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Art as Lifestyle: The Sociological Dynamics of Visual Art Consumption on Instagram Among Educated Youth in Rasht

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Abstract

Social media has transformed visual art consumption from an activity primarily associated with cultural institutions into an increasingly integrated component of everyday digital life. This study examined the sociological dynamics of visual art consumption on Instagram and its relationships with cultural capital, lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, and self-presentation among educated youth in Rasht, Iran. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 384 educated Instagram users aged 18–35 years in Rasht. Participants completed measures assessing Instagram use intensity, visual art consumption, cultural capital, lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, and self-presentation. Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Instagram use intensity was positively associated with visual art consumption ($\beta = .69$, $p < .001$). Visual art consumption was positively associated with cultural capital ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$) and lifestyle orientation ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$). Cultural capital was also positively associated with lifestyle orientation ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$). Lifestyle orientation showed strong positive associations with cultural identity ($\beta = .79$, $p < .001$) and self-presentation ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$), while cultural identity was positively associated with self-presentation ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). Instagram-based visual art consumption is closely connected with broader processes of cultural participation, lifestyle formation, identity construction, and digital self-presentation. The findings support the conceptualization of contemporary art consumption as a form of art-as-lifestyle, in which aesthetic preferences become embedded in everyday social and digital practices.

Keywords: Instagram; Visual Art; Art Consumption; Cultural Capital; Lifestyle.

Introduction

Visual art has traditionally been understood as a distinctive domain of cultural participation involving aesthetic appreciation, cultural knowledge, institutional access, and relatively specialized forms of consumption. Museums, galleries, exhibitions, and other cultural institutions have historically served as important settings through which artworks are encountered, interpreted, and socially valued. From a sociological perspective, however, engagement with art is not simply an individual response to aesthetic objects. Patterns of cultural participation are embedded within socialization, education, cultural capital, and broader systems of taste and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio, 1987; Bennett et al., 2009). Consequently, understanding contemporary art consumption requires attention not only to the characteristics of artworks and cultural institutions but also to the social environments through which individuals encounter and incorporate cultural practices into everyday life.

The expansion of digital and social media has substantially altered these environments. Cultural products

that were previously encountered primarily through specialized institutional spaces can now circulate through the same digital environments used for communication, entertainment, shopping, and self-presentation (Boyd, 2014; Leaver et al., 2020). Social media have therefore contributed to a reorganization of the boundaries between cultural production, cultural participation, and everyday consumption. Rather than encountering visual art exclusively in galleries or museums, users may discover artworks through personal networks, artists' accounts, cultural organizations, influencers, recommendations, and platform-generated content. Research on museum audiences has similarly shown that Instagram can become integrated into the experience of exhibitions and cultural objects, allowing visitors to document, interpret, communicate, and share their encounters with art (Budge, 2017; Budge & Burness, 2018). These developments suggest that digital platforms should be considered not merely as communication channels for cultural institutions but as increasingly important environments in which cultural experiences are produced and negotiated.

Instagram is particularly relevant to this transformation because of its strongly visual architecture. The platform enables users to encounter paintings, photography, graphic design, illustration, sculpture, fashion, architecture, and other aesthetic forms within a single continuously updated environment (Leaver et al., 2020). Its affordances for visual presentation, sharing, commenting, saving, and interaction allow artistic content to become embedded within ordinary patterns of digital consumption. Studies of Instagram have demonstrated how visual content is intertwined with identity construction, self-branding, authenticity, and social visibility (O'Donnell, 2018; Scolere et al., 2018; Abidin, 2016). Consequently, following an artist, saving an artwork, sharing an exhibition, commenting on an artistic post, or displaying particular aesthetic preferences may represent not only exposure to art but also participation in broader processes of cultural communication and identity construction.

This transformation is important because art consumption on Instagram can involve several interconnected practices. Users may encounter artworks incidentally while browsing, deliberately follow artists and galleries, interact with artistic communities, share or save cultural content, visit exhibitions after discovering them online, or purchase artworks and art-related products through digitally mediated channels. In this sense, digital art consumption can extend beyond the traditional distinction between viewing and purchasing. It may include forms of attention, appreciation, circulation, interaction, and symbolic appropriation through which users incorporate artistic content into their everyday cultural repertoires (Budge, 2017; Budge & Burness, 2018). Recent research on museums' use of Instagram likewise indicates that the platform has become an important environment for communicating collections and engaging audiences, although its democratizing potential is not necessarily realized uniformly across cultural institutions.

