

Captured and Captioned: A Qualitative Study of Representing Long-Distance Relationships on Instagram

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Abstract

Aim: This study qualitatively examines the representation of long-distance relationships on Instagram, analyzing how these relationships are portrayed through posts and captions.

Method: Using a qualitative approach and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method, a total of 740 Instagram posts related to long-distance relationships were initially identified. These posts were collected through a snowball sampling method using specific hashtags. Following a systematic screening process, promotional, non-personal, and irrelevant posts were excluded to focus on real-life experiences, resulting in a final dataset of 182 posts. Selection criteria required posts to contain images of individuals or handwritten messages in Persian, explicitly related to long-distance relationships. The selected images and captions were carefully analyzed and coded. Results: The thematic analysis identified four main themes: (1) Expression of Love and Affection, (2) Planning for the Future, (3) Capturing Special Moments in Long-Distance Relationships, and (4) Waiting and Longing. Findings indicate that Instagram serves as an effective tool for maintaining and strengthening long-distance relationships. Users actively utilize this platform to express emotions, cope with longing, and plan future reunions.

Conclusion: This study emphasizes the role of social media, particularly Instagram, in shaping and understanding long-distance relationships. The research specifically identifies relationship patterns within a Persian-language digital context and can be compared with studies conducted in other languages to provide a broader understanding of digital media's influence. The findings offer valuable insights for psychologists, family counselors, and social science researchers, providing strategies to enhance emotional communication in long-distance relationships.

Keywords: Long-Distance, Relationships, Instagram, Representing.



Introduction

In recent decades, with the advancement of communication technologies and the rise of social media, human relationships have taken on new forms. One significant change is the increase in the number of long-distance relationships. These types of relationships are defined by the geographical distance between two individuals, where, for various reasons such as work, education, or personal circumstances, they are unable to meet regularly in person. Instead, they manage their relationship through modern communication tools like video calls, messaging apps, and social media platforms (Zebua & Kartikawati, 2023). Communication tools like messaging apps and video calls play a crucial role in maintaining satisfaction in long-distance relationships, as they enable greater interaction and constant communication between partners (Holtzman et al., 2021).

Instagram, as one of the leading platforms in the realm of social media, allows users to share their personal and public moments with others through the posting of images, videos, and text captions. In recent years, this platform has become one of the most important communication tools, providing a visual and interactive environment where users can display their everyday moments, significant events, and even inner emotions through visual and textual content. This feature is especially vital for individuals in long-distance relationships, serving as a key tool for maintaining and managing these types of relationships (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2020).

In such circumstances, maintaining emotional connection and creating a sense of closeness from a distance is not without its challenges. Instagram, by providing a platform for sharing experiences through images and captions, allows individuals engaged in long-distance relationships to share special moments of their lives with their partners and, in a way, maintain a virtual presence and continuous connection with each other (Pantalos et al., 2022). Instagram has also evolved into a tool for documenting daily life. Users can display specific moments and even the challenges of their relationships through shared images, both old and new, along with emotional captions. This platform enables users to express their feelings visually and effectively through emojis, hashtags, and images, creating a new language of emotional communication in the digital space (Pluta, 2021).

Moreover, as a public social network, Instagram allows users to involve others in their relationship. Individuals in long-distance relationships may use Instagram as a space to receive social validation from friends, family, and even their followers. This validation can come in the form of likes, supportive comments, and empathetic messages, which in turn can strengthen the relationship and the inner emotions of the individuals involved (Sciara et al., 2021). For this reason, Instagram has become an essential tool for managing and enhancing long-distance relationships, as it helps people share their relationship experiences with others while also maintaining a sense of connection and presence, even across great geographical distances (Sciara et al., 2021).

One of Instagram's key features that helps these individuals is the use of hashtags. Hashtags not only help categorize content and increase post visibility, but they also create a space where individuals can find content related to their own situation. Those who use hashtags associated with long-distance relationships can easily view posts and experiences of others in similar circumstances. This shared experience can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, as they realize others are facing similar challenges and experiences (Perone et al., 2021). Additionally, using these hashtags facilitates the sharing of experiences and the gaining of support from others (Schreiber, 2023). By employing relevant hashtags, individuals can view stories of success, experiences, strategies, and even the challenging moments of others, drawing inspiration from them. This sharing fosters a sense of solidarity among individuals and shows them that the challenges of long-distance relationships are not theirs alone. Viewing these posts and connecting with others in similar situations can help individuals feel more positive about their own relationships and reassure them that they are not alone. Therefore, examining how long-distance relationships are represented on Instagram is of particular importance. The overarching question of this research is: How are long-distance relationships represented on Instagram?

