

## A Mixed Methods Approach to Social Control of Cybercultural Transgressions: An Iranian Perspective

**Shalaleh Meraji**  
**Oskuie** 

PhD, Media Management Dept., Faculty of Management and Economics, Tehran Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

**Kamran**  
**Mohamadkhani** 

Associate Professor, Higher Education Administration Dept., Faculty of Management and Economics, Tehran Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

**Ali Delavar** 

Full Professor, Psychometrics Dept., Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

**Ali Akbar**  
**Farhangi** 

Full Professor, Faculty of Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

### Abstract

Cyber transgressions (non-normative behaviors, attitudes and conditions) are growing, hence we employed a three-study exploratory sequential mixed method designed to make a taxonomy of Instagram cybercultural transgressions, and cyber social control means; to examine the effects of low self-control, depression, negative interpersonal relationships, computer/ Internet self-efficacy, netiquette, and normative beliefs, and also sociodemographic factors, and media use habits on cybercultural transgressions; and to explore the effectiveness of jurisdiction, non-anonymity, filtering, and forced user migration to domestic social media platforms as cyber social control means. The quantitative findings from 989 participants

\* Corresponding Author: shalaleh.meraji@srbiau.ac.ir

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showed that nondepressed, older, married, middle-income, university educated, non-student users (especially women) with high self-control, more positive interpersonal relationships, moderate levels of computer/ Internet self-efficacy, normative beliefs, and with more years of Internet use experience, and less daily Internet use, who are knowledgeable about netiquette, are parents, have a job (also retired individuals and housewives), do not use VPNs, psychotropic medications, and alcoholic beverages and/ or recreational drugs, do not have previous experience of online victimization, do not associate with online transgressors, and do not feel being in minority, are less likely than others to commit online transgressive behaviors, or consume transgressive content. The importance of jurisdiction and non-anonymity as social control means, and the failure of filtering and forced user migration to Iranian social media platforms are discussed. These findings can be useful in devising new non-coercive policies and initiatives to socially control cybercultural transgressions.

**Keywords:** Cybercultural Transgressions; Cyber Social Control; Mixed Methods; Instagram

## **Introduction**

Cyber transgressions (non-normative behaviors, attitudes, and conditions; Herington & van de Fliert, 2017, p. 2)– whether cultural or criminal– are growing as a result of the increasing use of the Internet, anonymity, the expansion of criminal opportunities, and the lack of (formal) online social control (Berenblum, et al., 2019, pp. 616-617). The purpose of social control is to maintain certain social norms and prevent harm that may be produced by violating these norms– a transgression that can be enjoyable and profitable (Dolev-Cohen & Ricon, 2020, p. 4).

Cyber transgressions are dependent on the characteristics of each social media platform, and what they are technologically enabled to do. Hence, as Kumar (2017) also mentioned that “maliciousness largely varies by platform” (p. 3), we limited our exploration of cybercultural transgressions to the Instagram platform which with 48 million Iranian users in 2021 is the second most popular social media app after Telegram (Beta-co, 2021). We, indeed, focused on noncriminal transgressions through a sociological lens of social control.

## **Iranian Social Media Regulation**

Iranian social media sphere is a unique embodiment of the Iranian culture in transition from more traditional views to drastically cosmopolitan views– that can be considered as seriously transgressive and norm-breaking from a governmental or religious-traditional perspective. Hence, the Iranian government tries to impose strict rules, criminalization, and filtering to regulate the Internet and social media.

Since 2014, several filtering and forced user migration policies were implemented, but in 2018, the government’s policy to forcefully migrate users to domestic social media platforms failed. Many users moved to other foreign platforms and despite the lags and difficulties, 10-12 million Iranians used Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to break through filtering, and maintain the activity on the blocked app (Telegram) (Beta-co, 2021; Mojnews, 2019; Eghtesadonline, 2019; ISNA, 2018; Entekhab, 2014). Since then, the popularity and the number of users of Instagram (that is not filtered yet) have been doubled (Beta-co, 2021). Again, the Iranian government has decided to gradually decrease Instagram bandwidth to replace it with an Iranian substitute, as a part of a parliamentary bill called the

"protection of users' rights in cyberspace" (Donya-e-Eqtesad, 2021) – a controversial title that has recently been changed (BBC, 2021).

### **Literature Review**

In this section we will briefly review transgressions that are discussed in our research findings. We divided them into transgressive content (TC) and transgressive behaviors (TB).

#### **Transgressive content**

*Obscenity*– Due to Iranian religious-cultural norms, obscenity as a serious taboo is criminalized (Habibzadeh & Rahmanian, 2011). Sexually explicit material and problematic pornography use can cause risks such as addiction-like symptoms (Baranowski, et al., 2019, p. 1274). Some studies suggested that growth in online pornographic trades correlates with increasing rates of sexual crimes (Chen, et al., 2015, p. 823).

