

## Pseudo-event Construction on Instagram by the Iranian Female Micro-Celebrities

Abdollah Bicharanlou\*  
Zeinab Shojaeian

(Received 20 July 2021; accepted 28 December 2021)

### Abstract

The pseudo-events -events that are created through and for the media- are one of the main opportunities to increase the visibility of micro-celebrities and to grow and maintain their audiences. This study aims to find what happens behind the scenes of pseudo-events that micro-celebrities organize. The primary purpose of this article is to study pseudo-events on social media accounts of Iranian female micro-celebrities on Instagram. Therefore, we aim to answer the following questions: What are pseudo-events on Instagram and what are their characteristics? How do Iranian female micro-celebrities create these pseudo-events? And What are the motivations behind creating these events and the way they are held? The methodology of this research is online ethnography and to answer the questions, we conducted unstructured interviews with 16 micro-celebrities and informants on micro-celebrities' personal lives. Then, raw data were analyzed using the content analysis method. Based on the analysis, the central theme was fake events whose characteristics are: 1. participants (present and absent), 2. time (event occurrence time, event receipt time), 3. location (in real space, on virtual space), 4. etiquettes and form of performance (type of gifts, music, food, and the well-staged nature of events). The findings also showed that in these events, the represented image is more important than the event itself. In fact, these events are designed and performed for filming and display.

**Keywords:** Instagram, micro-celebrities, netnography, pseudo-events, social media.

**Abdollah Bicharanlou (Corresponding author):** Assistant Professor, Communication, Social Science Faculty, University of Tehran, Iran | Email: bikaranlou@ut.ac.ir

**Zeinab Shojaeian:** M.A of Media and Cultural Studies, University of Tehran, Iran | E-mail: zeinab.shojaeian@ut.ac.ir



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (CC BY NC), which permits distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

## Introduction

Due to the centrality of *image* and *display* in today's life, especially on Instagram, the reputation of people on this space has become specifically important; therefore, online reputation has become one of the most important research foci in recent years. In previous studies, the representation of the pages of micro-celebrities and their impact on the audience has been studied and the mechanisms influencing the production of the content on their pages have been less considered. The main reason for choosing the subject of this research was that we have previously observed how many audiences of different celebrity pages considered what was portrayed on these pages. They mostly believed the reality of various events that shared by micro-celebrities on their pages matched their representation. However, due to personal contacts with some micro-celebrities and their surroundings, we came across differences in what happens on-stage and what happens off-stage during these events. Therefore, in this research, back-stage mechanisms of organizing pseudo-events have been studied as one of the main opportunities for micro-celebrities to increase visibility and satisfy their audiences.

The expansion of the internet has made possible the establishment of symbolic and online interactions and communications and resulted in the emergence of new worlds. The online world results from the vast extent of modern computerized information and communication technologies across the world and is sometimes portrayed as parallel to the actual world or even dominating it (Castells, 2010). What is called "Dual Globalization" refers to having these two different worlds (Ameli, 2004). As Rose refers it is now often suggested that much meaning is conveyed by visual images (Rose, 2001: 6). Thus, people lives are characterized by the intertwined nature of social life and the desire to be seen via social media. According to Veblen to access to and hold power and credit one must display his/her wealth. the leisure class constantly tries to showcase power and wealth through wasting expensive goods and conspicuous leisure. They want to show their superiority through displaying ownership things that others can't possess (Mason, 2005).

Social media nowadays play a pivotal role in daily lives and celebrities have been fast in understanding it (Shahghasemi, 2020, 2021). The present study, however, focuses on Instagram as it is considered one of the most popular social networks in Iran and across the world due to its visual and conspicuous facilities.

Iran as a country that has a very strong appreciation of visual images (Shahghasemi & Tafazzoli, 2013; Shaghasemi & Prosser, 2019) and hence the Iranians spend much time and money on visual material. The micro-celebrities' power and their influence on the Iranian audiences originate from how they display the various aspects of their own lives and create

successful images of them. In that regard, Goffman divided one's behavior into two broad categories of "the backstage" and "the front stage". In the latter, performers of a particular role are at the presence of their audiences and illustrate a rather ideal form of a social role (Meyrowitz, 1985).

Reference groups according to Merton "become points of reference for shaping one's attitudes, evaluations and behavior" (Merton, 1968: 288). Thus, micro-celebrities are seen as influential people and among the reference groups of a society.

Leslie emphasizes the role of media in celebrity culture: "visibility is what distinguishes celebrities from the masses; moreover, visibility is made possible by the media's shaping of celebrities as extraordinary, complex, and interesting individuals with unique talents and gifts" (Leslie, 2011: 13). Cashmore quotes Psychologist David Giles (2000) that: "The ultimate modern celebrity is the member of the public who becomes famous solely through media involvement" (Cashmore, 2006: 7).