Methods

To examine the various representations of long-distance relationships on Instagram, a qualitative study was conducted on a purposive sample of public posts (including images and captions) related to long-distance relationships. Data collection and sampling followed a three-stage sequential approach.

In the first stage, we explored key trends related to long-distance relationships using hashtags to define the scope (Highfield & Leaver, 2014). At this stage, a total of 740 Instagram posts were initially identified based on their relevance to long-distance relationships. These posts were gathered through an extensive hashtag search and user engagement analysis. To ensure a diverse dataset, we selected posts that reflected a variety of user experiences and emotional expressions associated with long-distance relationships.

In the second stage, the researchers reviewed the selected posts to familiarize themselves with emerging trends and to refine the sampling criteria. This process helped categorize posts based on their thematic content and distinguish between different representations of long-distance relationships. Posts that primarily contained advertising content, general relationship advice, or non-personal experiences were excluded. Additionally, posts that lacked clear indicators of long-distance relationship dynamics, such as those without explicit references to distance or relationship management strategies, were removed.

In the third stage, several selection criteria were established to determine the final dataset for analysis. These criteria consisted of three components:



Images had to feature individuals or their handwritten notes to directly reflect human emotions and connections.

The content had to explicitly depict long-distance relationships through images or captions, clearly illustrating the concept of distance and how individuals navigate such relationships.

A diverse representation of relationships was ensured, including emotional bonds within both marital and premarital contexts, to capture different aspects of long-distance relationships. These criteria served as the primary guide for selecting appropriate samples for the study.

Following the application of these criteria, a total of 182 posts were finalized for analysis. Additionally, we limited the number of posts related to recurring themes, such as similar images of video calls or reunion moments, to avoid redundancy in the dataset. Posts primarily aimed at advertising or providing relationship advice were excluded to maintain the focus on real-life personal experiences.

Considering the importance of ethical principles and "ethics in practice" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), although Instagram posts (images and captions) are publicly accessible, we obtained consent from users to use their content in this research. To minimize identification, any information that could lead to direct identification of users, such as profiles and account IDs, was removed. During data analysis, some posts that were no longer publicly accessible were excluded, and these processes adhered to the best ethical practices in social media research (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Locatelli, 2017).

To analyze the sample posts, we focused on the content, audience, context, authorship of each image, caption, and relevant hashtags. Following Haidy Geismar's (2017) digital ethnography approach, we used hashtags as a unit of analysis, as "users gather around hashtags to share their shared experiences." This clustering of images around hashtags created a common scope for uniform data. Methodologists argue that traditional methods used for text analysis are also useful for analyzing images and visual data (Saldana, 2015). With this in mind, we used a combination of images and text (including hashtags) as analytical units and employed thematic analysis to identify different patterns and themes in the posts. For this, we followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: First, the researcher became familiar with the collected data (posts, captions, and Instagram images related to long-distance relationships) and took notes on initial observations. During this phase, we conducted a preliminary review of images and texts regarding emotions and expressions of love in such relationships. Then, initial codes were generated, representing the key themes present in the posts and images related to long-distance relationships. In the next stage, similar codes were grouped into potential themes. A thematic diagram was then developed to help visualize the connections between these themes and clarify the overall structure of the data. Themes were subsequently refined to ensure that they accurately represented the data. Finally, these themes were linked to the research's primary questions. Using the flexibility of this approach, we combined textual and visual analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the data. The analysis of posts, including images and texts related to long-distance relationships, ultimately provided a multifaceted analysis of this data. Disagreements regarding the target audience and

interpretation of hashtags were discussed live among the researchers and resolved by consensus.

Results

A total of 182 Instagram posts were selected for analysis after an initial screening of 740 posts. These posts were chosen based on their relevance to long-distance relationships and their alignment with the study's selection criteria.

Table 1: Demographic information	
Count	Demographic Feature
140	Posts from Iran
42	Posts from Outside Iran
94	Posts from Female Accounts
65	Posts from Male Accounts
23	Posts from Couple Accounts

The dataset included posts featuring both images and captions that explicitly depicted aspects of long-distance relationships. Given the study's focus on Persian-language content, all selected posts were written in Persian. Demographic information is provided in Table 1, and the coding details are presented in Table 2. Example Instagram posts with captions, while adhering to ethical guidelines, are also shared in the following section.