*Transgressive Information*– It is comprised of misinformation (unintentionally false and imprecise information, open to multiple comprehensions and uses), disinformation (deliberately misleading and deceptive information, intending to deceive or not), and malinformation (reconfigured true sensitive information, that is strategically used to cause advantage) (SANTOS-D'AMORIM, & de Oliveira MIRANDA, 2021, p. 9; Baines & Elliott, 2020, p. 3).

*Spam*– Spamming is the abuse of electronic messaging systems to send unsolicited bulk messages and advertisements indiscriminately to a large number of users over the Internet (Ahuja, 2021; Khan & Mashiane, 2014, p. 3). Spamming is the subject of legislation in many jurisdictions and is considered to be a serious threat to the Internet, and to both ISP and users' resources (Ahuja, 2021).

*Violent Content*– The online exchanging and (unsolicited) viewing of explicit, uncensored real-world violent footage are highly problematic by nature (Nicklin, et al., 2020, p. 1). Exposure to the radical violent online material is correlated with extremist online/offline attitudes (Hassan, et al., 2018, p. 71). As well, violent content within violent video games can increase levels of aggression (Hollingdale & Greitemeyer, 2014).

*Suicidal/ Non-Suicidal Self-Injury Content*– The expansion of media use may make suicidal information more easily accessible, hence, “causing a ‘contagion’ of suicidal behavior, particularly among

young people” (Katsumata, et al., 2008, p. 744). Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) (i.e., the deliberate damaging of one’s body tissue for non-lethal reasons; Seko, et al., 2015, p. 1334; Lewis & Baker, 2011, p. 390) can induce risks including NSSI reinforcement, normalization, triggering NSSI urges, and acceptance or stigmatization of NSSI (Brown, et al., 2018, p. 337; Lewis, et al., 2012; Lewis & Baker, 2011, p. 390).

### **Transgressive Behaviors**

*Trolling*– It is a disinhibited vituperative, deceptive, destructive, or disruptive behavior with no apparent instrumental purpose, intended to aggravate, annoy or disrupt online interactions and community, and lure other users into often pointless and time-consuming discussions, while the troll takes pleasure in upsetting others (Cheng, et al., 2017, p. 2; Coles & West, 2016, p. 2; Kovic, et al., 2016, p. 7; Griffiths, 2014, p. 85; Buckels, et al., 2014, p. 1; Whelan, 2013, p. 38).

*Flaming*– It is an uninhibited aggressive, insulting, ridiculing, hostile verbal behavior and emotional expression toward a person or organization (Hutchens, et al., 2015, p. 1204; Cho & Kwon, 2015, p. 364).

*Sexting*– It is the transmission of sexually explicit text messages, photos or videos, or (partially) nude photos or videos via any digital device or platform (Evans, 2021, p. 2; Marcotte, et al., 2020, p. 1). Online sexual pushiness is any online behavior that involves repeated unwanted sexual advances, sexual harassment, or sexual coercion toward another person (most often females) (Nevin, 2015, p. 38).

*Problematic Internet Use*– or Internet addiction (Stevens, et al., 2020) is a risky behavior. Excessive engagement in specific online activities (e.g., gambling, pornography use, video gaming, social media use, and shopping) may lead to severe problems and disordered or addictive use (Király, et al., 2020, p. 2).

### **Cyber Social Control**

Transgressions, whether offline or online, induce social control. Social control is defined as different forms of organized and purposive reactions– both informal and formal forms of punishment, discipline, and also positive and negative sanctions– which define, control, and influence the deviance and conformity– to give society a trend toward an ideal, maintain social order and morality, and make for a pleasant

society both in real-world and online communities (Giddens, et al., 2018, p. 60; Goode, 2015, p. 7; Van Kokswijk, 2010, p. 239; Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 4; Innes, 2003, p. 3; Horwitz, 1990, p. 9; Janowitz, 1975, p. 83). Social control mechanisms can be divided into two forms of internal (individual's internalized norms, values, and standards), and external means of control (the reactions of others to an individual's behavior) (Tischler, n.d., pp. 158-159).

The sociology of transgression (i.e., normative violations), and the theories of criminology (i.e., legal violations) examine different, but either partially or entirely overlapping phenomena (Goode, 2015, p. 20; Worthen, 2016, p. 57). Hence, some of our adopted theoretical frameworks are chosen from the theories for social control of crime and deviance.