A remarkable opportunity to increase media visibility and maintain fans and audiences is holding pseudo-events. These events are planned and created for and by the media; they are the product of the graphic revolution that has made it possible to produce and multiply images on a large scale, resulting in the domination of images over reality. This research tries to answer the following questions through netnography; What is a pseudo-event on the social network Instagram and What are its characteristics? How do Iranian female micro-celebrities hold these pseudo-events? and What are the motivations behind holding such events and the way they are held?

## Theoretical Framework

As it was mentioned before, the current study aims to investigate pseudo-events on Instagram by focusing on the lifestyle of Iranian female micro-celebrities. The present section defines and explains the theoretical foundations underlying the study. As the topic of the study is investigating pseudo-events, motivations of performance, and their characteristics, the focus of this section is on Daniel Boorstin's conceptualization of pseudo-events. On the other hand, considering the importance of depiction and the importance of visualized experiences in pseudo-events, Debord's "The Society of the Spectacle" theory is reviewed.

## Pseudo-events

An important characteristic of modern societies that American historiographer, Daniel Boorstin identified is the dominance of images over reality. In his famous book "Image: a guide to pseudo-events in America", Boorstin dealt with the importance of images and the implementation of imagery in the

news. An important element that Boorstin discussed was pseudo-events. He mentioned four characteristics for pseudo-event (Boorstin, 1992: 11-12):

1. It is not spontaneous. but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it.
2. It is planned primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported.
3. Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity.
4. Usually it is intended to be self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotels' 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, by saying that hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one.

Boorstin emphasized that the proliferation of pseudo-events was the result of the graphic revolution. Indeed, the graphic revolution pointed to the situation that made it possible to produce and multiply images in a large scale. The development and expansion of the printing industry, the radio, and television increased the need to consume the news. Despite the thirst for the news, there were not sufficient real news to feed the need. Thus, pseudo-events emerged. They are similar to actual news events, but they are created just to be consumed and do not represent any real entities; for example, news conferences, interviews with celebrities, and conversation programs about politicians' private lives (Ibid: 13-16).

As Veblen argues in *The Theory of leisure Class*, individuals' status is based on the conspicuous display of their wealth. One way to display wealth is through ceremonies, events, and the type of rituals and customs they hold. Veblen states in this regard that the observance of customs and in general the manner of appearing in ceremonies and the display of these customs are considered the degree of personal prestige (Veblen, 2016: 90-91).

Another characteristic of the revolution was the priority of the copied versions to their original ones. Thus, reading excerpts, knowing the summary of books, and getting informed of events have become more important than reading the books or facing the original versions of the events. The increased proliferation of such imagery creates demands for it, and pseudo-events emerge to meet them. In this way, the demand for the latter exceeds that of the actual and spontaneous events.

Boorstin offered 8 reasons for the domination of the demand for pseudo-events compared to the demand for the spontaneous events (Boorstin, 1992: 39-40):

1. Pseudo-events are more dramatic. A television debate between candidates can be planned to be more suspenseful than a casual encounter or consecutive formal speeches planned by each separately.

2. Pseudo-events being planned for dissemination are easier to disseminate and to make vivid. participants are selected for newsworthy and dramatic interest.
3. Pseudo-events can be repeated at will, and thus their impression can be reinforced. We can at least judge the effectiveness of a television performance.
4. Pseudo-events cost money to create; hence somebody has an interest in disseminating; magnifying, advertising, and extolling them as events worth watching or worth believing.
5. Pseudo-events being planned for intelligibility, are more intelligible and hence more reassuring. Even if we cannot discuss intelligibility the qualifications of the candidates or the complicated
6. Pseudo-events are more sociable. More conversable, and more convenient to witness.
7. Knowledge of pseudo-events - of what has been reported or what has been staged, and how- becomes the test of being informed.
8. Finally Pseudo-events spawn other pseudo-events in geometric progression. They dominate our consciousness simply because there are more of them, and ever more.

As Gleason has pointed out, the characteristics of the pseudo-events on social networks have been increasingly intensified and found new forms (Gleason, 2014: 6-9):

1. As the contemporary media atmosphere is saturated with pseudo-events, they need to be planned more exciting than ever.
2. Nowadays, broadcasting the news and images of pseudo-events has become considerably simpler due to the expansion of social networks, and the need to coordinating with newspapers, TV channels, etc. that made matters complicated during Boorstin's days is long gone. Nevertheless, the designers of pseudo-events try to make their creations more visible by inviting their audiences to share them, write comments, tag their friends on social media posts, and design challenges (among others).
3. Repeating a particular content was difficult in Boorstin's days as an event had to be repeated in several locations and covered by media. On the other hand, contents on Instagram can be visited even after a long while when other people share stories or posts.
4. Holding an event and broadcasting it was very costly and complicated in Boorstin's days, but such costs have decreased significantly due to the capabilities provided by visual social media. In such situations, creativity and the manner of presenting the content by their producers have gained more prominence over the related costs.