Table 2: Data Coding	
Subcode	Main Code
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating joint posts with side-by-side photos • Expressing emotions through long captions • Posting romantic messages and using shared profile pictures • Sharing romantic quotes from books or poems • Posting images of personalized gifts 	Expressing love and affection in long-distance relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referring to upcoming reunions • Sending hopeful messages for the future • Sharing travel plans with images • Posting future plans or maps • Creating countdown posts until the next meeting 	Planning for the future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing images from reunions and celebrations • Posting travel photos, including images from first meetings 	Capturing special long-distance moments



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capturing anniversary moments and video call screenshots • Sharing moments from trips to visit the romantic partner 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in timing and daily schedules • Visual metaphors of absence • Differences in communication methods • Display of objects or indirect symbols related to waiting 	Waiting and longing

Expressing Love and Affection in Long-Distance Relationships

In long-distance relationships, expressing love and affection plays a crucial role in maintaining emotions and the connection between two people. These feelings are often conveyed through Instagram posts in the form of images, captions, and stories, providing audiences with a deep understanding of the romantic relationship facing geographical distance. Individuals use this platform to share their romantic emotions during moments of reunion and separation, creating romantic content that makes the distance seem less significant.

One of the most prominent ways of expressing love in long-distance relationships is through couple photos during reunions. These images often capture very special and emotional moments, such as when two people meet after a long time apart. These photos typically depict moments of hugging, joyful smiles, and even tears of happiness, accompanied by captions like, "After all this time, together again." These images highlight the value of in-person meetings in such relationships and show how significant each reunion is for the individuals. Besides images, romantic captions emphasizing the distance also form a major part of this display of love. People often refer to the enduring nature of their love, which remains strong despite geographical distance. Phrases like, "Distance can't keep us apart" or "Distance only makes us stronger" are frequently used to show that their love has persevered and grown stronger despite the challenges of separation. These captions are often posted alongside photos of the couple, either together or apart, to convey love and hope to their audience.

Another common way of expressing love and affection is by showcasing moments of reunion or farewell. These include photos of goodbyes at airports or train stations, or images of returning home after a long trip. These pictures often capture the most emotional moments of the relationship, whether filled with the joy of meeting again or the sadness of parting ways. Captions such as "Goodbyes get harder every time" or "This won't be the last time" often accompany these images. These displays clearly show how

love endures through the difficult moments of separation, with the hope of future reunions.

Overall, the expression of love and affection in long-distance relationships on Instagram is conveyed through couple photos, romantic captions, and emotional moments of reunion and farewell. These posts allow the audience to witness the ups and downs of such relationships. By sharing these moments, users demonstrate that love not only survives the challenges of distance but also grows stronger with each meeting and farewell.

One example is an image of a couple standing together romantically, smiling deeply, while both are holding sparklers. The glow of the sparklers illuminates their faces, emphasizing the deep emotions between them. The text on the image, "Kissing you from afar..." alludes to the longing and sense of separation in a long-distance relationship, while also conveying how love diminishes the impact of that distance. In the caption, romantic phrases express the closeness felt despite geographical separation: "What difference does it make where we are in the world? It may be far, but it feels close." These words show that in this relationship, physical distance cannot weaken the emotional bond. The use of red heart and bird emojis symbolizes love and freedom in the relationship, reinforcing the message that their feelings remain strong despite the distance.

In one of the analyzed cases perfectly capture the essence of long-distance relationships on Instagram, where couples use visual symbols and emotional captions to share their love and emotional connection in the digital world, emphasizing the power of love to overcome physical distance.

Planning for the Future in Long-Distance Relationships

In long-distance relationships, planning for the future is one of the most essential strategies for maintaining connection and fostering hope for the continuation of the relationship. Instagram users frequently share images and write captions related to their future plans, aiming not only to ease the sense of waiting but also to visualize a bright and shared future for themselves and their partner. These expressions appear in posts and stories that intimately and emotionally reflect their plans for upcoming reunions. References to future meetings are commonly seen in posts where users excitedly anticipate special moments. Images of airplane tickets, packed suitcases, or even captions like "Just a few more days until we meet again" convey to the audience that significant moments are on the horizon. These visual displays not only symbolize hope for the future but also represent the strength of patience and endurance in such long-term relationships.