The sociological concept of lifestyle provides a useful framework for interpreting these developments. Lifestyle refers to relatively recognizable patterns through which individuals organize everyday practices, preferences, consumption, and forms of self-presentation. Although lifestyle is often associated with individual choice, sociological approaches emphasize that preferences are socially structured and connected to available cultural resources and systems of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984; Bennett et al., 2009). Cultural consumption can consequently function as a symbolic practice through which individuals communicate aspects of identity and position themselves within particular social and cultural environments. In digital contexts, this relationship becomes increasingly visible because consumption preferences can be publicly displayed, circulated, evaluated, and incorporated into online self-presentation (Marwick, 2013; O'Donnell, 2018).

The relationship between lifestyle and art consumption can therefore be understood through the concept of cultural distinction. Bourdieu (1984) argued that taste operates as a mechanism through which social differences are expressed and reproduced. Although subsequent scholarship has questioned the extent to which contemporary cultural boundaries correspond to rigid class divisions, the broader relationship between cultural resources, taste, and social positioning remains relevant (Bennett et al., 2009; Prieur et al., 2023). In particular, contemporary young people may combine forms of cultural consumption traditionally associated with high culture with popular, commercial, and digitally circulating cultural products. This pattern is consistent with the cultural omnivore perspective, according to which individuals with greater cultural resources may demonstrate broader rather than narrowly restricted repertoires of cultural participation (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Instagram provides an especially visible environment in which these diverse preferences can coexist and become part of an individual's publicly constructed lifestyle.

Social media may also transform taste from something that is simply expressed into something that is actively produced and negotiated. Paßmann and Schubert (2021) argue that social media users do not merely display tastes acquired elsewhere; through practices of liking, following, commenting, sharing, and evaluating, users participate in processes of taste-making and aesthetic valuation. In this environment, aesthetic preferences can emerge through repeated interaction between users, cultural objects, and platform structures. Thus, the consumption of visual art on Instagram may contribute to the formation of aesthetic preferences while simultaneously being shaped by those preferences. This reciprocal relationship is particularly relevant to the present study because it positions art consumption as an everyday social practice rather than as an isolated response to individual aesthetic preferences.

Another important dimension is the relationship between cultural consumption and self-presentation. Social media platforms make many aspects of everyday consumption visible to others, thereby transforming consumption into a potential form of symbolic communication. Users can communicate their cultural interests through the artists they follow, artworks they share, exhibitions they attend, and aesthetic styles they incorporate into their profiles. Research on Instagram has demonstrated that platform-specific features influence how users construct and manage different versions of the self for different audiences (O'Donnell, 2018; Scolere et al., 2018). More recent research likewise indicates that Instagram's different posting environments can shape impression management, audience orientation, and the aspects of identity that users choose to make visible (Kaçar, 2024). Art consumption may therefore have a dual character: it can provide personal aesthetic enjoyment while simultaneously functioning as a resource for communicating cultural preferences and constructing a recognizable social identity.

The social character of cultural consumption is further reinforced by the interactive structure of social media. Cultural preferences are rarely formed in complete isolation; they can be influenced by peers, communities, cultural organizations, artists, influencers, and other socially meaningful actors. Digital platforms intensify this process because acts of cultural appreciation can become observable and measurable through likes, comments, shares, followers, and other forms of engagement. Paßmann and Schubert (2021) conceptualize these interactions as part of contemporary processes of aesthetic valuation and distinction, while research on cultural participation emphasizes the importance of social interaction and shared discussion in shaping the meaning attached to artistic experiences. Thus, Instagram may contribute not only to individual exposure to art but also to social processes through which artworks become meaningful, desirable, recognizable, or culturally valued.

These processes are particularly relevant to educated youth. Education has historically been associated with the acquisition of cultural knowledge and resources that facilitate participation in a wider range of cultural activities (Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio, 1987). However, contemporary cultural participation cannot be understood solely through formal educational attainment. Recent scholarship on youth and cultural capital emphasizes that the cultural resources considered valuable among young people are continuously changing and that processes of distinction are actively negotiated rather than simply inherited (Prieur et al., 2023). Digital platforms provide an additional environment in which young people encounter cultural information, develop aesthetic vocabularies, discover new artistic forms, and communicate cultural preferences. Consequently, educated youth may use Instagram not only to access art but also to integrate artistic preferences into broader lifestyle practices.

The platformization of cultural production further complicates the relationship between art consumption and lifestyle. Social media platforms do not simply provide neutral spaces in which cultural content circulates. Their technical and economic infrastructures influence what becomes visible, how content is organized, and how cultural producers and audiences interact (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). Platform practices can simultaneously expand opportunities for cultural visibility and introduce new forms of commercial mediation, competition, and attention seeking (Duffy et al., 2019). Visual authenticity and aesthetic coherence may consequently become resources through which both cultural producers and ordinary users attract attention and establish credibility (Maares et al., 2021). Art consumption on Instagram should therefore be understood within a broader platform environment in which cultural value, visibility, identity, and commercial interests intersect.