*General Theory of Crime*—Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime considers low self-control as the major cause of crime regardless of its place in time, history, context, and types of criminal acts (Piquero, 2009, pp. 153-154). This theory is useful for explaining the involvement in a variety of online deviant behaviors (Donner, et al., 2014, p. 170). Baek, et al. (2016), Li, et al. (2016), Vazsonyi, et al. (2012), and Higgins, et al. (2008) demonstrated the relationship between low self-control and the specific kinds of online deviant behaviors. Lyngs, et al. (2019), Purba and Istiana (2019), and Mills and Allen (2020) also showed that low self-control can contribute to problematic use of digital devices, and media addiction. Self-control is also linked to the tendency to substance abuse and alcohol use. The loss of self-control is the basic measure of addiction (Mowlaie, et al., 2016, p. 248).

Self-control is a modest but consistent predictor of victimization, and is stronger when predicting non-contact forms of victimization such as online victimization. Individuals with lower self-control involve in different risky behaviors that may result in their victimization (Pratt, et al., 2014, p. 87). It "is associated with person-based, but not computer-based, forms of cybercrime" victimization/experiences (such as online harassment and receiving nude photos or explicit content) (Reyns, et al., 2019, p. 63). Low self-control and deviant peer associations are related to cyberdeviance in general (and piracy, harassment, online pornography, and hacking in particular). "Deviant peer associations both mediated and exacerbated the effect of low self-control on general cyberdeviance" (Holt, et al.,

2012).

*General Strain Theory*– Agnew’s (2009) General Strain Theory argued that certain strains are conducive to crime/ deviance, and strains may increase crime because they lead to negative emotional states (p. 170). For Merton, in Strain Theory, strain is a major risk factor for deviance/ crime (Ford, 2014, p. 654), and for Agnew, in general strain theory, the primary source of strain is negative interpersonal relationships that can lead a person to criminal behavior (Kurtz & Zavala, 2016, p. 2; Ford, 2014, p. 654). Peterson and Densley (2017) also made a mention of internalizing traits of online aggressors, including depression, suicidal ideation, and shyness (pp. 195-196).

*The New Chicago School*- It considers law to be one channel of regulation amongst three other channels identified by Lessig, i.e., markets, norms, and architecture which “create constraints upon individuals that shape human activity in similar ways to the law” (Herborn, 2013, p. 1). These four “modalities of regulation” were also introduced for cyberspace by Lessig (2006). Formal legal control regulates pornographic, hateful, and violent content, children protection, copyright violations, cybercrime, online gambling, online threats or harassment, etc. (Atchison, 2000, p. 89). Social norms that are congruent with Scott and Murray’s community-based control (Murray, 2007, pp. 10, 29), are a strong predictor of behavior (Vlasceanu, 2021, p. 95). Informal netiquette as a part of the system of control on the Internet (Atchison, 2000, p. 87) is also necessary to make users become digital citizens (Walsh, 2020, p. 15).

*Self-perceived level of Internet competence*– It is an important factor in the commitment of online misconduct (Nevin, 2015, p. 48). Competent users are more likely to be malicious than non-competent (Kumar, 2017, p. 24). It is noteworthy that the mean score for web-use skills in the general public is 3.24 out of 5 (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2012, as cited in Nevin, 2015).

*Sociodemographic Factors as Social Control Means*– Previous research showed that men are more likely to be exposed to and consume cyber-pornography more often and are more likely to have attitudes toward sexual and violent content, Internet addiction, and to commit cyberaggression or flaming, cyber-stalking, hacking, and digital piracy (Hen, et al., 2020, p. 613; Nicklin, et al., 2020, p. 2; Baranowski, et al., 2019, p. 1274; Nevin, 2015, p. 46). The gender

ratio problem also stated that always and everywhere, there are significant gender differences in the rate and seriousness of crimes (Walsh & Beaver, 2009, p. 89).

Previous research found that age and frequency of engaging in cybercrimes, and cyber aggressions are negatively correlated (Nevin, 2015, p. 47), and young users are more likely to commit maliciousness than old users (Kumar, 2017, p. 24). Also, Sampson and Laub's Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control correlated the decline in juvenile delinquency after its peak between ages 16 and 20, with sociodemographic factors and the changes in social bonds throughout the lifespan (Worthen, 2016, pp. 54-55; Walsh & Beaver, 2009, p. 91).

