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Instagram as a Means of Empowering Iranian Women by Focusing on Home-based Businesses



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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to examine how Instagram can affect the empowerment of Iranian women by providing a platform for them to run their home-based businesses (HBBs). The data were collected through sixteen in-depth interviews with Iranian women who ran their HBBs on Instagram, and Kabeer's empowerment framework was applied to the analysis. The results show that women's empowerment can be improved by running an HBB on Instagram. Participants in this study could achieve greater agency, facilitate access to resources, and improve their achievements by running their HBBs on Instagram. However, all the barriers to women's empowerment cannot be overcome by using Instagram.

KEYWORDS: *Women's empowerment, home-based business, social media, Instagram, Iranian women*

Introduction

Internationally, there is an emerging consensus that gender equality and women's empowerment are valuable goals from a human rights standpoint.

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Besides, they are crucial for the achievement of a wide range of economic and social development goals (Quisumbing, Meinzen-Dick & Malapit, 2022). Accordingly, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" is presented as the fifth goal of the sustainable development goals by the United Nations (UN).

Previous studies reveal that entrepreneurship activities can empower women by helping them become self-employed (Abou-Shouk, Mannaa & Elbaz, 2021), and women entrepreneurship has often been associated with home-based businesses (HBBs) (Rodríguez-Modroño, 2021). Moreover, with the growth of technology-based networks, the need for face-to-face contact with customers and colleagues has reduced considerably and provided new opportunities for HBBs to compete equally with traditional organizations (Wynarczyk & Graham, 2013). Reuschke and Mason (2022) suggest that digitalization and E-commerce play key roles in growing HBBs which have been increasingly popular over the past few years (Saleh, 2021).

In light of the foregoing, this research focuses on the effects of using Instagram on the empowerment of Iranian women who intend to run their HBBs. According to the World Economic Forum's 2021 global gender gap index, Iran ranks 150th among 156 countries and is one of the countries with the largest economic gender gaps in the world (World Economic Forum, 2021), which does not indicate desirable conditions. Iranian women face significant barriers regarding employment and participation in the labor market due to cultural and institutional factors (Basu & Maitra, 2020). Modarresi et al. (2017) claim that women are the owners of most home businesses in Iran, indicating the importance of studies related to women and HBBs in Iran. Meanwhile, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Telegram are blocked in Iran (Esfandiari, Fridrich & Yao, 2021), and Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms there (Niknam et al., 2021). As a result, Instagram was chosen as the platform for this study.

In the current study, the research question is "How does Instagram affect the empowerment of Iranian women by supporting them to start their own home-based businesses?" and to answer the question, data was collected through conducting in-depth interviews with Iranian women who run their HBBs on Instagram and Kabeer's empowerment framework was applied for data analysis.

Literature Summary

The literature on the intersection of women's empowerment, social media, entrepreneurship, and HBBs is reviewed in this section.

Women's Empowerment

To explore women's empowerment, it is necessary to understand the concept of empowerment. While empowerment has been studied extensively, defining it remains a challenge (Boley & McGehee, 2014). A definition of empowerment is straightforward based on its absence, but it is more difficult to define in action because it takes different forms in different contexts and among different people (Francina & Joseph, 2013). However, most conceptualizations of empowerment emphasize power, choice, and change. Empowerment can be considered a process of change in which people with limited power, choice, and freedom obtain the power to exercise choices that can benefit their well-being (Ganle, Afriyie & Segbefia, 2015).

Women's empowerment is generally acknowledged as a multi-dimensional process that is dynamic and context-specific. In addition to economic and socio-cultural factors, it has legal, political, familial or interpersonal, and psychological extents (Nazier & Ramadan, 2018). Sell and Minot (2018) claim that, according to experts, certain factors including age, gender, nationality, marital status, health, and economic activity, can impact empowerment.