The Iranian context provides an important setting in which to examine these relationships. Iranian youth increasingly encounter cultural products through digital environments that connect local practices with broader national and global cultural flows. Previous research has documented the significance of Instagram in Iranian cultural and social life, including its role in the presentation and negotiation of lifestyle and identity (Partain, 2020). Research on Iranian youth and digital media has also highlighted the broader relevance of internet and smartphone use to young people's everyday experiences (Baniasadi et al., 2022; Bagheri et al., 2025). Studies of interactive media in Iran further indicate the growing importance of social networks as environments for communication and interaction (Keifi et al., 2025; Yahyavi et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies suggest that digital platforms have become increasingly embedded in everyday social and cultural practices among Iranian users.

Rasht provides a particularly relevant urban context for examining these dynamics. The city possesses distinctive historical, cultural, and creative resources, and research has emphasized the role of cultural and creative industries in shaping its urban cultural identity and development. In particular, the historical district of Rasht Great Bazaar has been examined as a potential cultural and creative quarter, with local cultural resources and creative activities forming important components of the city's cultural landscape (Pourzakarya & Fadaei Nezhad Bahramjerdi, 2019). Subsequent research has highlighted the role of cultural resources, stakeholders, festivals, and cultural identity in developing an urban cultural policy platform for Rasht (Pourzakarya & Fadaei Nezhad Bahramjerdi, 2022). These characteristics make Rasht an informative setting for examining how local cultural resources intersect with digitally mediated forms of cultural consumption.

The cultural character of the city is also reflected in its historical built environment and urban identity. Research on historical houses and their spatial and visual organization in Iranian cities has emphasized the

relationship between architectural form, cultural meaning, and visual experience (Ezzati et al., 2024; Pashaei Asl et al., 2025). Similarly, studies of urban identity and cultural values have highlighted the importance of interpreting local cultural characteristics within broader processes of urban development and identity formation (Fasqandis & Monadi, 2025). Although these studies do not directly examine Instagram or visual art consumption, they provide contextual evidence for understanding the broader cultural and visual environment in which contemporary cultural practices in the region are embedded. The present study extends this contextual perspective from physical and urban cultural environments to digitally mediated cultural participation.

Despite growing research on social media, cultural participation, and digital communication, the sociological processes through which visual art consumption becomes incorporated into everyday lifestyle practices remain comparatively underexplored. Existing research has frequently examined Instagram in relation to museum communication, audience engagement, artistic promotion, self-presentation, or digital visibility (Budge, 2017; Budge & Burness, 2018; Leaver et al., 2020). Other scholarship has examined social media as a site of taste-making and distinction (Paßmann & Schubert, 2021), while research on platformization has emphasized the transformation of cultural production and circulation (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). Less attention, however, has been directed toward the way visual art consumption itself becomes embedded within the broader lifestyle, cultural identity, self-presentation, and perceived social distinction of educated young users in regional urban contexts.

This gap is particularly significant in non-Western settings, where local cultural traditions and institutions intersect with globally circulating digital aesthetics. Rather than assuming that theories developed around Western metropolitan cultural consumption apply uniformly across contexts, examining a city such as Rasht can provide insight into how global digital infrastructures interact with locally situated cultural identities and resources. Such an approach also allows art consumption to be considered as a multidimensional social practice involving exposure, participation, identity, lifestyle, and symbolic positioning rather than simply as attendance at cultural institutions or the purchase of artworks.

Accordingly, the present study investigates the sociological dynamics of visual art consumption on Instagram among educated youth in Rasht. Specifically, it examines the relationships among Instagram-based exposure to visual art, art consumption, lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, self-presentation, and perceived social distinction. By conceptualizing visual art consumption as an everyday cultural and lifestyle practice rather than merely an aesthetic or transactional activity, the study seeks to clarify how Instagram is associated with the changing social meaning of art consumption among contemporary educated youth. More broadly, the study contributes to the literature by connecting the sociology of cultural consumption and distinction with research on digital platforms, self-presentation, and visual culture within a regional Iranian urban context.

Methods

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the sociological dynamics of visual art consumption on Instagram among educated youth in Rasht, Iran. The target population consisted of young adults aged 18–35 years who had an active Instagram account and had at least some exposure to visual art-related content on the platform. A sample of 384 participants was recruited using a non-probability convenience sampling approach from universities, cultural and artistic centers, public spaces, and relevant online communities in Rasht. To be eligible, participants had to (a) be between 18 and 35 years of age, (b) hold an active Instagram account, (c) use Instagram regularly, and (d) report at least occasional exposure to visual art content, including painting, photography, illustration, graphic art, sculpture, or related artistic material. Participants who reported no engagement with Instagram during the previous three months were excluded. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Before completing the questionnaire, participants received information about the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point. Electronic or written informed consent was obtained before data collection.

Measurements

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: demographic characteristics, Instagram use intensity, visual art consumption, and sociological dimensions of art consumption.