5. Nowadays, as social media are saturated with pseudo-events, some artificial and unreal aspects of such events need to be intensified and strengthened so that they may take more dramatic forms. This challenges the trustworthiness of pseudo-events.
6. By the growing expansion of social media, it is possible to make conversations about a certain content in social media forums, comment boxes, or fan pages.
7. Nowadays, many people known as celebrities are the most prevalent results of search engines as audiences search their names to get informed about the personal lives.
8. As creativity is hard to achieve, a certain pseudo-event becomes the role model for the following ones. On the other hand, copying and repeating the previous pseudo-events are both economical and safe; thus, the designers of pseudo-events prefer to follow previous models.

Boorstin's main concern was that the dominance of images on the real experiences of the life might make people live to see the image of experiences instead of living to experience (Boorstin, 1992: 258).

### **Debord's the society of the spectacle**

Guy Debord used the term "the society of the spectacle" to describe the growing western capitalism. Debord's central idea was relevant to Marx's Capital as it stated that the life of communities where modern production relationships is dominant is intertwined with spectacle in every respect and is represented as an infinite accumulation of displays; thus, spectacles could not be considered unreal. Indeed, he viewed spectacles as images that were combined. In this way, an artificial world would be made that was independent from its real counterpart as a separate pseudo-world (Debord, 2020: 57).

He said, "The only argument of the spectacle is that whatever appears is good, and whatever is good appears. The kind of behavior typically required by the spectacle is passive acceptance and conditioned imitation (Ibid: 60).

It can be argued that Debord believed the spectacle overshadowed every aspect of the life, and everything visible was nothing but spectacle. It drew new images that could even contradict the previous ones. In this way, representation (and not reality) gained prominence; everything including humans, their bodies, assets, and landscapes were regarded as good to be displayed.

Douglas Kellner (1995) underlined that the culture of spectacle expanded in every area of life after Debord proposed his society of the spectacle theory.

Nowadays, the effect of Debord's "the society of the spectacle" can be recognized in social media. The tendency to reduce experiences to digitalized images and live in a world that has gained a "social" dimension via computers and may appear just as a show instead of a place to live signify a fact that has

been devoured by images and replaced by images and shows (Sciortino & Wright, 2017: 85). The distinguishing characteristic of social media in modern networked capitalistic background is the ability to combine a new form of economic, technological, and anthropological value creation that occurs via the free of charge activity of users in their social reproduction space (Ibid: 83).

## Method

This study was carried out using the qualitative approach. The data were collected using the netnography that consisted of unstructured interviews, participatory observations, and long-term presence in the field, the raw data was analyzed using content analysis. 16 Iranian female micro-celebrities and informants on their lives were selected as the sample to investigate the main characteristics of pseudo-events on Instagram.

The pages of selected micro-celebrities' on Instagram have more 10 thousand followers, and they spend more than two hours a day on Instagram. Interviews with the micro-celebrities were complemented by interviews with informants on the micro-celebrities' personal lives because of the micro-celebrities' probable fear and conservatism in revealing their personal lives and the lack of access to some other micro-celebrities.

The informants were the micro-celebrities' friends and colleagues or researchers in this field and had credible information on how they run their personal lives and produced the content of their pages. In addition to the interviews with the micro-celebrities and informants, interviews conducted with two social media influencer marketers in two reputable advertising agencies who had close contacts with a significant number of Instagram micro-celebrities and were informed about their activities. Moreover, interviews were made with several Iranian female micro-celebrities on Instagram residing out of Iran to introduce variety to the sample and the presented attitudes.

Due to the importance of participatory observations, researchers started to investigate various fields of the celebrity culture in 2016 and tried to focus on the social media pages of various Iranian and non-Iranian micro-celebrities. Long-term presence and membership on Instagram made it possible to know and understand its characteristics and context more extensively and profoundly. Moreover, researchers had contacts and conversations with several micro-celebrities on various occasions and accompanied some of them in two trips two observe their lifestyles in terms of their actual behaviors, their online content production, and even the backstage of responding to their audiences' comments.

The sampling was performed purposive, and representative from all characteristics (including diverse religious beliefs and content materials) were selected to make the results maximally generalizable.

First, candidates who were available and fulfilled every intended criterion were selected; then, the snowball sampling technique was applied where the researcher selected samples from the likely candidates (Flick, 2011). Indeed, the participants of the samples were selected by the ones selected previously.

Verification and validation are two very important considerations in qualitative studies. In this regard, researchers implemented various techniques like developing exclusive questions for every examinee according to previous information. In addition, some interviews were made with the micro-celebrities' relatives to create a reliable environment and establish relationships to receive accurate and true information. Finally, researchers assessed the data by comparing the information gathered through the interviews with the micro-celebrities and informants and checking the content materials of the micro-celebrities' pages for at least 5 months.