A variety of studies in Asia have demonstrated that ICT can enhance women's empowerment (Manzoor & Farooq, 2017; Noor, Asghar & Arfeen, 2021; Patil, Dhere & Pawar, 2009). ICT can support the empowerment of women through capacity building, and women who do not have access to ICTs can be disempowered as they lack a voice and part in the information realm (Mackey & Petrucka, 2021).

Social Media and Women's Empowerment

Social media has been examined in a variety of aspects for its influence on women's empowerment. Hurley (2021) argues that the use of social media can empower women in the Middle East by creating income opportunities from social media content and by encouraging feminist activism. According to Hamid, Ishak, and Yusof (2016), social media can assist women in gaining control over their lives and improving their quality

of life. Shata and Seelig (2021) suggest social media can gain attention by advocating for movements such as #Metoo, which can help to dismantle social norms and to empower women. A study in Egypt examines the influence of social media on the development of digital entrepreneurship among female and young male entrepreneurs. Study results indicate that digital entrepreneurship positively impacts women's empowerment. Additionally, the majority of study participants stated that they would not have run their businesses without social media, which indicates the social media effect (Miniesy, Elshahawy & Fakhreldin, 2021). In this regard, the theoretical model proposed by Ajjan et al. (2014) states that social media use by female entrepreneurs can lead to increased social capital and self-efficacy, resulting in empowerment. A study about the effects of social media on the empowerment of female entrepreneurs in emerging economies declares that women entrepreneurs who use social media to manage their businesses can improve their flexibility, financial independence, self-confidence, control over their lives, and decision-making capabilities (Beninger et al., 2016).

The impact of using social media on Iranian women has been addressed in several studies. Salehi et al. (2020) suggest social media can raise the awareness of Iranian women, which helps them break taboos. According to Mohammadi (2019), women in Iran increasingly use social media and online campaigns in the absence of free and democratic spaces for the negotiation of their rights and as a means of raising awareness, practicing democracy, and protesting against social injustice.

Iran has one of the highest populations of Instagram users in the world (Ebadijalal & Weisi, 2021). Consequently, Iranian women's use of Instagram has been studied in various contexts, and a couple of recent studies can be cited as examples. Nikjoo et al. (2021) explain how Iranian solo travelers actively use Instagram to empower other Iranian women to challenge gender stereotypes. In another study, Rahbari (2019) discusses how the Instagram platform provides an opportunity for Iranian women bodybuilders to make themselves visible and obtain recognition despite the compulsory hijab in the country.

Social Media and Entrepreneurship

Social media is used by entrepreneurs for a variety of purposes (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs can discover opportunities and changes in the business creation process by interacting and communicating

with peers on social media platforms (Park, Sung & Im, 2017). Social media has been recognized as a powerful tool for building customer relationships by entrepreneurs, and a majority of entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms for lead generation and promotion (Ghoshal, 2019).

Social media can provide new opportunities for female entrepreneurs due to their attributes. Using social media, women entrepreneurs can start their own businesses with minimal investment and operating costs (Francesca, Paola & Paola, 2017). Women entrepreneurs play different roles in their daily life, including procreating, managing the home, and running the business. Social media provides them with the ability to manage their time, complete daily tasks, and be involved in all aspects of their family's lives and their business (Ukperere, Slabbert & Ukperere, 2014).

Home-based Businesses and Women

HBB is a business that runs from home, and the owners are self-employed (Mason, Carter & Tagg, 2011). A wide variety of HBBs are available, including childcare, food production, crafts, professional services, and trades (Anwar & Daniel, 2016).

According to Tur-Porcar, Mas-Tur, and Belso (2017) obtaining financing and family responsibilities are two major barriers that women entrepreneurs face, whereas starting a business from home offers a lower risk in terms of both financial and emotional risks (Walker & Webster 2004). Wyncarczyk and Graham (2013) point out that HBBs provide flexibility for women, enabling them to manage household responsibilities as well as economic activities in one place. As a result, running an HBB can remove two important obstacles in the way of women's entrepreneurship.