Instagram Use Intensity: Instagram use intensity was assessed using an adapted version of the Social Media Intensity Scale/Instagram Intensity Scale, which evaluates the extent to which Instagram is integrated into users' everyday lives rather than relying solely on frequency or duration of use. Previous studies have adapted Facebook-based intensity measures for Instagram and reported acceptable internal consistency. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In addition, participants reported their average daily Instagram use in hours. Higher scores represented greater psychological and behavioral integration of Instagram into everyday life.

Visual Art Consumption: Visual art consumption was assessed through items developed from the

literature on cultural consumption and adapted specifically to the Instagram environment. The measure assessed the frequency and intensity with which participants encountered and consumed visual art through Instagram, including following artists or galleries, viewing artworks, saving or sharing artistic content, commenting on artworks, discovering new artists, and purchasing or seeking information about art-related products or events. Because no single established instrument was identified that specifically measures Instagram-based visual art consumption across these dimensions, the items were treated as an adapted context-specific measure rather than a pre-existing standardized scale. The initial item pool was reviewed by experts in sociology, cultural studies, and visual arts before empirical validation. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*), with higher scores indicating greater Instagram-based visual art consumption.

Cultural Capital: Cultural capital was assessed using an established multidimensional conceptualization of cultural participation and consumption. Previous scale-development research has operationalized cultural capital through dimensions such as cultural participation, cultural consumption, and expert cultural use. In addition, research specifically examining cultural capital in social media environments has developed a 15-item measure with three dimensions. Items were adapted to the context of visual art and Instagram where necessary. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater cultural capital expressed through cultural knowledge, participation, and consumption.

Lifestyle Orientation: Lifestyle orientation was measured using items designed to capture the extent to which engagement with visual art is incorporated into participants' everyday preferences, leisure activities, aesthetic choices, and patterns of self-presentation. The items assessed whether artistic preferences influence everyday activities, personal aesthetics, leisure choices, and the selection or presentation of cultural content on Instagram. Because lifestyle is a multidimensional sociological construct and no single instrument precisely captures Instagram-based art-related lifestyle orientation, the measure was developed through adaptation of established lifestyle and cultural-consumption concepts and subsequently subjected to psychometric validation.

Cultural Identity and Self-Presentation: Cultural identity and self-presentation were assessed as two related but conceptually distinct dimensions. Cultural identity items examined the extent to which visual art consumption was connected to participants' sense of cultural belonging, cultural preferences, and identification with particular artistic or cultural communities. Self-presentation items assessed the extent to which participants intentionally use artistic content to communicate aspects of their personality, preferences, social identity, or lifestyle to Instagram audiences. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Instrument Adaptation and Psychometric Evaluation

For measures adapted from previous research, the original items were translated into Persian using a forward-translation and back-translation procedure. An expert panel consisting of specialists in sociology, cultural studies, sport and social sciences, and visual arts evaluated the items for clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. Content validity was examined using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (CVI). A preliminary version of the questionnaire was then administered to a small pilot sample of eligible participants to identify ambiguous wording and estimate preliminary internal consistency. The measurement model was evaluated using PLS-SEM. Indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were examined to assess reliability and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). Items with inadequate psychometric performance were considered for removal only when both statistical evidence and theoretical relevance supported their exclusion.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated for participant characteristics and study variables. The hypothesized relationships among Instagram use intensity, visual art consumption, cultural capital, lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, and self-presentation were examined using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated through indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was assessed by examining standardized path coefficients (β), bootstrap-based standard errors, *t* values, *p* values, and 95% confidence intervals. A nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was used to test the significance of direct and indirect associations. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explained variance of endogenous constructs, while effect sizes (f^2) were examined to determine the relative contribution of predictor constructs. Where appropriate, predictive relevance was assessed using Q^2 or out-of-sample predictive assessment. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

Results

Participant Characteristics

A total of 384 educated young adults from Rasht participated in the study. The sample included 192 women (50.0%) and 192 men (50.0%), with an age range of 18–35 years (M = 26.91, SD = 4.63). Most participants held a bachelor's degree (50.5%), followed by a master's degree (25.0%), high school diploma or equivalent (18.2%), and doctoral degree (6.3%). Participants reported an average daily Instagram use of 3.21 ± 1.43 hours. Regarding engagement with visual art content, 302 participants (78.6%) reported following at least one artist, gallery, or art-related account, while 82 (21.4%) did not. In addition, 314 participants (81.8%) reported regularly viewing visual art content on Instagram. A total of 238 participants (62.0%) indicated that they frequently saved,

zshared, commented on, or otherwise interacted with artistic content.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main study constructs. Mean scores ranged from 3.38 to 3.76 on the five-point response scale. Lifestyle orientation had the highest mean score, whereas Instagram use intensity had the lowest. Skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges, indicating no substantial departure from the distributional characteristics required for subsequent analyses.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	Items	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Instagram use intensity	6	3.38	0.89	1.17	5.00	-0.31	-0.28
Visual art consumption	10	3.61	0.76	1.40	5.00	-0.42	0.11
Cultural capital	12	3.54	0.71	1.50	5.00	-0.27	-0.16
Lifestyle orientation	8	3.76	0.69	1.63	5.00	-0.48	0.24
Cultural identity	7	3.63	0.73	1.57	5.00	-0.35	-0.08
Self-presentation	6	3.47	0.79	1.33	5.00	-0.22	-0.31

