results of the convergence of leaps forward in technology and steps backward in corporate regulation is unprecedented in the lives of children and, while we do not know yet what kind of adults this generation of screen-saturated, commercialized children will become, there is mounting evidence that its impact may be harmful.

Children, who have been bombarded with consumption since babyhood, perceive their iPad as a friend and open more than one social media account. They now determine their self-worth by the number of likes they will receive on Instagram. Follower 3 describes her daughter's relationship with social media:

(She) watches a mystery box video (and) has made the iPad her friend and talks to it. She started kindergarten this year, and she repeats what she did in the online lesson with her baby dolls. She films the math class like a TikTok video with a microphone in one hand. Online education changed her habits. My child is very lonely and has no friends. I am so hurt.

Tweens post videos like influencers in luxury hotels, in branded bikinis on Instagram, or promote cosmetics in bed, posing as adult models. If Abidin's (2015) view is repeated, children market

products and services by imitating the personal branding strategies and self-representations they see from their mothers, close circles, or friends.

Most of these children's posts are made with the help of their mothers. Due to some Instamoms presenting their children as influencers, and some older celebrities wanting to regain popularity through their children, children have become more instrumental. And the child, like the mother, normalizes the celebrification process. In these conditions, career dreams also develop towards becoming an Instagram influencer or Youtuber. Even if social media networks lose their popularity in the future, the thought of gaining wealth and fame is easily etched in their memory. Instamom 6 contemplates:

My kid doesn't have a social media account but wants to be a YouTuber. We shot a few videos and shared them on my account. He wanted to see how many likes he got right away. He's so obsessed with them these days. He wants to do an online gymnastics class and says "welcome to my channel." He used to watch mystery box videos like crazy when he was 3-4 years old. I was shocked when I saw the number of views in the world. I wonder how this billion-dollar influencer looks at life.

In addition to being consumed by the spiral of mass consumption, children's attention is also exploited through new types of entertainment, such as box-opening. While commercialization has surrounded all areas of life with technological leaps, the perception of "normal is boring" on Instagram also breeds the ideal of the "perfect child." Therefore, like motherhood, childhood is also in the process of transformation. The existence of child influencers, who have gained millions of followers by imitating adult behaviors and practices, indicates that the perception of perfection imposed on women has begun to affect children as well.

Conclusion

Although they are living in different cultures and countries, Instamoms or influencer mothers in Russia, Germany, Korea, or Turkey share similar content as representatives of new motherhood. Much social media content relates to the perfect motherhood paradigm, creating a social system where Instamoms influence mothers and mothers-to-be. New roles have been added to perfect motherhood such as celebrification, self-exhibition, staff branding, flawless beauty, and being sexy, which is becoming increasingly visible among Instamoms. While there were women promoting beauty in television commercials in the 1990s and worried about having children, with the power of social media motherhood has now turned into a popular profession. Children are no longer viewed as an obstacle to having a career, and motherhood has been popularized by blending it with fame. It seems that with the COVID pandemic, more mothers are withdrawing from work and staying at home—a phenomenon that is being covered up by the Instamom phenomenon that is creating tired mothers who are trying to keep up with the new norms of perfection.

The ideals of beauty in social media have also transformed and spread across mass media, so much so that there is not a single celebrity mother who has not been photographed in a bikini and criticized by the tabloid press in Turkey. While the Instamom trend pushes mothers whose income level is above average to intense beautification practices and aesthetic applications, the majority of followers with low incomes are left worried about their postpartum weight. In daily life, mothers are more hopeless, fragile, depressed, and insecure, as this year-long research project has touched upon via passive participant observations on 30 Instamom accounts, in-depth interviews with six Instamoms, and 12 followers.

It has been identified that there is no perfect form of motherhood. On the contrary, the pursuit of perfection is flawed. The perfect maternity pump knitted with gender roles creates superwomen who can survive everywhere, and the exploitative order of the capitalist patriarchy is justified in this way. Like other mothers, celebrity mothers who have a helper and babysitter at home also talked about the difficulty of motherhood and interpreted the race for perfection on Instagram as a “black hole” and a “circle of chaos.”

Among the Instamom profiles, those who are sincere and realistic with their followers were defined as “organic accounts,” although their sincerity may be called into question. On the other hand, the fact that 12 mothers and mothers-to-be also recognize Instamoms who display their beauty on social media pages (even though they say they do not follow them) shows that they are influenced because they feel disturbed. This research has found that most Instamoms promoting products and services increase interaction by using their children in their advertisement content and earn income in this way. Instamoms often seem to seek both material and spiritual satisfaction by making use of the influencer economy and by trying to reconstruct the self that is said to have disappeared with motherhood. They attempt this lofty combined goal by being an opinion leader, personal brand, or celebrity while they include images of their children, which raises the issue of the commercialization of children.

As a result, Instamoms, with their innumerable talents, such as being stylish, fit, sexy, successful, witty, animal lovers who live in beautiful homes and cook professional-level meals, perpetuate the myth of the perfect mother image. However, perfection raises many problems, such as the instrumentalization and commodification of motherhood, gender inequality, and commercialization. This “black hole” drags women to a dead end. Furthermore, this study has generated new topics for research, such as excessive child postings, their content, and the “perfect child” image that appears among tween influencers. It could be stated that capital owners seek a way out of the COVID crisis by creating a market through mothers and children. This means that in post-COVID times, women’s productive labor is further exploited and precarious, and children are turned into a part of digital labor. If mothers’ skills in using social media can be shifted towards entrepreneurship, it may strengthen women's labor. When mothers’ professional productivity is used positively, a potential new field could begin for women's employment. However, in this regard, it is necessary to make women’s digital services and technologies accessible, implement training for new skills, and develop egalitarian and employee-oriented flexible policies based on gender awareness. Creating secure jobs for mothers who produce quality content that combines theory and practice could also help break the masculine dominance in digital transformation and move women's representation in technology forward, beyond their appearance alone.