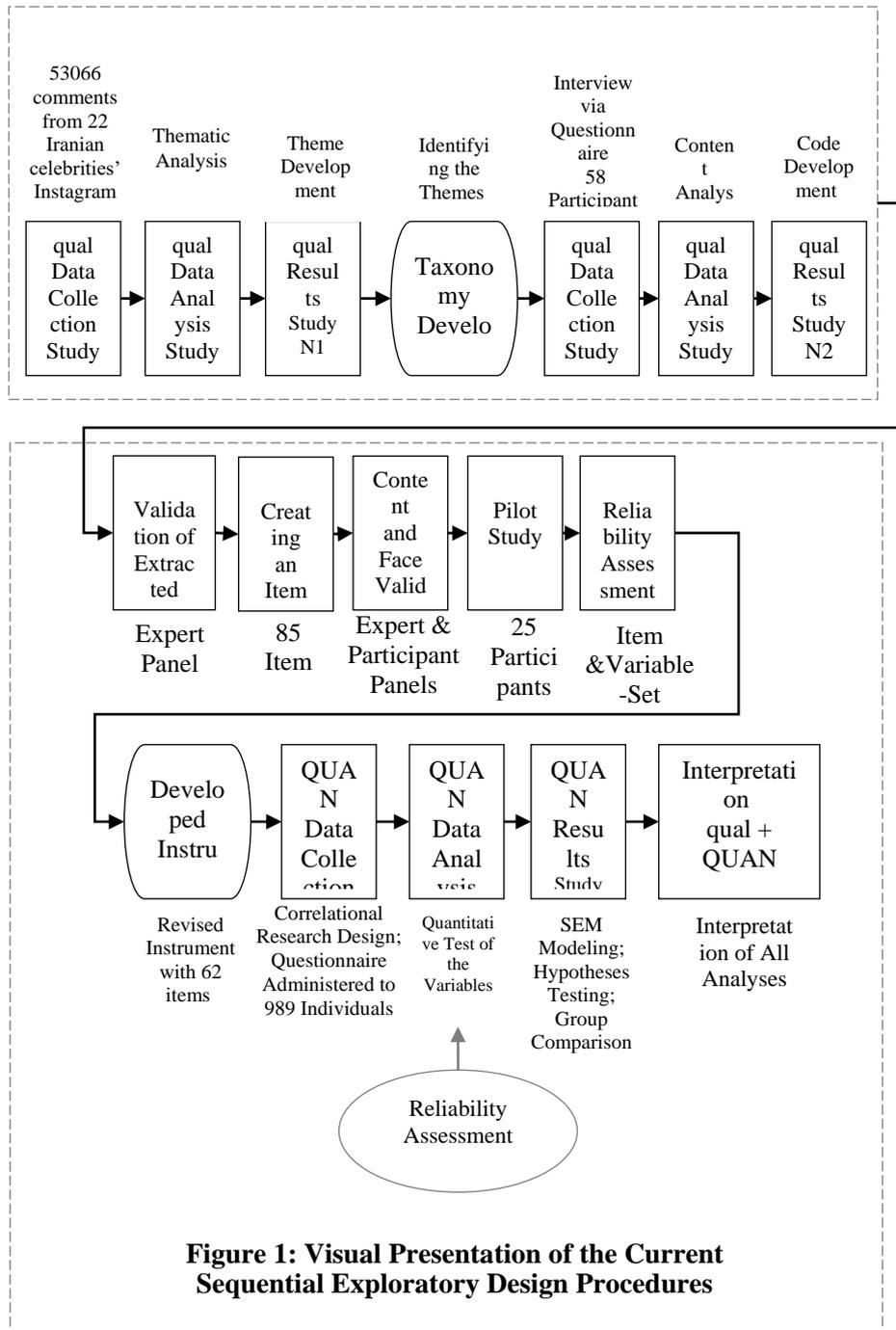
In the social structure social learning (SSSL) model, Akers introduced Differential Location in the Social Structure (i.e., social groups, and sociodemographic characteristics such as class, gender, race and ethnicity, marital status, age) as one of the key structural dimensions of social learning that affect criminal and conforming behaviors (Akers & Jennings, 2009, pp. 109-110).

### **Purpose of the Study**

In the current research, we aimed at exploring the phenomenon of Instagram cybercultural transgression and its users' perceived social control means and also at examining the factors affecting social control of these noncriminal transgressions, in an Iranian social media context. We also intended to explore the effectiveness of jurisdiction, non-anonymity, filtering, and forced user migration to Iranian social media platforms, as social control means.

### **Methods**

An "Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Design" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 266), in both forms of "the instrument development model and the taxonomy development model" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 77) was adopted, while priority was given to the second quantitative phase. The current research is composed of two main phases, including two qualitative studies, and one quantitative study. The research ethical issues, such as privacy of participants, anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were considered in all phases, as the participants voluntarily filled an anonymous online questionnaire out. The following visual presentation of the research procedures was adopted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, p. 76), and Creswell, et al. (2003, pp. 180 & 191):



**Figure 1: Visual Presentation of the Current Sequential Exploratory Design Procedures**

We asked the users of various highly-followed Instagram pages, and several popular groups and channels on the Telegram app– available to the researchers– to fill out the online questionnaires that were made by Google Forms.