Research on women's empowerment and HBBs is limited, but more studies have been conducted on entrepreneurship and women's empowerment (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013; Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Crittenden, Crittenden & Ajjan, 2019; Miniesy, Elshahawy & Fakhreldin, 2021; Noor, Isa & Nor, 2021; Raghunandan, 2018; De Silva et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship is considered one of the prime solutions for empowering women, and it is also a means to increase women's participation in the labor force (Raghunandan, 2018). Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) suggest entrepreneurship can empower women since women can break away from male dominance in the workplace and society through it.

Iranian women, despite their increased education levels, still face different barriers to career advancement, and there are more than half of Iranian women in the workforce who are self-employed (Javadian & Y. Addae, 2013), which can indicate the importance of HBBs regarding Iranian women's empowerment.

Empowerment Theory

According to Kabeer (1999), the ability to make choices is essential to women's empowerment, and the ability to exercise choice can be viewed as intertwined in three dimensions: resource as a pre-condition, agency as a process, and achievement as an outcome. In this paper, women's empowerment is defined based on Kabeer's (1999) ideas, and Kabeer's empowerment framework is used as a conceptual framework that is illustrated in Figure 1. **Resources** refer to material, human, or social resources that can facilitate a person's ability to exercise choice, and social relationships are the means by which resources are acquired (Freeman & Svets, 2022). **Agency** implies being able to set individuals' goals and take action to achieve them (Kabeer, 1999). A sense of agency also encompasses not only observable actions such as decision-making, but also the meaning, motivation, and purpose that people bring to those actions (Kabeer, 2005). The social science literature tends to operationalize agency as decision-making, but it can take the form of resistance, bargaining, and negotiation as well (Kabeer, 1999). **Achievements** are defined as outcomes of the choices made (De Silva et al., 2021). It implies how far people's potential for living the lives they want is realized or not realized (Kabeer, 2005).

Figure 1. Empowerment Framework



Source: Adapted from (Kabeer, 1999)

Methodology

The goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning and experience dimensions of human lives and social contexts (Fossey et al., 2002). This study has a qualitative approach and aims to understand in what ways using Instagram has affected the empowerment of Iranian women who intend to run their HBBs. To answer the research question, the perspective and experience of the Iranian women who run their HBBs on Instagram are pivotal, and in order to gain in-depth information from these women, in-depth semi-structured interviews are employed. The focus of the interviews is, therefore, the perspective of Iranian women who run their HBBs on Instagram.

Data Collection

In order to collect data, 16 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. Since no sampling frame was available, snowball sampling was applied to select the interviewees. The interviewees are Iranian women who run their HBBs on Instagram. The initial sample consisted of four individuals from whom the researcher was confident they were running their own HBBs on Instagram. At the end of their interviews, the participants were requested to suggest individuals who might be suitable to interview for the study. Following their recommendations, 15 additional individuals were contacted. Two of them were unable to participate in the interview. Another person, in addition to selling products through Instagram, had a gallery to sell her products; thus she was not eligible to participate in this study. In total, the study included 16 participants. The longest interview was conducted with a person who sells cosmetics and lasted 40 min, while the shortest lasted 17 min and was conducted with a person who sells clothes.

Bryman (2016) suggests telephone interviews can be more effective for asking sensitive questions because interviewees might be less anxious when the interviewer is not physically present. In this study, due to the researcher's distance from the interviewees and some interview questions that could seem sensitive, telephone interviews were used.

The interview questions were built upon the research question, study of existing literature and the empowerment theory covering different topics, including perceptions of empowerment, social media, motivations and barriers in their path, and effects of their HBBs on their life. An overview of the participants' backgrounds is provided in table 1.