Interviews were made with 16 participants. Eight of them were micro-celebrities, three of them were informants, and five people were both micro-celebrities and informants. The sampling processes continued until achieving the theoretical saturation.<sup>1</sup>

Several characteristics were considered for the selection of the micro-celebrities:

1. female
2. Iranian
3. followed by more than 10 thousand followers
4. long-term and continuous activity on Instagram (the daily time devoted to the social network was considered more than 2 hours)
5. spending sufficient time to answer the research questions
6. active on public (visible for everybody) Instagram pages
7. Sharing at least 50 posts on Instagram page.

Moreover, the following considerations were observed for the selection of the informants:

1. relating with the micro-celebrities as friends, colleagues, or researchers in the field of Instagram micro-celebrities with credible information regarding the backstage lives of the micro-celebrities
2. constantly checking the micro-celebrities' pages on Instagram
3. experiencing at least 6 months of relationships with the intended micro-celebrities and informed about their backstage lives
4. Spending sufficient time to answer the research questions.

The interviewees' names were abbreviated to keep their identities private. The information related to the micro-celebrities are summarized in Table 1.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the theoretical saturation employed in this research, the data collection saturated at the 13<sup>th</sup> interview, but the procedure continued until the 16<sup>th</sup> interview for the purpose of certainty.



Table 1. The demographic information of the micro-celebrities

Item	Name	Followers	Residence place	Instagram Page Content
1	Ameneh K. (A. K.)	139k	Gilan	Cooking
2	Maryam T. (M. T.)	53.9k	Istanbul	Travel
3	Sahar T. (S. T.)	45.2k	Tehran	Travel
4	Soha R. (S. R.)	232k	Germany	Daily life (personal growth)
5	Sara F. (S. F.)	80k	Tehran	Daily life
6	Nafiseh M. (N, M.)	20.8k	Tehran	Daily life (happy Islamic lifestyle)
7	Zahra N. (Z. N.)	40.9k	Tehran	Studying and planning
8	Maryam S. (M. S.)	32k	London	Daily life

The informants' characteristics are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. The demographic information of the informants

Item	Name	Type of Relationship with the micro-celebrities	Related micro-celebrities	Content background	Followers
9	Zahra. I	Friend and colleague	N. D.	Cooking	254 k
			M. S.	Daily life	220 k
			F. B.	Daily life (family)	375 k
10	Mahdi. SH.	Friend and colleague	H. H.	Confectionery	214 k
			M. H.	Daily life	351 k
			M. S.	Daily life	32 k
11	Alireza. E	Social media Influencer marketer	Multiple people due to the job	--	--

The demographic information of the interviews who were both micro-celebrities and had information regarding other micro-celebrities (as their friends) are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The demographic information of the interviewees who were both micro-celebrities and informants

Item	Name	Followers	Content	Type of relationship with the micro-celebrities	Related micro-celebrities	The followers of the related micro-celebrities	Content Background
12	Fatemeh Z. (F.Z.)	14.3k	Daily life	Friend	S.F.	80 k	Daily life
					A.D.	72.3 k	Daily life
					M.R.	38.4 k	Daily life
					A.M.	207 k	Daily life
					M.M.	339 k	Hijab style
					M.A.	169 k	Hijab style
13	Zahra R. (Z.R.)	25.1k	Daily life	Friend	F.H.	400 k	Daily life
					S.M.	80 k	Daily life
					M.F.	82.4 k	Daily life
					F.Z.	15 k	Daily life
14	Mina A. (M.A.)	32k	Media and technology	Social media Influencer marketer	Multiple people due to the job	--	--
15	Atiyeh H. (A.H.)	31.6k	Daily news	Researcher in the field of Instagram micro-celebrities	Multiple people due to the job	--	--
16	Fateme S. (F.S.)	16k	Daily life	Friend	N.N.	41.8 k	Travel
					F.B.	375 k	Daily life
					S.T.	113 k	Personal growth
					A.M.	512 k	Cooking
					A.H.	1.1m	Hijab style
M.N.	152 k	Travel					

## Discussion

The interviews with the micro-celebrities and the informants, revealed information about the manner of performing some events and their characteristics that had been designed and created according to the audiences tastes and the features of Instagram. Such characteristics and the manner of performing the events are discussed in Figure 1.