Moreover, sending hopeful messages about the future through captions or direct messages is widely observed in long-distance relationships. Instagram users often use these

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messages to create a positive and motivating atmosphere for their relationship. Phrases like "We'll always be together" or "Our future is bright" are typically seen in captions or stories related to future planning. These messages not only reassure their partner but also show followers that their relationship is built on hope and trust in the future. Such messages are often accompanied by images of shared smiles, sent gifts, or video calls, all of which signify the effort to maintain commitment in the relationship.

Another popular way of showcasing future planning in long-distance relationships is sharing images of travel plans. Instagram users frequently post photos of travel tickets, flight schedules, packed suitcases, and even the destinations where they plan to meet. These images are often captioned with phrases like "I can't wait to see you again," expressing the excitement and anticipation for the next reunion. These posts give the audience a sense of closeness to an important upcoming meeting and serve as a way to turn distance into a strength in the relationship. Images of packed suitcases or travel tickets become visual symbols of hope and planning, illustrating how long-distance relationships, despite their challenges, are sustained through such future planning.

Additionally, images of future maps also feature prominently in this display on Instagram. Users often share pictures of maps highlighting specific locations where they plan to meet in the future. These images may include destinations that both partners are eager to visit or places that hold special memories for them. Posts like these are usually accompanied by captions such as "Looking forward to our next meeting at this magical place" or "Our map for the future." These images and maps subtly point to the couple's commitment and hope for a shared future, signaling to the audience that despite geographical distance, the relationship is continuously growing and evolving.

In conclusion, planning for the future on Instagram, expressed through images, captions, and visual symbols, serves as a key strategy for sustaining connection in long-distance relationships. These displays inspire feelings of hope, commitment, and excitement for the future, emphasizing the power of patience, endurance, and mutual effort in such relationships.

Capturing Special Moments in Long-Distance Relationships

In long-distance relationships, significant and memorable moments take on heightened importance because the individuals rarely have the opportunity for in-person meetings. These moments are viewed as milestones in the relationship, and Instagram users are often eager to share them. The images depicting these special occasions, aimed at showcasing the value of these meetings and conveying positive and meaningful emotions, are frequently accompanied by related captions and hashtags.

Photos of reunions and celebrations are some of the most prominent content shared by long-distance relationship users on Instagram. These images often include rare in-person meetings, birthday celebrations, anniversaries, or other special occasions. Users share these photos with emotional captions to express how much these moments mean to them and how long they have waited for these reunions. Additionally, sharing travel photos is a major part of this content, as trips taken to visit a partner are frequently documented with images of airports, tickets, or moments during the journey. These images usually represent the joint effort to maintain the relationship and are often paired with captions like "Finally together."

Photos from first meetings after the relationship begins also hold a special place. These images capture the first meeting after a long separation, typically showing an emotional and joy-filled moment that users try to present in the best possible way. These moments may include pictures of the first look, first shared smile, or the first embrace. Additionally, documenting anniversaries is widely shared on Instagram, symbolizing the stability of the relationship and successfully overcoming periods of distance. Users share these images as a reminder of their success in maintaining the relationship, using them as a symbol of lasting love.

In one of the analyzed cases, a couple is seen warmly embracing in a public place, most likely an airport. The woman, dressed simply with a headscarf, leans into the man, who holds her tightly in his arms. The man, with a calm and downcast expression, draws her closer, sharing a moment of deep emotional connection. The woman's bag stands out with bright patterns and a small heart-shaped toy hanging from it, symbolizing love and attachment in this scene. In the background, other people are busy moving about, but the couple seems to be lost in their own world, oblivious to everything happening around them. The soft lighting and somewhat crowded environment, with a focus on the couple's deep emotions, effectively convey a sense of calm and intimacy.

Waiting and Longing in Long-Distance Relationships

Waiting and longing are among the most prominent emotions in long-distance relationships, often showcased on Instagram in various forms. Users share their feelings about physical separation and the inability to meet in person through images, captions, and visual symbols. These representations clearly highlight the emotional challenges of distance.

In long-distance relationships, waiting and longing are central emotions that users express in diverse ways on Instagram. One of the most common displays of these feelings is the difference in time zones and daily routines. This difference is often shown in posts and stories that highlight the time gap between the two partners. For instance, one person may

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post photos of their daily activities while their partner, in a different time zone, is resting. Captions like "When I'm awake, they're asleep" or "Waiting for a video call at the end of the day" emphasize this time difference, reflecting the sense of longing and distance.