Table 1. Participants' background

No.	Business type	Age	Marital status	No. of children	Business age
P1	Selling cosmetics	32	Married	2	2 years
P2	Selling homemade cakes	33	Married	2	3 years
P3	Selling Various products	31	Married	1	1 year
P4	Selling stained glass crafts	25	Married	1	1 year
P5	Selling homemade cakes	45	Married	2	7 years
P6	Selling cosmetics	20	Single	0	3 months
P7	Selling clothes	35	Married	2	8 months
P8	Selling clothes	32	Married	0	1 month
P9	Selling clothes	18	Single	0	2 months
P10	Selling homemade cakes	31	Married	1	6 months
P11	Selling clothes	30	Married	1	3 months
P12	Selling clothes	30	Married	2	3 months
P13	Selling cosmetics	22	Single	0	1 year
P14	Selling handmade crafts	30	Married	1	3 years
P15	Selling clothes	32	Married	2	3 years
P16	Selling cosmetics	29	Married	1	2 years

Source: Author

Data Analysis

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in the researcher's and participants' native language, Persian. The interviews have been voice recorded in agreement with the interviewees. The material was later transcribed verbatim and anonymized. The data from each interview was analyzed through thematic analysis, and NVivo software was used to identify themes. Considering that the right to left languages like Persian may not make NVivo work as expected (QSR International, 2022), the transcribed material was translated into English, and then it was coded for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Initially, to invite the participants for the interview, an information letter was sent to them. In this letter, the purpose of the study and the interview process was explained entirely. It was mentioned that the

interview would be audio recorded to be transcribed afterward. Moreover, at the beginning of the interviews, the explanations about the interview process were given again, and the consent was verbally agreed upon. There was a possibility of conducting online interviews and video recording, but for the convenience of the interviewees, a telephone interview was conducted, and accordingly, only audio was recorded. This action could reduce the stress on the interviewees. Moreover, it was emphasized during the interview that interviewees are allowed to leave the interview at any time, or they can request a pause for the interview. Finally, the interviews were transcribed and anonymized. The transcripts were sent to the interviewees for approval, and no objection was received.

Results

As a result of the analysis, four main themes were found, two of which have subcategories. The themes are defined according to the content of the interviews, to answer the research question, and through the lens of the empowerment framework. Table 2 shows the identified themes and their subcategories.

Table 2. Identified Themes

Themes	Subcategories
The general perception of empowerment	
Disabling factors for women's empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different roles of women • Lack of proper support structures • Banning of some social media in Iran
Enabling factors for women's empowerment by using Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing expenses for running HBBs • Income and economic independence • Control and decision making • General effects
Special features of Instagram for HBBs	

Source: Author

The General Perception of Empowerment

Early in all interviews, the participants were asked about their perception of women's empowerment and how empowered they consider

themselves. This was asked to understand what the interviewees perceived as empowerment. The participants consider pursuing their goals and desires as the meaning of empowerment.

P1: "I think an empowered woman thinks that like men and like other people, she can achieve many of her goals and aspirations."

In interviews, self-reliance and independence were mentioned as another dimensions of empowerment. Meanwhile, participants have paid more attention to financial independence.

P6: "An empowered woman can rely on herself."

P4: "I think an empowered woman is independent in her life, in every aspect, especially financially."

Overall, interviewees had a high understanding of differences in circumstances in the empowerment discussion.

P2: "Empowerment can have many broad definitions, and it cannot be said that it has one or two characteristics, and it may have one definition for each person in any situation."

Disabling Factors for Women's Empowerment

The interviewees were asked several questions about the challenges and barriers they encountered. Thus, the researcher can develop an approach to finding factors that hinder women's empowerment. Understanding these factors, which are discussed below, can assist the researcher in exploring the role Instagram plays in overcoming the limitations.

Lack of Proper Support Structures

According to the interviews, the lack of proper support structures during pregnancy and illness can result in women being unable to find a job or losing their jobs. As a result, the participants have decided to start their own HBBs.

P2: "I suffer from Multiple sclerosis (MS), and when my employer found out that I had MS and what my illness was, he fired me."

P11: "In order to take care of my newborn, I quit my job and could not go back."