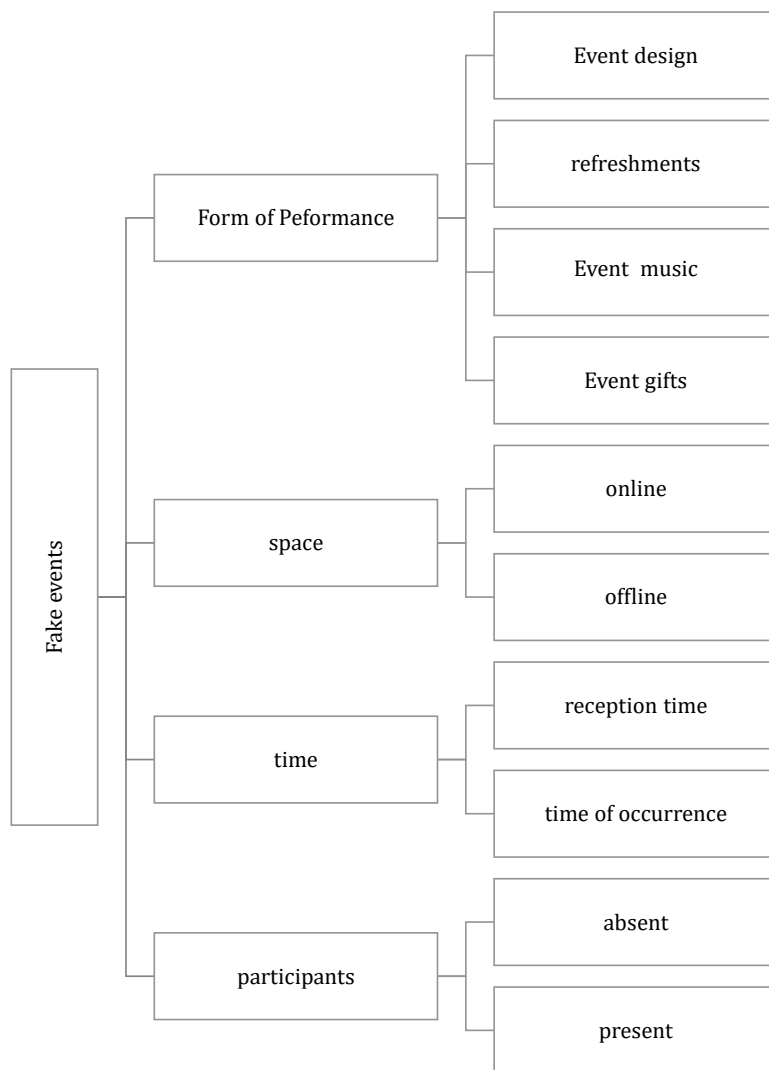


Figure 1. Fake events chart

**Fake-events**

Fake-events are ceremonies and occasions that micro-celebrities design and implement to increase the theatrical aspect of their daily lives and introduce variety to the process of visual content production. The ultimate goal is to attract more followers for their pages and maintain them. Boorstin defined fake events as “events that are designed and created by and for events” (Boorstin, 1992). As it was pointed out in the literature review of the study, Boorstin’s fake events are significantly similar to events and the exaggerated manner of performing some

prevalent ceremonies that are displayed by life-style micro-celebrities on Instagram.

As Instagram is typically a visual platform, image and its contingent features play significant and vital roles in such events. The events are designed and displayed according to the Instagram users' tastes and in line with the visual nature of the platform to be consumed by its users. Events are behaviors that certain people participate in certain times and locations by being involved in certain activities. The next section deals with the participants, time, and manner of performing the events.

### Participants

Two types of participants take part in events:

- *The present participants:* They are physically present in the place where the event is held. Their images either have graphic or aesthetic values or have credit values that attract attention to the ceremony and increase the number of visitors. They include other micro-celebrities or the friends of the host micro-celebrity. They must take part in the ceremony according to the graphic values intended by the host to increase the consumption of the broadcasted content. The types of clothes, the match between the decoration and the color/design of the clothes, the placement of the guests in the ceremony, and the guests' behavior and representing it are adjusted according to the hosts' intended images. Indeed, the guests take part in the ceremony as second-degree audiences. The main goal of their participation in the ceremony is creating convenient images for the target audience of the events.



Figure 2. The present participants

- *The absent participants*: They are people who participate in the ceremony virtually. Though they are not physically present in the ceremony are absent from the scene, they are considered the target audiences. The absent participants are the followers and audiences of the page.

F. Z. stated about the reasons to hold such ceremonies:

*“They must hold ceremonies from time to time to refresh the content of their pages, or they need to take trips so that they can produce their contents in different locations. Even some ceremonies were unprecedented until this significant volume of spectacles was introduced to Instagram like the first diapers ceremony, or the first tooth, or birthday ceremonies using various themes and luxurious features that make them like a wedding ceremony.”*

Z. R. argued about the importance of the audiences as the first-degree participants of the events:

*“They create some ceremonies from time to time to avoid repeating their daily activities and introduce variety to their content. For example, they say - 11 months has passed from their marriages, so let’s celebrate it to make some beautiful content. Then, they invite other influencers as guests so that they can increase their followers and the images of the ceremony can be shared multiple times; but the ceremony has no importance for the guest or the host. The only thing that matters is the stories and posts that are created, and the followers that are attracted. As a result, they consider what seems more beautiful in every respect. For example, colorful fruit in a special decoration or expensive food that can attract attention and audiences.”*

As George Homans (1961) has stated, the purpose of the performance is taking the attention of the audience and impressing them. Performers want to be praised by their audiences rewarded, and meanwhile not to get punished. This means that the role of the participants in every play is very important, and their feedbacks can determine the next behaviors of the performer.