**Table 1: Research Populations, Sample Sizes, and Sampling Methods**

Phase	Approach (APR)	Research Population	Sample Size	Sampling Method	
Phase 1	Qual 1	Comments on Iranian Celebrities' Instagram Pages	53066 comments on one or two recent posts from 22 Iranian celebrities' Instagram pages	Judgmental (purposive) non-probability sampling (JNPS)	
	Qual 2	Instagram Users	58 (male & female = 28; Not assigned =2)	Convenience Non-Probability Sampling (CNPS)	
Phase 2	Instrumentation	Construct Validation	Media Experts	4	JNPS
		Content Validity Assessment	Media Experts	10	JNPS
		Face Validity Assessment	Participants	6	CNPS
	Quan	Iranian Internet Users (78,086,663) (Internetworldstats, 2021)	989 (25 in the pilot & 964 in the final study) (male= 499; female= 490)	CNPS (Non-probability sampling can be useful where it is difficult to get access to the whole population; Walliman, 2011, p.96).	

The description of instruments and measures used in each phase are shown in the table below:

**Table 2: Instruments and Measures**

Phase	APR	Instrument	Measures
Phase 1	Qual 1	Online Comments	Data-driven Codes
	Qual 2	Interview via Questionnaire	15 sociodemographic closed-ended questions, and 16 open-ended questions
Phase 2	Quan	Questionnaire	64 closed-ended items (12 multiple answer questions about sociodemographic characteristics, and media use habits; and 50 5-point Likert-type items) (Extremely=5; Very=4; Moderately=3; Slightly=2; Not at all=1)

The data analysis methods, trustworthiness techniques of the Phase 1, and validity and reliability assessment methods for the Phase 2 are briefly introduced in the Table 3:

**Table 3: Data Analysis Methods**

Phase	APR	Data Analysis Methods & Software	Trustworthiness / Validity & Reliability Assessment
Phase 1	Qual 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic analysis in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As coding is a reflexive process, Braun and Clarke (2019) do not "advocate the use of a coding frame, or the calculation of inter-rater reliability scores".</li> <li>Strategies to build trustworthiness, and ensure rigor, adopted from Morse, et al. (2002, pp. 12-13).</li> </ul>
	Qual 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Conventional Content Analysis" approach (inductive content analysis) (Hsieh &amp; Shannon, 2005, p.1277; Elo &amp; Kyngäs, 2008, p. 107); In 8 steps explained by Flick (2014), and Hsieh and Shannon (2005)</li> <li>NVivo 10 software.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through "systematic random sampling", 10 percent of answer units were selected (n= 93) (Lombard, et al., 2002, pp. 300-60).</li> <li>Two coders (one of which was the researcher) coded this sample after 20 minutes of training.</li> <li>Inter-coder agreement: percent agreement= 0.89; Holsti's method= 0.94 (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 149); Kappa coefficient= 0.86 ("Almost Perfect") (Delavar &amp; Zaharakar, 2013; Neuendorf, 2002, pp. 143 &amp; 151; Stemler, 2001, pp.6-7).</li> <li>Intra-coder agreement: percent agreement= 0.95; Holsti's method= 0.97; Kappa coefficient= 0.93 ("Almost Perfect").</li> </ul>

Phase	APR	Data Analysis Methods & Software	Trustworthiness / Validity & Reliability Assessment
Phase 2	Quan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive statistics: Measures of Central Tendency, and Dispersion, Univariate/ Multivariate Normality Tests.</li> <li>• Inferential statistics: Cronbach's Alpha, Linearity/ Multicollinearity Tests, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests, EFA &amp; CFA, SEM, Bayesian Statistics, Power Analysis.</li> <li>• IBM SPSS Statistics &amp; Amos Graphics 22 Software; G*Power 3.1.9.2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Consistency Criteria= Cronbach's alpha <math>\geq .60</math>; Mean inter-item correlation = .15 to .50; Item loading in Exploratory factor analysis <math>\geq .40</math>; Communality statistics &gt; 60%; Goodness-of-fit indices= Excellent (Meraji Oskuie, et al., 2022).</li> <li>• Reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs were assessed employing ValidityMaster tool (Gaskin, 2018).</li> <li>• Composite Reliability for half of the variables &gt; .70 (for the rest was close to .70). AVE for all variables &gt; .50, except for 3 variables (two with values close to .50, and one with an AVE &lt; .40. Standardized loadings, CR, and AVE of variables demonstrated an adequate convergent validity in almost all of the variables. All of the exogenous variables had discriminant validity. But endogenous variables of TB and TC Consumption did not demonstrate an adequate discriminant validity, as they are considered to be a constituent of a single latent variable, i.e., Cybercultural Transgressions (Meraji Oskuie, et al., 2022).</li> </ul>

## Results

We categorized qualitatively extracted Instagram transgressions into TC and TB.