However, the participants have been able to remove these barriers since Instagram provided the structure to run their HBBs.

Different Roles of Women

In particular, married participants play several roles in their lives, and they are responsible for different issues in the role of wife and mother. They mentioned the interference of running an HBB with their responsibilities at home and discussed how they manage these numerous tasks.

P10: "Besides running my business, I also have to take care of my child and do housework."

P16: "Maintaining a balance between household chores and running my HBB is difficult and requires a lot of energy."

According to the interviews, using Instagram cannot help women in this regard, and running their HBBs may even complicate matters.

Banning of Some Social Media in Iran

In addition to Instagram, the participants in this study use a wide range of social media. However, some social media such as YouTube, Telegram, and Facebook are banned in Iran and are not easy to access, which has caused some difficulties for the participants. YouTube was specifically mentioned by interviewees as a source of tutorial videos. Meanwhile, it appears that this restriction has greatly affected P2.

P2: "Here in Iran, we had the problem of banning Telegram. In the beginning, my business was on Telegram, and then it was banned, and many people lost their access to Telegram."

Although Instagram can assist women in overcoming the consequences of this limitation to some extent, participants are still restricted from using other social media.

Enabling Features for Women's Empowerment by Using Instagram

To get good knowledge about the factors that can reinforce women's empowerment, interviewees were asked about their motivations and general effects of running their HBBs through Instagram on their life, which are discussed in turn below.

Reducing Expenses for Running HBBs

The participants discussed various aspects that lead to cost reductions by using Instagram to run their HBBs. In this way, women need to invest

less, and it is easier for them to start a business. It was a common point raised by interviewees that they do not need to rent a place.

P9: "My business did not require any investment, and since I did not rent a place or hire staff, it was a low-risk situation for me."

P12: "It was impossible for me to rent a place, and I did not want customers to come to my house to buy clothes, so I used Instagram to sell my clothes online."

Participant 2, who makes homemade cakes, pointed out that she did not need to prepare any special equipment to start her HBB.

P2: "I did not consider any financial resources to start my work and I worked and prepared my own equipment gradually."

Income and Economic Independence

Participants stated that running their HBBs enabled them to achieve financial independence and spend on their interests, which was one of the main reasons for starting their HBBs.

P13: "Now that I have my own income, I can buy anything I want."

P14: "Money was one of my main motivations for starting my HBB."

Control and Decision Making

Participants' responses to how they make decisions on various issues are represented in Table 3. For matters related to their HBBs, all participants described themselves as the main decision-makers, whereas that was not the case for other matters.

Table 3. Decision making

No.	Who makes decisions about		
	Daily life	Children	HBB
P4	<i>"It is mostly with my husband, but he certainly asks my opinion."</i>	<i>"My husband and I, It is fifty-fifty."</i>	<i>"I decide what to do. I get advice, but I am the final decision maker."</i>
P5	<i>"Most of the time, we, the family and the children, decide to do something."</i>	<i>"In most cases, they make their own decisions."</i>	<i>"In general, it is on me from start to end."</i>
P7	<i>"My husband and I"</i>	<i>"I, but I also consider my husband's opinions."</i>	<i>"Myself, because it is my business."</i>

Source: Author

Another important aspect of this discussion is that the participants stated that they run their own businesses because they do not want anyone else to command them or control what they do at work. In this regard, P11 explained the advantages of her business as follows:

P11: "The hours I work, leave, and other matters are up to me, and I do not need anyone else's approval."

General Effects

The purpose of this section is to examine the general impact of using Instagram by participants to run their HBBs. Overall, all participants considered running HBBs on Instagram beneficial and were satisfied with the general effects they experienced. P1 specifically mentioned the effects that it has on her husband and her child.

P1: "I feel that I have gained better self-confidence; I feel that my husband sees me as more powerful than before. [...] and I feel that it also affects my daughter because I am learning, she is learning from me."

P8 emphasized the impact of her HBB on other aspects of her life and her self-confidence to achieve her desires.