## **Time**

The actual time that the events occur differs with the time when the target audiences in social media receive their images. When the event is

actually going on, the micro-celebrity shares some side activities of the events in the form of stories to make the audiences curious about the main file that will be released as a prolonged post. Indeed, the audiences are participated in the event after the ceremony is over, and an ideal image of it has been created and made ready to release using techniques like editing, filters, and covering shortcomings.

M. SH. stated in the same regard, "The influencers who invited me to their ceremonies always employed professional photographers as it they held wedding ceremonies. A round of filming is done before the guests arrive, from the environment and the decorations, and another round is taken when they arrived at the ceremony. Then, the followers could see the ceremony twice: on the day of the ceremony in the form of stories, and on another occasion when the clips were ready and a post was released. In this way, the stories and posts circulate frequently for a while."

### Space

Typically, Instagram events are held in spaces that are ready for that purpose by creating particular decorations to photograph and film this event. For example, the decoration, its color, and the placement of objects are designed so that the best possibilities can be provided to record the participants' images and release them on Instagram. If the ceremony has a sponsor, the objects provided by that party should be visible in the images. However, as Instagram is the main space of holding the event, the locations of people and objects are determined by the editing process, music, and the order of the images on posts and stories.

M. SH. stated about the place:

*"I remember that once N. D. was describing the birthday party a friend's (who was another influencer) child. There was a special decoration in front of which people stood to be photographed. The guests had been told to wear purple clothes to match with the decoration."*

### Form of performance

The manner of performing various parts of the events has particular forms in accordance with the visual values, the peculiar visual nature of Instagram, and the audiences' tastes. The activities performed in the events and the form and rules of performing them have special characteristics.

Practical rules: Unlike actual events, the rules of such events typically include forming beautiful and perfect frames and posing appropriately

for the photography. In addition, the event is typically devoted to filming and taking photos.

Moreover, the above considerations continue on Instagram as the present guests share the images on this personal pages. Another dimension is republishing the reactions of other micro-celebrities (whether absent or present) to the ceremony. This type of behavior is among the rules of holding such events and continue several days after the actual event.

Z. R. stated about the audiences' time of presence in the events and the related practical rules:

*"the other time that I had been invited to their birthday party everybody was holding a cell phone, and no one put them down. The poor child whose birthday was being celebrated did not understand anything at all from noise. Honestly, even adults like me were bored among all those influencers as everybody was sharing stories."*



Figure 3. Practical rules 1

Elisa Serafinelli stated in "Digital life on Instagram: new social communication of photography", that real experience of actions is typically established by devices in the form of media-based forms. Thus, it appears that devices are placed between the individual and the object. The mediation of devices is uncovered on two occasions: 1. recording and experiencing, 2. sharing and broadcasting it. In social life, objects pass through different cultural contexts and devices that may modify what they mean. As Serafinelli states: "The analysis of participants' photo sharing did not consider photographs as evidence of the 'who', 'where' and 'what' of reality, rather as evidence of bias, ideologically

collared interpretations of how their maker or makers perceived and reconstructed the reality (Serafinelli, 2018: 41).



Figure 4. Practical events

A. H. stated about such ceremonies:

*“They are typically held in several stages; a stage is the ceremony itself where everybody shares stories. Then, they release posts and share stories of the posts. Then after, the influencers who are invited share stories and tag the hosts to congratulate them. Then, the absent influencers share stories to congratulate. This is followed by the hosts’ re-sharing of the stories to thank the guests. Thus such stories are once again shared. All of this is just to increase followers. Even the close family members do not matter, as other influencers are considered central to the events.”*

### The form of implementation

- event gifts: The present gifted in such ceremonies are intended to attract the audiences’ attention both in terms of their prices, visual beauty, and dimensions. Thus, the guests take the gifts apparently



to the host, but they are actually intended to be represented and shown on online space.

- event music: Typically, pop music and other forms that are in line with the audiences' tastes and the general atmosphere of Instagram are played. Thus, a significant similarity can be found in the music tracks played on various parts of the ceremony.
- Refreshments: Colorful and decorated refreshments or the ones that become fashionable according to the audiences' tastes and the general atmosphere of Instagram are among the components of such events. For instance, fondant cakes and icing confectionery are frequently offered in such ceremonies.
- Event design: It should be considered that design is very important factor in the manner of performing the events. Indeed, the events are designed and formed by special decorations. Even the occasions that seem surprising are fake and staged beforehand; though micro-celebrities claim to be uninformed in the visual representation that is offered to the audiences, the whole process like planning and booking the location, decorating it, and the details of the events are designed and reviewed by them beforehand on many occasions. For example, the researcher encountered several instances of such fake surprising events during the interviews with the informants:

M. SH. stated about staged surprises: "One of my influencer friends told me that she had a quarrel with her husband, and they did not talk with each other. Then, the husband bought an expensive gift for her to reconcile. However, my friend shares the image on women's day and told everyone that she had been surprised by him. That was because her followers insisted, she had to share an image until she was forced to share the image of that very gift and tell others that she had been surprised."