Users also use visual metaphors to express absence and longing. These images often depict empty objects or spaces, such as a two-person table with only one person sitting at it, or scenes of nature with a lone individual. These symbols subtly hint at the absence of a partner and convey a sense of longing and waiting through the imagery.

Moreover, the difference in how communication is maintained in long-distance relationships is often highlighted in Instagram posts. Instead of meeting in person, people rely on digital tools like video calls and text messages. Screenshots of video calls or stories referring to online conversations are part of this representation. Captions like "I miss you even through the screen" emotionally illustrate this form of distant communication.

Additionally, users frequently incorporate indirect symbols related to waiting, such as images of plane tickets, packed suitcases, or countdown calendars marking the days until the next reunion. These symbols not only give the audience a sense of anticipation but also reflect the patience and endurance required in long-distance relationships.

Sample Image Description: The image depicts a video call, clearly illustrating one of the most common aspects of long-distance relationships. A smartphone is placed on a table, showing two people who appear to be in a romantic relationship. Both are smiling warmly, engaged in a friendly and intimate conversation via video call. This image captures one of the typical methods couples use to maintain connection, allowing them to feel visually close despite geographical distance.

The red lighting in the image enhances the feeling of warmth and intimacy, and the surrounding environment is designed to draw focus to the phone and the video call. The emotional message written on the image reads: "Situation: When thousands of people are around you, but all you want is the one person who's thousands of miles away." This sentence poignantly reflects the emotional state of long-distance couples who, despite being surrounded by others, have their hearts and thoughts fixed on their faraway partner.

The caption under the post adds, "Send this to the one who stole your heart," accompanied by a red heart emoji, expressing deep love and attachment while encouraging followers to engage with these emotions in a friendly way. The large number of likes and comments reflects the widespread empathy and emotional connection that followers have with this heartfelt content.

In one of the analyzed cases, set against a dark and shadowy background, vividly portrays the feelings of longing and distance often experienced in long-distance relationships. The

text on the image clearly reflects this theme: "Those whose hearts are closest to us are often the ones farthest away from us." This sentence encapsulates the paradox of long-distance relationships, where despite the physical distance, individuals are emotionally and spiritually very close. The red heart emoji further emphasizes love and affection, symbolizing that even with the separation, the love remains strong and enduring.

In the caption, the writer expresses their longing for someone far away, stating: "My heart is with you, and today more than ever, I would give my all just to be able to wrap you in my embrace, even with all the sadness." This line demonstrates the writer's deep affection and commitment, showing their readiness to sacrifice everything just to be with their loved one. The writer then adds an even more emotional line: "More than anything, I wish I could pour my entire soul into your eyes and gaze at you forever." This powerful statement conveys the depth of the writer's desire and love, longing to be with their partner.

The post concludes with a quote from a poet: "Proximity of the heart makes distance meaningless," emphasizing that geographical distance cannot weaken the bond between hearts, and true love transcends both space and time. The image and accompanying text beautifully illustrate the sense of longing and emotional connection in long-distance relationships, capturing the essence of love that endures despite physical separation.

Discussion

The thematic analysis of this study revealed that the expression of love and affection in long-distance relationships is represented through specific structures in Instagram posts, such as joint posts with side-by-side photos and emotional expressions through long captions. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the importance of using images and text to convey emotions in social media (Muassomah, Yurisa & Rosid, 2020). Studies indicate that users widely utilize social media platforms like Instagram to maintain long-distance relationships, with tools such as joint posts and the use of images proving effective for conveying emotions and fostering a sense of closeness (Turner & Prince, 2020). Additionally, posting romantic messages and sharing love quotes from books or poems is another common method of expressing affection in long-distance relationships. This type of emotional expression not only helps strengthen the connection between couples but also reinforces a sense of commitment and closeness through the sharing of deep emotions. Research has shown that using social media to express emotions, as well as sharing images of personalized gifts as symbols of love, plays a crucial role in maintaining these relationships (Yu, Inakage & Ueki, 2021). These methods not only help deepen communication but also alleviate the feelings of longing and physical distance (Kidwell, 2021).



Planning for the future emerged as a prevalent theme in Instagram posts related to long-distance relationships. This core code includes activities such as mentioning upcoming reunions and sending hopeful messages about the future. Users utilize Instagram to express optimism and plan for future meetings. These methods help build a sense of assurance and reduce anxiety about the lack of physical presence. Studies have highlighted the importance of communication in managing emotions and maintaining hope in long-distance relationships. Muassomah et al. (2020) pointed out that social media, especially in the exchange of hopeful messages, helps long-distance couples strengthen their bonds (Muassomah et al., 2020). Furthermore, activities like sharing travel plans and creating countdown posts until the next meeting were identified as common ways of illustrating future planning in these posts. These activities allow couples to stay actively engaged in planning for the future, maintaining a sense of belonging to each other despite long distances. In a study by Turner and Prince (2020), it was emphasized that social media enables long-distance couples to constantly plan and enhance the feeling of each other's continuous presence through images and messages (Turner & Prince, 2020).

