GENDER REPRESENTATION ON INSTAGRAM: ENGLISH AN UZBEK DISCOURSE

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Abstract. *The purpose of this article is to explore how gender identity is shown and communicated on Instagram in both English and Uzbek contexts. It looks at the words people use, the types of photos they post, and the messages they share. By comparing English and Uzbek Instagram users, this study aims to show how culture affects gender representation and how social media can both challenge and support.*

Keywords: *discourse, Instagram, hashtag, gender identity, social media, platform*

With significant advancements in computer-mediated communication, social networks have already been embedded in individuals' daily social practices. Online platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have drastically transformed the way people interact and exchange information in today's fast-paced modern society. With a focus on Instagram in particular, a social media platform which is heavily visual, for millions of people, Instagram has become integrated into everyday life , and are introduced as so-called Hashtag Generation : a rising generation of youngsters who establish relationships and express their identities through digital discourse. This online platform has become a central arena for self-presentation and social belonging. Apart from this, gender representation constitutes as a key attribute, as platform users actively convey their self-expression and demonstrate gender identities through variety of images, written captions and hashtags that coextensively embody cultural discourses. All these contents posted on social media serve not only as acts of individual identity but also reflections of culture and linguistics of one language.

In today's digitalized era, Instgaram, undoubtly, stands out as one of the most widely-used social media platforms. It is mainly used for sharing photos and videos, but it also plays a big role in how people express themselves and build their online identities. One of the most interesting aspects of Instagram is how users represent gender through their posts, captions, and the way they interact with others. The way gender is shown online often reflects the cultural values and social expectations of a particular community. According to many studies, Instagram is not only a space for entertainment but also a stage where people perform different versions of their identities, including gender identity .

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When looked through the lenses of English-speaking and Uzbek-speaking platform users, there is actually transparent differences in how the gender is represented. In West people are likely to represent individuality, confidence, and self-expression, such as, ideas related to feminism, gender equality, and independency. While in East, particularly in Uzbekistan users often focus on culture, religious beliefs, and family values. However, as the globalization is taking over all around the world, these stereotypes are slowly changing, and new forms of gender expression are appearing that mix both traditional and modern values.

In English-speaking Instagram communities, gender is often represented through ideas of individuality, empowerment, and confidence. Many influencers try to show that people can be themselves and break away from traditional stereotypes. For example, Emma Chamberlain often shares casual, relatable content that focuses on being natural and confident rather than perfect. Similarly, James Charles challenges traditional gender roles by using makeup and fashion to express himself, showing that masculinity can look different. Their posts usually sound open, friendly, and personal, using humor and self-expression to connect with their followers. In contrast, on Uzbek Instagram, gender representation is usually more traditional and connected to cultural and family values. Influencers like Asal Shodiyeva or Shakhzoda Salimjanova, who is known as "leo_17s" on Instagram, often focus on beauty, modesty, and family life. Their posts highlight respect, elegance, and social harmony, which reflect Uzbek cultural norms. Male influencers, such as Jahongir Poziljonov, often show strength, leadership, and success — qualities that are seen as masculine in Uzbek culture. However, things are slowly changing. Some younger Uzbek influencers, such as Mohlaroyim or BabyMohi (Instagram followers know her with this name) and other lifestyle bloggers, try to mix modern and traditional elements. For example, they might wear Western-style outfits or share travel photos but still write captions that express modesty or pride in Uzbek identity. This shows how young people are trying to balance global trends with local culture.

On the other hand, English-speaking influencers often connect gender expression to social causes like body positivity, gender equality, or LGBTQ+ rights. They frequently use hashtags such as #selflove, #bodypositivity, #feminism or #manpower to promote confidence and inclusivity. Uzbek influencers usually do not use these hashtags. Instead, their posts often focus on values like family, respect, and tradition, showing a different approach to self-expression.

Overall, both English and Uzbek Instagram communities show their own ways of representing gender. English-speaking influencers use their platforms to highlight individuality and challenge gender norms, while Uzbek influencers tend to reflect traditional ideas — though this is gradually changing as more people are influenced by global culture.

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This study shows that Instagram plays an important role in how people express and shape their gender identities across different cultures. By comparing English and Uzbek Instagram influencers, it becomes clear that gender representation is strongly influenced by social values, cultural traditions, and global trends. In the English-speaking context, influencers often use Instagram as a space for self-expression and empowerment. They tend to challenge traditional gender roles, promote individuality, and support social movements like body positivity and gender equality. Their content usually focuses on being authentic, confident, and inclusive. In contrast, Uzbek influencers usually represent gender in a way that reflects traditional and cultural values. Women are often portrayed as elegant, respectful, and family-oriented, while men are shown as strong, successful, and responsible. However, younger Uzbek users are beginning to adopt more global styles and ideas, showing that social media can create a balance between tradition and modernity.

Overall, this comparison highlights how Instagram serves as a mirror of society — it reflects both global changes and local identities. While English-speaking users tend to use the platform to challenge gender norms, Uzbek users often use it to maintain cultural values, though this is slowly evolving. As globalization continues, the line between traditional and modern gender representation will likely become even more blended, creating new and diverse ways of expressing identity online.

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