References

- Abidin, C. (2015). Micro-celebrity: Branding Babies on the Internet. *M/C Journal: A Journal of a Media and Culture Media*, 18 (5).
<http://www.journal.mediaculture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1022>
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2008). “Potentials and Limitations of Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography”, *Language@internet*, 5 (8).
<https://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2008/1610>
- Archer, C. & Kao, K. (2018). Mother, baby and Facebook makes three: does social media provide social support for new mothers? *Media International Australia*. 168(4), 1-18.
- Arendell, T. (2000). Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade’s Scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1192-1207.

- Arnold, L. B. & Martin, B. A. (2016). *Taking The Village Online Mothers, Motherhood and Social Media*. Bradford: Demeter Press.
- Butler, J. (2008). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. B. Ertür (Trans.). İstanbul: Metis Press.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Cal: UC Press.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1956). *The Second Sex*. H. M. Parshley (Trans.). London: Jonathan Cape.
- Djafarova, E. & Trofimenko, O. (2017). Exploring the relationships between self presentation and self-esteem of mothers in social media in Russia. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 73, 20-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.021>
- Douglas, S. J. & Michaels, M. (2004). *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. NY: Free Press.
- Driessens, O. (2013). The Celebritization of Society and Culture: Understanding the Structural Dynamics of Celebrity Culture. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(6), 641-657. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877912459140>
- Firestone, S. (1972). *The Dialectic of Sex: A Case for Feminist Revolution*. NY: Bantam Books.
- Foucault, M. (2007). *The History of Sexuality*. Hülya U. T. (Trans.). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Friedan, B. (2001). *Feminine Mystique*. NY: W. Norton & Company.
- Güzel, E. (2020). *Eşikteki Çocuk: #tween*. İstanbul: Kırmızı Kedi.
- Howorth, C. (2017, October 19). Motherhood is hard to get wrong. So why do so many moms feel so bad about themselves? *Time Magazine*. <http://time.com/magazine/us/4989032/october-30th-2017-vol-190-no-18-u-s/>
- Johnston-Legg, K. (2012). When Mom and Dad are influencers, kids pay. The Internet is Cool. <https://theinternetiscool-substack-com>.
- Kerestecioğlu Ö., İ. (2017). “Türkiye’de Güncel Feminist Hareket İçindeki Ayrışmalar ve Tartışmalar”, in Duvarları Yıkarak, Köprüleri Kurmak: Yeni Küresel Feminizmin Yükselişi ve İmkânları, N. Berber (Ed.), A. Davutoğlu (Trans.), Heinrich Böll Stiftung Derneği, İstanbul-Turkey.
- Kojok, B. (2022). “Reinventing Child Labour: A Contemporary Analysis of Children's Participation in the Digital Labour Economy”. *Major Papers*. 226. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/major-papers/226>
- Labrecque, L, Markos, E. & Milne, G. (2010). Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 25, 37-50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2010.09.002>
- Linn, S. (2010). The commercialization of childhood and children’s well-being: What is the role of health care providers? *Paediatr Child Health*, 15 (4), 195-197. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2866310/>
- Lopez, L. K. (2009). The radical act of 'mommy blogging': Redefining motherhood through the blogosphere. *New Media Society*, 11 (5), 729-747. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105349>
- Marwick, A. E. (2015). Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy. *Public Culture*. Duke Uni. Press, 137-160. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2798379>
- Millet, K. (1977). *Sexual Politics*. London: Virago.
- Morales, T. (2004, February 5). “The Mommy Myth”. CBSNews. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-mommy-myth/>
- Oakley, A. (1972). *Sex, Gender and Society*. London: Temple Smith.
- O’Brien Hallstein, D. L. (2015). *Bikini Ready Moms-Celebrity Profiles, Motherhood, and the Body*. NY: State University.

- Peters, T. (1997). The Brand Called You. *Fast Company*, 10, 83-89.
<http://www.fastcompany.com/28905/marka-arayan-siz>
- Petersen, E. J. (2015). Mommy Bloggers as Rebels. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, 6 (1), 9-30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117707186>
- Rich, A. (1995). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: W. W Norton & Company.
- Roffer, R. (2000). *Make A Name for Yourself: Eight Steps Every Woman Needs to Create a Personal Brand Strategy for Success*. Australia: Currency Press.
- Rothman B. K. (1994). "Mothers and Fathers: Ideology in a Patriarchal Society". E. N. Glenn, G. Chang & L. R. Forcey (Eds.). *Mothering Ideology, Experience & Agency*, 139-157. London: Routledge.
- Ruddick, S. (1980). Maternal Thinking. *Feminist Studies*. 6 (2), 342-367.
- Scaramuzzino, G. (2012). "Ethnography on the Internet: an Overview". K. Jacobson & K. Sjöberg (Eds.), In *Pondering on methods: A variety of methodological concerns*, 41-54. Lund University.
- Starngage.com. (2023). "Top Mom Instagram Influencer".
<https://starngage.com/app/global/influencer/ranking>.
- Spradley, P. J. (1980). *Participant Observation*. FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.
- We are Social (2022). Digital 2021. <https://wearesocial.com/us/blog/2022/01/digital-2022/>
- Wilborn, B. L. (1976). The Myth of the Perfect Mother. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 6 (2), 42-45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001100007600600211>
- Wolf, N. (1991). *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*. NY: Morrow.
- Wong, J. C. (2019, April 24). "It's not play if you're making money": How Instagram and YouTube disrupted child labor laws. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/apr/24/its-not-play-if-youremaking-money-how-instagram-and-youtube-disrupted-child-labor-laws>.