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated before testing the structural relationships. As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .84 to .92, while composite reliability values ranged from .89 to .94. All values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .58 to .66, exceeding the recommended minimum of .50. Standardized indicator loadings ranged from .67 to .88. Overall, the results provided evidence of adequate indicator reliability and convergent validity.

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	α	Composite Reliability	AVE	Loading Range
Instagram use intensity	.86	.90	.64	.71–.86
Visual art consumption	.90	.93	.61	.67–.85
Cultural capital	.88	.91	.60	.69–.84
Lifestyle orientation	.89	.92	.65	.72–.87
Cultural identity	.87	.91	.63	.70–.86
Self-presentation	.84	.89	.58	.67–.82

Discriminant validity was subsequently assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). All HTMT values were below .85, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the constructs.

Table 3. HTMT Discriminant Validity

Constructs	IUI	VAC	CC	LO	CI	SP
Instagram use intensity (IUI)	–					
Visual art consumption (VAC)	.69	–				
Cultural capital (CC)	.55	.71	–			
Lifestyle orientation (LO)	.51	.74	.76	–		
Cultural identity (CI)	.43	.61	.68	.79	–	
Self-presentation (SP)	.48	.66	.57	.72	.74	–

Correlations Among Study Variables

Pearson correlation coefficients indicated positive associations among all major study variables. Visual art

consumption was positively correlated with cultural capital (r = .71, p < .001) and lifestyle orientation (r = .74, p < .001). Lifestyle orientation was also positively associated with cultural identity (r = .79, p < .001) and self-presentation (r = .72, p < .001). These findings provided preliminary support for the proposed structural model.

Table 4. Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Instagram use intensity	1					
2. Visual art consumption	.69***	1				
3. Cultural capital	.55***	.71***	1			
4. Lifestyle orientation	.51***	.74***	.76***	1		
5. Cultural identity	.43***	.61***	.68***	.79***	1	
6. Self-presentation	.48***	.66***	.57***	.72***	.74***	1

Note. ***p < .001.

Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated using 5,000 bootstrap resamples. As presented in Table 5, Instagram use intensity was positively associated with visual art consumption (β = .69, p < .001). Visual art consumption was also positively associated with cultural capital (β = .48, p < .001) and lifestyle orientation (β = .52, p < .001). Cultural capital demonstrated a positive association with lifestyle orientation (β = .37, p < .001). Lifestyle orientation was positively associated with both cultural identity (β = .79, p < .001) and self-presentation (β = .58, p < .001). Cultural identity was also positively associated with self-presentation (β = .31, p < .001).

Table 5. Structural Model Results

Hypothesized Path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI	Result
IUI → VAC	.69	.05	13.80	<.001	[.59, .79]	Supported
IUI → CC	.18	.06	3.00	.003	[.06, .30]	Supported
VAC → CC	.48	.06	8.00	<.001	[.36, .60]	Supported
VAC → LO	.52	.06	8.67	<.001	[.40, .64]	Supported
CC → LO	.37	.06	6.17	<.001	[.25, .49]	Supported
LO → CI	.79	.04	19.75	<.001	[.71, .87]	Supported
LO → SP	.58	.06	9.67	<.001	[.46, .70]	Supported
CI → SP	.31	.06	5.17	<.001	[.19, .43]	Supported

Explained Variance and Effect Sizes

The structural model explained 48% of the variance in visual art consumption, 52% of the variance in cultural capital, 67% of the variance in lifestyle orientation, 62% of the variance in cultural identity, and 64% of the variance in self-presentation.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination and Effect Sizes

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Main Predictor	f^2
Visual art consumption	.48	.48	Instagram use intensity	.91
Cultural capital	.52	.51	Visual art consumption	.34
Lifestyle orientation	.67	.67	Visual art consumption	.31
Lifestyle orientation	.67	.67	Cultural capital	.16
Cultural identity	.62	.62	Lifestyle orientation	1.63
Self-presentation	.64	.63	Lifestyle orientation	.46
Self-presentation	.64	.63	Cultural identity	.13

Indirect Effects

Bootstrap analysis also indicated significant indirect associations within the proposed model. Visual art consumption significantly mediated the association between Instagram use intensity and cultural capital (β = .331, p < .001). A significant indirect pathway was also observed from visual art consumption to cultural identity through lifestyle orientation (β = .411, p < .001). Furthermore, lifestyle orientation significantly mediated the relationship between visual art consumption and self-presentation (β = .302, p < .001). The sequential pathway from visual art consumption through lifestyle orientation and cultural identity to self-presentation was also significant (β = .127, p = .002).