### Transgressive content

We categorized extracted TC into the following themes: 1) Obscenity (a. Sexual Content; b. Nudity; c. Pornography; d. Child Exploitation & Abuse), 2) Transgressive Information (a. Deviant Cultural/ Ideological Information; b. False Information; c. Private Content in Public Accounts), 3) Market-Related content (a. Unwanted Advertisement (I. Business; II. Virtual/ Online Content; III. Propaganda; IV. Offers with Sexual Content including i. Pornographic Content; ii. Offers of Sex Work; iii. Adult Dating Groups); b. Gamble; c. Illegal Goods &

Services), and 4) Emotional Release (a. Violence; b. Hate-Speech; c. Suicidal/ Tragic/ Self-Injury Content). Emotional Release with separate sub-themes falls under both TC and TB categories (see the next section).

Transgressive Information, mentioned by some of the participants, in the False Information category is compatible with the concepts of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation in the literature. Some of the participants also made a mention of microcelebrity culture; luxury consumerism, like-gathering content, deviant ideological thoughts, and also the dissemination of private photos/ videos on public accounts, as TC.

The most prevalent theme observed on Instagram (by users and the authors) was Market-Related content, especially Unwanted Advertisement, that is compatible with spamming in the literature.

The Emotional Release theme in its content aspect consisted of violent content, hate-speech, and content that promote suicide, self-injury, and extreme sorrow. We observed hate-speech in both content and behavioral aspects of Emotional Release.

### **Transgressive Behaviors**

We categorized the extracted themes under TB as follows: 1) Attention-Seeking Comments (a. Pointless (I. Highlighted; II. Decontextualized; III. Repeated); b. Questions (I. Personal; II. Vague); c. Help-Seeking (I. Donation Requests; II. Virtual Support Requests; III. Requests for Conversation); 2) Partner-Seeking (a. Date-Seeking; b. Requests for Sex; c. Disturbance/ Pushiness); 3) Risky Behaviors (a. Loosened Privacy; b. Chatting/ Meeting Strangers; c. Fanaticism/ Misjudgment, d. Immersion/ Waste of time); 4) Criminal Behaviors (a. Deception/ Scam; b. Cyber Ransoming/ Hack; c. Digital Piracy/ Plagiarism); and 5) Emotional Release (that in its behavioral aspect includes: a. Sexual (I. Sexual Praise; II. Slut Shaming/ Sexual Name Calling; III. Sexual Fantasies Expression Toward Others); b. Nonsexual (I. Insult; II. Hate-Speech).

Attention-Seeking is one of the most observed themes, that is compatible with trolling. Emotional Release in its behavioral part is mostly compatible with flaming. Partner-Seeking theme<sup>1</sup> is observed

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1 For detailed explanations about Attention-Seeking, Partner-Seeking, and



in both comments and behaviors of users. Some of these behaviors are considered as online sexual pushiness, and it seems some of them have some characteristics of trolling.

Our participants mentioned some risky behaviors online. Some of them believed that privacy on Instagram is loosened because of the use of non-private accounts, the following of strangers, and the invasions to other users' privacy. Some also thought that chatting with strangers, and meeting them in real world can have harmful consequences for some vulnerable users. Some participants made a mention of fandom, extremism, and misjudgment or misbelief about a situation, as transgressive. Another risky behavior is what the participants mentioned as Immersion or what can be called problematic Internet use or Internet addiction, in a more scholarly way.

Despite the noncriminal essence of our research, some participants also mentioned the following forms of criminal behaviors on Instagram: deception, scam, cyber ransoming, hacking, digital piracy, and plagiarism.

### **Cyber Social Control Means**

According to the literature, we divided Instagram users' perceived means of social control into the two following categories:

*Perceived Personal Means*– The participants mentioned several personal means of social control: 1) Personality Traits (a. Personal Desire & Preference; b. Mental/ Psychological Factors; c. Self-Control; d. Age/ Experiences); 2) Social Status (a. Professional Status; b. Educational Status; c. Busyness); 3) Personal Attitudes (a. Ethics; b. Beliefs); 4) Media Use Habits (a. Real Name/ Identity; b. Information Security; c. Privacy; d. Time/ Engagement Management; e. Post and Follow Control), and 5) Reaction Habits (a. Avoidance; b. Ignoring/ Inaction; c. Warning; d. Fear of Being Blocked/ Reported/ Account Terminated).