Z.A. stated about the fake surprise of N. D.'s husband:

*"She said that she had been surprised by her husband on their wedding anniversary, but actually she herself did it. Then, she announced on her page that she had been surprised. She says that she does not intend to lie, she just wants to produce content, attract followers, and increase the interaction of the page to get ads and attract people. Other may say – oh baby, did you see that? Her husband surprised her? – However, she was sitting in front of us and was making the required agreements. Our friends said – good for her – though she had designed the A to Z of the ceremony herself, exactly like writing a scenario for a movie."*



Figure 5. Form of implementation, staged



Figure 6. Luxury in the form of implementation

As mentioned before, Veblen considered basis of people's dignity to portrayal of wealth to conspicuous consumption and leisure. Z. A. and M. Sh. are so mentioned the types of luxury gifts and their conspicuous nature in pseudo-events of micro- celebrities.

M. SH. stated concerning the form of implementation:

*"The birthday party of the child of N. D's friend was very luxurious, different kinds of finger food and long table. Only the photography and lighting team consisted of 10 people. The*

*foods were all expensive and designed beautifully. There was a live concert. Several cartoon mascots were used. Another one had employed a DJ. In general, when you are richer and spend more, your visibility will increase. If you are not religious with no limitations concerning dance and similar events, your half-naked clothes will attract more people."*

Z. A. stated about the gifts:

*"In general, the gifts were very luxurious and expensive, particularly the gifts that an influencer give to other influencers. That is because they know the images will be shared via stores. Thus, at least the box, its size, particularly the price of the gift is very important."*



Figure 7. Luxury in the form of presentation, the types of refreshments

Something that matters most in designing such events is how to offer an ideal and dreamlike image of micro-celebrities' lives; that is because the audiences typically cannot attain such a luxurious life and consumes its images on micro-celebrities' pages. Indeed, the audiences ask micro-celebrities to live their dreams for them. Thus, micro-celebrities try to respond to that request by releasing the event in graphic platforms in the most convenient manner. As a result, they may employ a professional photography team, scene accessories, make-up and expensive decoration, and rent a beautiful garden or restaurant (among others) to create an ideal image of their lives and present it to their audiences.

Other types of fake events are in the form of benevolent actions with religious and humanitarian roots. As Ilan Kapoor wrote, "The problem with celebrity humanitarianism is that not only is it deeply contaminated by personal, institutional, commercial, and geopolitical interests" it is also highly circumscribed by its present historical time. Celebrity humanitarianism is

integral to the current global order, aiding and advancing post democratic governance and neoliberal economics (Kapoor, 2013: 12).

M. S. stated regarding micro-celebrities' humanitarian activities: *"we cooked sholezard (an Iranian traditional desert). I think there were at least 1000 bowls of sholezard. It was supposed to start pouring and distributing them from 12 o'clock. N. D. said – let's gather 500 bowls and arrange them beautifully so that I can take a good photo. We insisted that people were waiting, and the desert would cool down; however, it was useless. Our work was delayed for almost two hours as she took images from various angles for her stories and posts."*



Figure 8. Planned humanitarian actions

M. SH. explained another experience of humanitarian activities:

*"Once H. H. shared a story to ask her followers to raise money and buy stationeries for poor children. Then, a large amount of money was collected. She wanted to go to Saadatabad (in Tehran) to buy the stationery packages. One of our mutual friends suggested that we should buy from the Bazaar instead of Saadatabad. This way, we could have bought like 500 packages instead of 100 ones. But H. H. argued bitterly with her; and they ended their relationship."*

Z. A. stated in terms of the manner of behaving with the audiences:

*"When some people commented on F. B.'s posts that why you display colorful and luxurious foods and expensive objects while some of people are poor, she said they should buy food instead of wasting their money on the Internet and checking her page."*

Moreover, for the purpose of participatory observation, a report was prepared in the opening ceremony of a business owned by a female micro-celebrity:

*"last year, we were invited to the inauguration ceremony of a business owned by a friend that was well-known on Instagram. we observed gifts in large boxes and very expensive and lustrous bouquets wreaths. The design of the decoration and the place was set to make them convenient for filming, and significant time and money had been spent on the decoration. For instance, within the shop, a full-length mirror decorated all over with flowers had been prepared for Instagram photos. The participants who were mostly Instagram micro-celebrities were considerably attractive who had chosen the type and color of their clothes, gifts and flowers according to the color and design of the decoration to meet the required visual attractiveness for filming. The participants were filming other participants and themselves from the beginning of the event to its end in a way that they observed the event through the lenses of their mobile phone cameras. When we checked our Instagram account at the end of the ceremony, we observed the participants' representations of it; they were images that had become more attractive to the actual scenes because of the costly gifts and flowers, color adjustment, taking photographs from convenient angles, and using ideal lighting. It was as if the main ceremony was held on cyber space, and the main guests were the micro-celebrity's followers."*

As Sarah Frier, reporter of Bloomberg, said in "No filter: the inside story of Instagram": "after the graphic revolution and the emergence of Instagram, many businesses and various environments changed the manner of designing spaces and marketing their products to adjust them to the requirements of establishing visual relationships and making them fit to be displayed on Instagram (Frier, 2020).