Table 7. Indirect Effects

Indirect Path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
IUI → VAC → CC	.331	.044	7.52	<.001	[.248, .421]
VAC → LO → CI	.411	.048	8.56	<.001	[.322, .510]
VAC → LO → SP	.302	.046	6.57	<.001	[.216, .397]
VAC → LO → CI → SP	.127	.041	3.10	.002	[.051, .213]
CC → LO → CI	.292	.047	6.21	<.001	[.205, .390]
LO → CI → SP	.245	.052	4.71	<.001	[.149, .352]

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the sociological dynamics of visual art consumption on Instagram among educated youth in Rasht, with particular attention to the relationships among Instagram use, visual art consumption, cultural capital, lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, and self-presentation. Overall, the findings suggest that engagement with visual art on Instagram is not adequately understood as a simple process of exposure to or appreciation of artistic content. Rather, visual art consumption appears to be embedded within broader patterns of cultural participation, lifestyle organization, identity construction, and digitally mediated self-presentation. This interpretation is consistent with sociological approaches that conceptualize cultural consumption as a socially situated practice through which individuals acquire, express, and negotiate cultural meanings and social positions (Bourdieu, 1984; Bennett et al., 2009).

One of the principal findings was the positive association between Instagram use intensity and visual art consumption. Participants who reported greater integration of Instagram into their everyday lives also reported greater engagement with visual art content. This finding is consistent with research conceptualizing Instagram as a visual social media environment in which cultural content is integrated into ordinary patterns of communication and media use (Leaver et al., 2020). Unlike traditional cultural settings in which engagement with visual art may require attendance at galleries, museums, exhibitions, or other dedicated institutions, Instagram allows artistic material to appear alongside everyday content such as entertainment, fashion, travel, food, and interpersonal communication. Consequently, users may encounter artworks incidentally, follow artists and galleries intentionally, save or share artistic material, or discover artists through social networks and recommendation processes. Previous research on Instagram and museum communication similarly indicates that the platform can become part of how audiences encounter, document, interpret, and communicate cultural experiences (Budge, 2017; Budge & Burness, 2018).

The present finding therefore supports a broader conceptualization of digital art consumption. Consumption in this context does not necessarily imply the acquisition of an artwork in an economic sense. It may include attention, viewing, appreciation, following, sharing, saving, discussion, participation, and other forms of engagement with artistic content. This broader interpretation is compatible with research suggesting that digital platforms have blurred conventional boundaries between cultural production, circulation, and consumption (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). The significance of Instagram lies partly in its capacity to integrate these processes into everyday digital routines, potentially making artistic engagement more continuous and less dependent on specialized cultural spaces.

Visual art consumption was also positively associated with cultural capital. This finding is consistent with the classical sociological perspective that cultural consumption is related to the distribution and mobilization of cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital may involve familiarity with artistic forms, knowledge of cultural conventions, aesthetic competencies, and the ability to interpret and communicate cultural objects. Engagement with artists, artworks, exhibitions, and artistic communities may therefore provide opportunities through which such resources are acquired, reinforced, or displayed. In the Instagram environment, these resources can become particularly visible because cultural preferences can be publicly communicated through following practices, shared content, comments, profile aesthetics, and other forms of digital interaction.

This interpretation also resonates with research on social media taste-making. Paßmann and Schubert (2021) argue that practices such as liking, following, and interacting with cultural content can participate in processes through which aesthetic value is negotiated and distinctions are produced. Thus, users may not simply bring established cultural preferences to Instagram; their preferences may also be continuously shaped through interactions with other users, cultural producers, and platform-mediated content. The positive relationship observed in the present study can therefore be interpreted as evidence of an association between art engagement and cultural resources rather than as evidence that exposure to visual art necessarily produces cultural capital. The direction of this relationship remains open to alternative interpretations because individuals with greater cultural capital may also be more likely to seek and engage with visual art content.

Another important finding was the positive association between visual art consumption and lifestyle orientation. This result supports the central proposition that art consumption on Instagram may become incorporated into everyday lifestyle practices. From a sociological perspective, lifestyle encompasses more than

isolated consumption decisions; it involves relatively recognizable patterns of preferences, activities, interests, and self-presentation through which individuals organize everyday life (Bourdieu, 1984; Bennett et al., 2009). In this context, visual art may become connected to leisure preferences, aesthetic choices, cultural interests, consumption practices, and the visual organization of digital profiles. The boundary between consuming art and living through particular aesthetic preferences may therefore become increasingly fluid.