*Perceived Social Means*– The participants also mentioned several social means of social control: 1) Legal Factors (a. Law enforcement Authorities; b. Corporate Self-Regulation); 2) Awareness Raising (a. Education/ Knowledge; b. Culture Building; c. Media Literacy); 3)

Societal Attitudes (a. Norms; b. Humanitarian Perspective; c. Social Justice; d. Social Capital; e. Value Enrichment; f. No Compulsion for Conformity); 4) Family Structure (a. Family Supervision/ Relations; b. Upbringing; c. Nobility of Family (i.e., family virtues, values, and morals)); 5) Social Groups (a. Peer Groups; b. Acquaintances (i.e., Presence in online groups consisted of family members and acquaintances)), and 6) Technological Tools (a. Block; b. Report; c. Unfollow; d. Word Filtering). Personal attitudes and societal attitudes are related concepts.

### Effects of Cyber Social Control Means

To feasibly limit the number of social control factors and cybercultural transgressions, we chose to quantitatively examine the effects of three psychological factors (including Low Self-Control/ LSC– i.e., Impulsivity & Risk Seeking–, Depression, and Negative Interpersonal Relationships), one personal factor (Computer/ Internet Self-Efficacy), and two normative factors (including Netiquette– i.e., knowledge about formal and informal systems of control on the Internet–, and Normative Beliefs– i.e., perceived levels of conformity with social norms, religiousness, and being a traditional person–), on TB (including Trolling and Flaming), and TC Consumption/ TCC (including Pornography, NSSI Content, and Violent Content use, and Sexting), in a path analysis model. Sexting is considered a TB, but as it is also a kind of content consumption, in factor analysis, it was statistically meaningful in the TCC factor.

**Table 4: The Effects of Examined Cyber Social Control Means**

Variables	TB	TCC	LSC	LSC as Mediator
Low Self-Control	↑	↑	–	–
Depression	↑	↑	↑	●
Negative Interpersonal Relationships	↑	–	↑	–
Computer/ Internet Self-Efficacy	–	↑	↑	●
Knowledge About Netiquette	–	↓	↓	●
Normative Beliefs	–	–	↓	●
↑= Increase; ↓= Decrease; ● = Yes; The significance level= 0.01				

Most of our participants considered themselves having a more than moderate Computer/ Internet Self-Efficacy (mean score= 3.234) that

is identical with the mean score (3.24 out of 5) for web-use skills in the general public (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2012, as cited in Nevin, 2015).

### **Sociodemographic Factors and Media Use Habits as Social Control Means**

Around 60% of our participants reported they somewhat behave and consume transgressively online. In addition to TB and TCC as outcome variables, we also examined the effects of Sociodemographic factors and habits of media use at the significance level of 0.01, on LSC, due to its importance and mediating role. We will discuss our findings on 7 insignificant and 15 effective factors:

*Insignificant Factors*– Full Time/ Part Time Employment, Residence Location (living in Province Capitals, Other Cities of Provinces, Rural Areas, and Abroad), and living alone/ not alone, did not influence LSC, TB, and TCC. Our findings also demonstrated that none of our examined harrowing experiences, i.e., Divorce, Parents' Divorce, Parents' Death, and Having Step-Parents, were cybercultural transgression conducive.

*Effective Factors*– Female participants reported higher self-control, less TB, and less TCC than males. Also, there was an almost constant decline in LSC, TB, and TCC from younger to older ages.

Participants who were in an informal relationship, and after them, single people, reported lower self-control, higher TB, and higher TCC than married people. Iranian Islamic Penal Code (2013) (Articles 221-241) criminalized premarital sex which is a religious taboo. Hence, it is not clear to the authors, if participants who claimed to be single, were actually single, or some of them also engaged in premarital relationships but preferred to conform to the existing formal and cultural duality of single/ married. Indeed, participants who disclosed that they engaged in premarital sex, were already violating allegedly dominant but loosened social norms.

Participants without children demonstrated lower Self-Control, higher TB, and higher TCC than people with children. High-Income and Low-Income participants reported lower Self-Control, and they almost similarly ranked high in TCC than Lower- and Upper-Middle Income people. Income level showed no effect on TB.

We found a constant, and an almost constant decline in LSC and TB respectively, from lower to higher degrees of educational attainment. There is a constant decline in TCC, from Below High School Diploma to Bachelor's holders/ students, but reversely, a constant increase in TCC was observed from Bachelor's holders/

students to Doctorate and Higher. It seems that the more access to computers and broadband Internet connections, higher levels of computer/ Internet self-efficacy such as search skills, and maybe even more English or foreign language knowledge help highly educated participants to break through government filtering and reach TC more easily.