The analysis of the core code "capturing special moments" in long-distance relationships, along with its related subcodes, revealed that Instagram users use posts and images to document and share significant moments such as reunions, celebrations, first meetings, and anniversaries. Sharing these moments serves as a means to preserve and strengthen emotional bonds and connections in these relationships. Pérez-Sabater (2021) showed that sharing special moments on social media can play a significant role in creating a sense of solidarity and social support among long-distance couples (Pérez-Sabater, 2021). Additionally, sharing images of video calls and travel moments to meet one's partner is another way social media strengthens emotional connections and maintains a sense of closeness in long-distance relationships. Kucera and colleagues (2021) explored the impact of virtual communication and the use of technologies like image sharing and video calls in maintaining emotional bonds in long-distance relationships. Their study shows that these techniques help reduce the stress caused by physical separation, allowing couples to share a virtual presence during special moments (Kucera et al., 2021).

One of the key challenges that couples in long-distance relationships face is the difference in time zones and daily schedules. This challenge is particularly pronounced in relationships spanning different time zones, making regular communication more difficult and intensifying feelings of loneliness and longing. In a study by Zebua and Kartikawati (2023), it was found that instant messaging apps like WhatsApp are widely used to coordinate schedules and maintain emotional connections. However, scheduling conflicts often remain, leading to feelings of longing (Zebua & Kartikawati, 2023). In addition, visual metaphors of absence play a crucial role in expressing longing and

emotions related to physical distance in Instagram posts and images. Symbolic objects like personalized gifts or old photos of couples are often used to maintain a sense of closeness. Research such as Alinejad (2020) has shown that social media, especially through the sharing of images and visual messages, helps couples manage feelings of longing and strengthen emotional connections. This kind of visual communication via social networks can significantly reduce negative feelings associated with physical distance (Alinejad, 2020).

Moreover, the display of indirect symbols associated with waiting, such as travel maps, tickets, or keepsakes, is used as a way to reduce longing and maintain hope for future reunions. A study by Holtzman and colleagues (2021) demonstrated that couples who use social media to share such symbols experience less longing, highlighting the importance of these visual communications in managing emotions in long-distance relationships (Holtzman et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that future research explore the effects of social media use on long-distance relationships more thoroughly, particularly among different age and cultural groups. Additionally, developing educational programs to raise awareness of strategies for better managing emotional connections in this digital space could be beneficial. The present research demonstrated that social media, particularly Instagram, serves as an effective tool for documenting and sharing special moments while managing the challenges of long-distance relationships. The intelligent use of images, captions, and hashtags helps individuals strengthen their emotional bonds and maintain a sense of closeness and presence despite physical distances. These findings could serve as a foundation for designing communication strategies in long-distance relationships and offer suggestions for improving the quality of such relationships.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the dataset was limited to public Instagram posts written in Persian, which means the findings may not be generalizable to users from different linguistic or cultural backgrounds. Second, the qualitative nature of the study does not allow for statistical generalization; instead, it provides an in-depth exploration of themes within the selected dataset. Third, the study relied on self-reported content shared by Instagram users, which may not fully capture the complexities of long-distance relationships beyond social media representations. Additionally, the study only focused on Instagram, excluding other platforms that may be used for maintaining long-distance relationships, such as WhatsApp or Telegram.

Future research should consider expanding the dataset to include posts in multiple languages to compare how long-distance relationships are represented across different cultural and linguistic contexts. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach incorporating



quantitative analysis could strengthen the study by providing statistical insights alongside thematic interpretations. Further studies could also explore longitudinal changes in how long-distance relationships are portrayed over time, assessing whether social media representations shift in response to broader societal trends. Another valuable direction would be to compare different social media platforms, analyzing whether users express and document long-distance relationships differently on Instagram compared to other platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, or Facebook. Lastly, incorporating direct user interviews could provide deeper insights into users' motivations for sharing long-distance relationship content and the real-life impact of these digital interactions.

Disclosure Statements

The Authors have no conflict of Interests.

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