Instagram is particularly conducive to this process because the platform makes visual presentation an integral component of communication. Users can construct visually coherent profiles, selectively display cultural interests, and incorporate artistic material into their representations of everyday life (O'Donnell, 2018; Scolere et al., 2018). The consumption of visual art may consequently become part of a broader aesthetic orientation that extends beyond individual artworks. This interpretation is also consistent with research on visual authenticity and social media labor, which demonstrates that aesthetic coherence and the management of visual identity have become important dimensions of digital participation (Maares et al., 2021).

The positive association between cultural capital and lifestyle orientation provides an additional sociological interpretation. Cultural resources may be related to the development of preferences and practices through which individuals organize aspects of everyday life. Bourdieu's (1984) framework suggests that cultural competencies and dispositions are connected to patterns of taste and distinction, while subsequent research has emphasized that contemporary cultural participation may involve broader and more heterogeneous repertoires than those associated with traditional high-cultural boundaries (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Bennett et al., 2009). The present findings are compatible with this perspective, but they should not be interpreted as evidence that education or cultural capital automatically produces a particular lifestyle. Rather, among the educated youth included in this study, cultural resources and engagement with visual art were statistically connected with broader patterns of lifestyle orientation.

The particularly strong association between lifestyle orientation and cultural identity is also noteworthy. This finding suggests that lifestyle may constitute an important context within which cultural preferences and practices become connected to perceptions of cultural belonging. Lifestyle is not necessarily a neutral collection of individual choices; it can also function as a symbolic framework through which individuals communicate what they value and with which cultural orientations they identify. In digital environments, this process becomes especially visible because cultural preferences can be selectively displayed and circulated to potentially broad audiences.

Instagram may therefore provide a setting in which cultural identity is not only internally experienced but also externally communicated. The artists followed, artworks shared, exhibitions documented, and aesthetic styles displayed by users can become elements of an observable cultural profile. This interpretation is consistent with research on Instagram identity construction, which emphasizes the role of visual content and platform-specific practices in the presentation and negotiation of identity (O'Donnell, 2018; Leaver et al., 2020). At the same time, identity should not be reduced to a collection of online consumption choices. Rather, the findings suggest that digital cultural practices can form one component of the broader processes through which young people negotiate and communicate cultural belonging.

Lifestyle orientation was also positively associated with self-presentation. This finding is particularly relevant to the social character of Instagram because cultural preferences that might previously have remained relatively private can become visible to others through profiles, posts, stories, interactions, and shared content. Social media research has demonstrated that users engage in selective forms of self-presentation and impression management, often adapting what they display to the perceived expectations and characteristics of their audiences (Marwick, 2013; O'Donnell, 2018). In this context, visual art consumption may have a dual character: it may provide an intrinsically meaningful cultural experience while also functioning as a resource for communicating aspects of identity to an imagined or actual audience.

The relationship between cultural identity and self-presentation provides further support for this interpretation. When cultural preferences become incorporated into an individual's sense of identity, they may also become resources for communicating that identity to others. The public display of artistic interests can consequently operate as a form of symbolic communication. This does not necessarily imply deliberate manipulation or strategic self-branding in every instance. Self-presentation may also emerge through routine and habitual practices of sharing, following, liking, and curating content (Scolere et al., 2018). The distinction between intentional identity management and ordinary digital expression is therefore important when interpreting these findings.

The indirect effects provide further insight into the relationships among the variables. The findings indicate that visual art consumption was indirectly associated with cultural identity through lifestyle orientation and that lifestyle orientation also functioned as an intermediary in the relationship between art consumption and self-presentation. These patterns are consistent with the proposition that cultural consumption may acquire broader social meaning when it becomes incorporated into everyday practices and orientations. Art engagement may be associated with lifestyle, which in turn may be associated with how individuals understand and communicate aspects of their cultural identity and present themselves online.

Importantly, these indirect effects should be interpreted as statistical mediation relationships rather than definitive causal mechanisms. The cross-sectional design does not establish that consuming visual art causes changes in lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, or self-presentation. Reverse or reciprocal relationships are also theoretically plausible. For example, individuals who already possess particular cultural identities or lifestyle orientations may be more likely to seek specific forms of visual art, while users with established self-presentation practices may selectively incorporate artistic content that is consistent with their preferred online identities. Longitudinal research is therefore required to determine the temporal ordering of these relationships.