P8: "My HBB multiplied my confidence to pursue more of the things I love because I feel it is possible."

Special Features of Instagram for HBBs

The participants discussed the features of Instagram that make it different from other social media platforms, as well as its value for businesses. In this regard, P3 and P15 pointed out more detailed items.

P3: "Using Instagram, you can easily follow people you do not know and introduce your page to them."

P15: "Instagram allows me to showcase my products very effectively and attractively through photos and videos."

Accordingly, the participants implicitly discussed the possibility of better marketing as a result of better product display and the possibility of interaction with potential customers.

Analysis and Discussion

To answer the research question, the results are analyzed based on the components of the empowerment framework. Table 4 summarises the themes associated with each dimension of the empowerment framework.

Table 4. Dimensions of empowerment framework and related themes

Dimensions	Related themes
Women's Empowerment concept	The general perception of empowerment
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing expenses for running HBBs • Lack of proper support structures • Different roles of women • Banning of some social media in Iran • Special features of Instagram for HBBs
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income and economic independence • Control and decision making
Achievements	General effects

Source: Author

Women's Empowerment Concept

Since this study aims to understand how using Instagram affects women's empowerment, it is more appropriate to examine what participants perceive as empowerment first and then examine how the use of Instagram can impact empowerment in the studied context.

In the interviews, all participants mentioned their perception of women's empowerment. They stated different dimensions and according to them, the key aspects are: pursuing goals and desires, self-reliance, and independence, particularly financial independence. The mentioned dimensions are in line with the women's empowerment literature. Kaber (1999) points out that people's ability to define their own choices and to pursue their goals, even when there is opposition, is related to the agency dimension of women's empowerment. Furthermore, in a study conducted in Iran, participants indicated that women's empowerment is associated with financial independence (Aghazamani, Kerstetter & Allison, 2020). Economic independence allows women to make their own decisions that impact their own lives (Phan, 2013), and it may be for this reason that participants emphasize it. Cornwall (2016) suggests empowerment is not a

fixed state or an endpoint, and the factors that empower one woman might not empower another. In the interviews, it was noted that empowerment could come in different forms for different people and in different situations, which can indicate that the participants have a deep understanding of the concept.

The Impact of Using Instagram on Resources

In the process of empowerment, the conditions under which people gain access to resources are as significant as the resources themselves (Kabeer, 2003). The findings of this study show that using Instagram as the platform for the HBBs has facilitated these women's access to resources.

Women face multiple barriers on their entrepreneurial journey and limited access to funding is one of them (Naguib, 2022). Using Instagram has reduced the initial costs of starting a business for women. Indeed, it reduces the risk of starting an HBB for them. They do not need to rent a place or hire shop assistants. Considering this, Instagram has improved women's access to resources.

A recent study conducted in Kurdistan, Iran, explains that women perceive employment as the path to empowerment, though employment opportunities are limited (Shakiba, Ghaderzadeh & Moghadam, 2021). In this study, some interviewees have lost their jobs due to the lack of proper support structures for women experiencing illness or pregnancy. However, they have overcome this barrier by starting their own HBBs on Instagram. The remarkable point here is that women who work still have most of the responsibilities of housework and childcare, which can considerably affect their lives and, thus, their level of empowerment (Cinar & Kose, 2018). The participants in this study experienced a double burden of taking care of children and doing housework, as well as running their HBBs. This issue can weaken the resources available to them. According to Hussain and Amin (2018) ICTs allow women to perform their existing gendered roles more effectively as wives and mothers. Participants in this study also noted that despite managing their online HBBs, they do not underestimate their roles as mothers and wives.