Figure 9. Location 2

## Conclusion

As it was mentioned before, the present study investigated pseudo-events in the Iranian female micro-celebrities' Instagram accounts, their characteristics, and the motives behind them. It was concluded that the requirements of Instagram and the audiences' tastes (as the consumers of the products) influenced the pseudo-events, their characteristics, and the manner of holding them.

As it was mentioned before, since Instagram is a visual platform, image and its characteristics play vital and significant roles in pseudo-events. The events are displayed to be consumed by the audiences in line with their tastes and the graphic characteristics of the platform.

In such events, the represented images are prioritized over the actual event. Pseudo-events are basically created for filming as the people that are the target of implementing and filming the event are the absent audiences of the micro-celebrities' pages.

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 interviewees, and the results were developed in the form of a main theme: "fake events". The theme included the participants, time and place, and the forms of implementation. The participants were divided into two groups: the people who were present in the ceremonies, and ones who followed the micro-celebrities' pages and were considered the target audience of the events. Time included both the time of holding the events and the time for the reception of the images by the target audiences. As it was mentioned before, the location of holding the events and the objects used in them were designed according to graphic characteristics and the audiences' tastes. Moreover, the types of music, refreshments, and the designed nature of the events were considered in terms of the forms and rules of implementation.

As it was mentioned before, micro-celebrities implement pseudo-events to increase their visibility and attract/maintain a larger number of followers via displaying attractive, adventurous, and lustrous daily lives and arrange for various fake events like the ceremonies for naming children, declaring their children sex, and the last diapers party. In addition to fake events, the manner of implementing some prevalent ceremonies is fake in such people's lives. Reconstructing the manner of implementing them is in a way that the audiences' needs to observe fantastic and dreamlike images can be satisfied. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some celebrities who assigned higher priorities to personal values were more resistant against accepting visual characteristics and their audiences' tastes.

### **Ethical considerations**

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

### **Conflicts of interests**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

### **Data availability**

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### **References**

- Ameli, S. (2004 [1383]). "Dual globalization and the future of simultaneous identities". Hamshahri (Kheradnameh Appendix), pp. 10-11.
- Boorstin, D. (1992). *The image: A guide to pseudo-events in America*. New York: Vintage.
- Cashmore, E. (2006). *Celebrity/ Culture*. London and New York, Routledge: Routledge.
- Castells, M. (2006). *The information age: economy, society, and culture. 1, The rise of the network society*. Wiley- Blackwell.
- Debord, G. (2020). *The society of the spectacle*. Aldgate Press.
- Flick, U. (2011). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Frier, S. (2020). *No filter; the inside story of Instagram*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gleason, T.R. (2014). "Pseudo-Events as a Mesocyclone: Rethinking Pseudo-Events in the Digital Age". *media watch*, 5(3): 265-281.
- Homans, G.C. (1961). *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kapoor, I. (2013). *Celebrity Humanitarianism; the ideology of global charity*. Routledge.
- Kellner, D.T. (1995). *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Leslie, L.Z. (2011). *Celebrity in the 21st century. A reference handbook*, ABC-CLIO, LLC.
- Mason, R. (2005). *The Economics of John Rae*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Merton, R.K. (1968). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: The Free Press.

- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. Nexus Between User Content and Valorization. University of Westminster Press, 81-94.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual Methodologies: An introduction of visual materials*. London: Sage.
- Sciortino, R. and Wright, S. (2017). The Spectacle of New Media: Addressing the Conceptual Nexus Between User Content and Valorisation. In: Briziarelli, M. and Armano, E. (eds.). *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*. Pp. 81-94. London: University of Westminster Press. doi: 10.16997/book11.e. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.
- Serafinelli, E. (2018). *Digital life on Instagram: New social communication of photography*. Emerald Publishing.
- Shahghasemi, E. (2021). "Rich Kids of Tehran: The Consumption of Consumption on the Internet in Iran". *Society*. doi: 10.1007/s12115-021-00626-3.
- Shahghasemi, E. (2020). "Iranian Celebrities on the Internet". *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*, 4(1): 77-80. doi: 10.22059/jcss.2020.74782.
- Shahghasemi, E. and Prosser, M. (2019). "The Middle East: Social Media Revolution in Public and Private Communication". International Conference on Future of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw.
- Shahghasemi, E. and Tafazzoli, B. (2013). "Scrabble the Face of Your Opponent: Iranian Blogger's Endeavour to Discursively Undermine Ahmadi Nejad's legitimacy". *Online International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2(8): 198-207.
- Veblen, T. (2016). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Duke Classics.