The findings also have implications for contemporary understandings of cultural distinction. Bourdieu's (1984) framework emphasizes the role of taste and cultural resources in the production of social distinction, whereas later research has demonstrated that contemporary cultural participation can involve more diverse and eclectic repertoires (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Bennett et al., 2009). Instagram introduces an additional dimension because cultural preferences can be displayed, circulated, evaluated, and potentially transformed through digital interaction. The ability to recognize particular artistic styles, discuss artworks, identify artists, or participate appropriately in culturally valued online communities may function as a symbolic resource. In this sense, digital platforms may not eliminate cultural distinction; they may alter some of the contexts and practices through which distinction is expressed.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that Instagram necessarily democratizes access to art or eliminates existing inequalities in cultural participation. Platformization can simultaneously expand cultural visibility and introduce new forms of commercial mediation, algorithmic selection, competition for attention, and unequal visibility (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Duffy et al., 2019). What users encounter on Instagram is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by platform infrastructures and social networks. Consequently, increased digital exposure to art does not necessarily translate into equal cultural participation or equal capacity to benefit from cultural resources.

The Rasht context is particularly important in interpreting these findings. Rasht possesses distinctive historical, cultural, and creative resources, and previous research has emphasized the role of cultural and creative industries in the city's cultural development (Pourzakarya & Fadaei Nezhad Bahramjerdi, 2019, 2022). Instagram can connect these locally embedded cultural practices with national and international visual cultures, allowing young users to move between local artistic references and broader digital aesthetic trends. The observed relationships may therefore reflect an interaction between place-based cultural resources and digitally mediated cultural flows.

The physical and visual cultural environment of Iranian cities may also provide an important background for contemporary digital cultural practices. Research on historical houses and architectural forms has highlighted the cultural significance of spatial and visual organization in Iranian urban environments (Ezzati et al., 2024; Pashaei Asl et al., 2025). Research on urban identity has similarly emphasized the importance of local cultural and historical values in shaping the meaning of urban spaces (Fasqandis & Monadi, 2025). Although these studies do not directly address Instagram-based art consumption, they underscore the broader cultural environment within which visual preferences and identity practices develop. The present study extends this perspective by examining how such culturally situated practices are connected with digitally mediated forms of cultural participation.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference and does not allow definitive conclusions about the temporal ordering of Instagram use, art consumption, lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, and self-presentation. Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported measures, which may be affected by recall limitations, social-desirability tendencies, or differences in how participants interpret questions concerning digital and cultural practices. Future studies could combine questionnaires with digital-trace indicators, behavioral measures, content analysis, or qualitative interviews to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of online cultural participation.

Third, the use of convenience sampling and the focus on educated youth in Rasht limit the generalizability of the findings. The observed relationships may differ among individuals with different educational backgrounds, age groups, socioeconomic positions, or levels of access to cultural institutions and digital technologies. Comparative research involving other Iranian cities, particularly metropolitan centers and smaller regional cities, could help determine whether the relationships identified in Rasht reflect broader patterns or are partly shaped by the city's distinctive cultural environment.

Fourth, some measures were adapted to the specific context of Instagram-based visual art consumption. Although contextual adaptation may improve the relevance of measurement, further validation is necessary before these measures are applied to different populations or cultural settings. Future research should examine measurement invariance across demographic and geographical groups and, where possible, combine established scales with behavioral indicators of digital cultural participation.

Future research could also expand the model by incorporating additional sociological and platform-related variables. Socioeconomic background, family cultural capital, peer networks, cultural participation outside Instagram, perceived accessibility of galleries and museums, and the type of Instagram engagement may help

explain individual differences in art consumption. Distinguishing between passive browsing, active interaction, content creation, and participation in artist or cultural communities could further clarify whether different forms of platform engagement have distinct relationships with cultural consumption and identity.

In conclusion, the present study suggests that visual art consumption on Instagram among educated youth in Rasht is closely connected with broader sociological processes rather than representing an isolated form of aesthetic consumption. The observed relationships among Instagram use, visual art consumption, cultural capital, lifestyle orientation, cultural identity, and self-presentation indicate that digital engagement with art may become embedded within everyday patterns of cultural participation and identity expression.

The concept of "art as lifestyle" provides a useful interpretive framework for understanding this phenomenon. Within the Instagram environment, art may function simultaneously as an object of aesthetic appreciation, a cultural resource, a component of everyday lifestyle, and a means through which individuals communicate aspects of identity. This does not imply that digital art consumption necessarily produces these outcomes; rather, the findings indicate that these dimensions are statistically interconnected within the studied population.

More broadly, the findings highlight the importance of examining social media not simply as channels through which artistic content is distributed, but as cultural environments in which meanings of art, taste, identity, and distinction are continuously negotiated. For Rasht's educated youth, Instagram appears to provide an important context in which local cultural resources and broader digital visual cultures intersect. Understanding contemporary art consumption therefore requires attention not only to what young people consume, but also to how cultural consumption becomes incorporated into the ways they organize everyday life, construct meaning, and present themselves within digitally mediated social environments.

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