The interviewees noted the lack of access to social media such as YouTube and Telegram, which could undermine women's access to resources. Alternatively, Instagram's applicable features have made it a popular choice among participants. Virtanen, Björk, and Sjöström (2017) suggest Instagram has become increasingly popular as a marketing platform

due to its characteristics, highlighting the trend toward visual content in social media marketing. The interviewees also mentioned several features on Instagram that are beneficial to their HBBs, including uploading pictures and videos to showcase products in an attractive way and the possibility of interacting with a large audience. Accordingly, using Instagram can overcome, to a certain extent, the limitations on access to other social media. However, the interviewees stated that using Instagram did not eliminate the need for other social media.

It can be claimed that launching HBBs on Instagram has generally improved women's access to resources. Despite this, using Instagram has not been able to overcome all obstacles in this dimension.

The Impact of Using Instagram on Agency

When women entrepreneurs decide to start a business, they exercise their agency (De Silva et al., 2021). Interviews reveal that running HBBs on Instagram has strengthened the agency of the participants in various ways.

Participants all identified themselves as the main decision-makers in relation to their HBBs, whereas not everyone did so in regard to other issues. Moreover, this can be reviewed regarding the fact that these women are their own bosses and not directed by anyone else. Therefore, it can be concluded that running an HBB on Instagram has benefited women in exercising decision-making, at least with respect to their HBBs.

In general, work with payment can potentially improve women's agency within the family because it provides them with a source of income independent of the family. As a result, they are in a stronger position when bargaining (Kabeer, 2003). With an HBB on Instagram, interviewees have earned money and gained financial independence to some degree, which can strengthen their agency. However, it is worth noting that economic empowerment does not always translate into empowerment in other aspects of life (Gressel et al., 2020), and one aspect alone cannot be considered.

A study about ICTs and women's empowerment points out that ICTs are the resources that expand women's agency (Hussain & Amin, 2018). Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that the use of Instagram for launching women's HBBs in various ways can strengthen their agency.

The Impact of Using Instagram on Achievements

Achievement is related to well-being outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). The participants in this study intend to increase their welfare and lead better lives by launching their HBBs. Instagram assists these women in running their businesses by providing a platform to get started.

In previous sections, the benefits of starting an HBB on Instagram to empower women by facilitating their access to resources and improving their agency were discussed, which can all increase women's well-being as well. At the same time, study participants discussed specific points about the general effects of running their HBBs on their life. In this regard, the change that takes place within the family because of running the HBB is important. This can affect the relationship between husband and wife as well as between mother and children. Likewise, Kabeer (2005) states that paid work done at home can shift the power balance within a family.

The next point brought up in interviews was the feeling of self-belief in a way that affects other aspects of life. This self-confidence leads to pursuing other desires as well and can impact the women's well-being.

Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the question: "How does Instagram affect the empowerment of Iranian women by supporting them to start their own HBBs?" And to answer the research question, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with Iranian women who run their HBBs on Instagram.

According to Noor, Asghar, and Arfeen (2021), having a mobile phone, access to the internet, and employment are positively and significantly associated with women's empowerment. The findings of this study reveal that Instagram can improve women's empowerment by offering women the platform to launch their HBBs. Indeed, participants can achieve greater agency, facilitate access to resources, and improve achievements by using Instagram. Nevertheless, Instagram could not overcome all the limitations on women's empowerment.

This study was done on the individual level. Kabeer (2003) underlines that for social transformation, individual empowerment is crucial, but without structural transformation, it will not be able to undermine the

reproduction of inequity on a systemic scale. This can show the importance of higher-level planning for increasing women's empowerment.

The results of this study show that it is important to strengthen and use the opportunities of social media and, in particular, Instagram in order to empower women. This is especially crucial for women in countries with less support since it can allow them to overcome the limitations that obstruct their empowerment.

It is a limitation that this study does not take into account the differences in running HBBs on Instagram in rural and city areas. Differences can exist in the field of HBBs, in the facilities available to women, and in the cultures and values that exist in the rural and city areas which can affect the agency, resources, and, ultimately, the achievement of women. For future research, it would be useful to examine how Instagram can affect women's empowerment, particularly in rural areas, by starting their HBBs.

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