Housewives, Retired, and civil servants had the lowest ranks in all three outcome variables. Student housewives reported the lowest self-control and had a mediocre rank in TB, and a low TCC. Students, Student & Employed, Unemployed, and Non-Governmental Job holders, had almost close mean ranks to each other, and Student & Employed were almost at the top of the list.

Although the Years of Internet Usage did not affect the TCC, but there was an almost constant decline in LSC, and TB from lower years to higher years of Internet usage. Exceptionally, people who were using the Internet for less than 1 year, ranked close to the end of the list, before the category of 15 Years and More. It seems that through years of Internet use experience, users socially learn netiquette and cyber norms by means of different forms of cyber social control means (such as technological and algorithmic tools), and the online socialization processes. Also, there was a constant increase in LSC and TCC from lower to higher daily Internet usage. More hours of being online may lead to more consumption of TC. Daily Internet Usage did not affect the TB.

The majority of our participants had been using VPNs on a daily basis, and only 15.5% of them mentioned that they did not employ them. The results demonstrated that the more users used VPNs, the more they reported lower levels of self-control, and the more they consumed TC that may be subject to government filtering.

Participants (18.1%) who had been taking Psychotropic Medications (as an indication of depression, anxiety, or other psychological problems), reported lower levels of self-control, and higher amounts of TCC. Moreover, around 15% of participants reported that they somewhat use alcohol and/ or recreational drug. The more participants reported Alcohol and/ or Recreational Drug Use, almost the more they reported LSC and TCC. Drinking alcoholic beverages is criminalized by the Iranian Islamic Penal Code (2013) (Articles 264-265). Consistent with previous research (Mowlai, et al., 2016, p. 248), it can be concluded that as people who problematically used alcohol or substance had lower levels of self-control, hence they also reported higher TCC which is already affected by their LSC.

Participants with the experience of Online Victimization (41.5%), reported lower levels of self-control, and higher amounts of TB and TCC. Around 55% of participants reported that they had some online-transgressor friends. The more participants had Associations with Online Transgressors, almost the more they reported lower levels of self-control, and the more they had higher amounts of TB and TCC.

Slightly more than 68% of participants somewhat felt they were in minority (religiously, politically, ethnically, sexually, behaviorally, and/ or physically). The more participants felt Being in Minority, the more they reported lower levels of self-control, and higher amounts of TB and TCC.

### **Iranian Jurisdiction, Filtering, and Anonymity Issues**

A domestic social media platform should be considered as the embodiment of the Iranian Jurisdiction as a social control means. We explored the thoughts of Instagram users to find out whether another forced migration of users to domestic social media platforms can be effective or not. Two-thirds of our participants stated that they would not use a domestic social media platform, and less than half of them mentioned distrust as their reason. The rest of the participants mentioned that they would or may use a domestic platform, especially for professional reasons, and only a very small part of the participants stated that there is no difference for them in using domestic or foreign social media platforms. Two-thirds of the participants who would use an Iranian substitute of Instagram, mentioned that their posting habits and online behaviors would not change.

Using VPNs is somehow a daily online routine for many Iranians, and 84.5% of our quantitative phase's participants mentioned that they had been using VPNs on a daily basis to break through filtering. Due to its significance, in the qualitative phase, we explored the effectiveness of filtering as a social control means. Again two-thirds of our participants stated that they would use VPN in the case of Instagram blockage (to be in contact with their acquaintances; to receive information; show civil resistance; have international-social relation/ interaction; and keep up their habit/ interest). Around one-sixth of the participants mentioned that they may use VPN– if it is necessary; to receive information; if other Iranians stay active on the blocked platform; and as a civil resistance strategy. The rest stated they would not use VPN because Instagram is not important for them; they do not have access to a secure VPN; and VPN causes Internet lag.

Another potential cyber social control means on Instagram we explored, was the use of real identity vs. anonymity. The majority of the participants stated that they use real names for their Instagram accounts, and have a single account on Instagram. More than half of the users with multiple accounts had public and private (professional and personal) accounts, and only a small percent of them mentioned transgressive reasons for their sockpuppetry (exploitation of multiple accounts; Kumar, 2017, p. 3), and the majority had benign reasons. Indeed, more than half of the participants stated that nothing induces them to transgress, or they are not interested in committing transgressions. That can be due to their higher social (professional, and educational) status, and also owing to their marriage and parenthood, and due to the fact that the majority of the qualitative phase participants had been using real names for the only Instagram account they had.

### **Discussion**

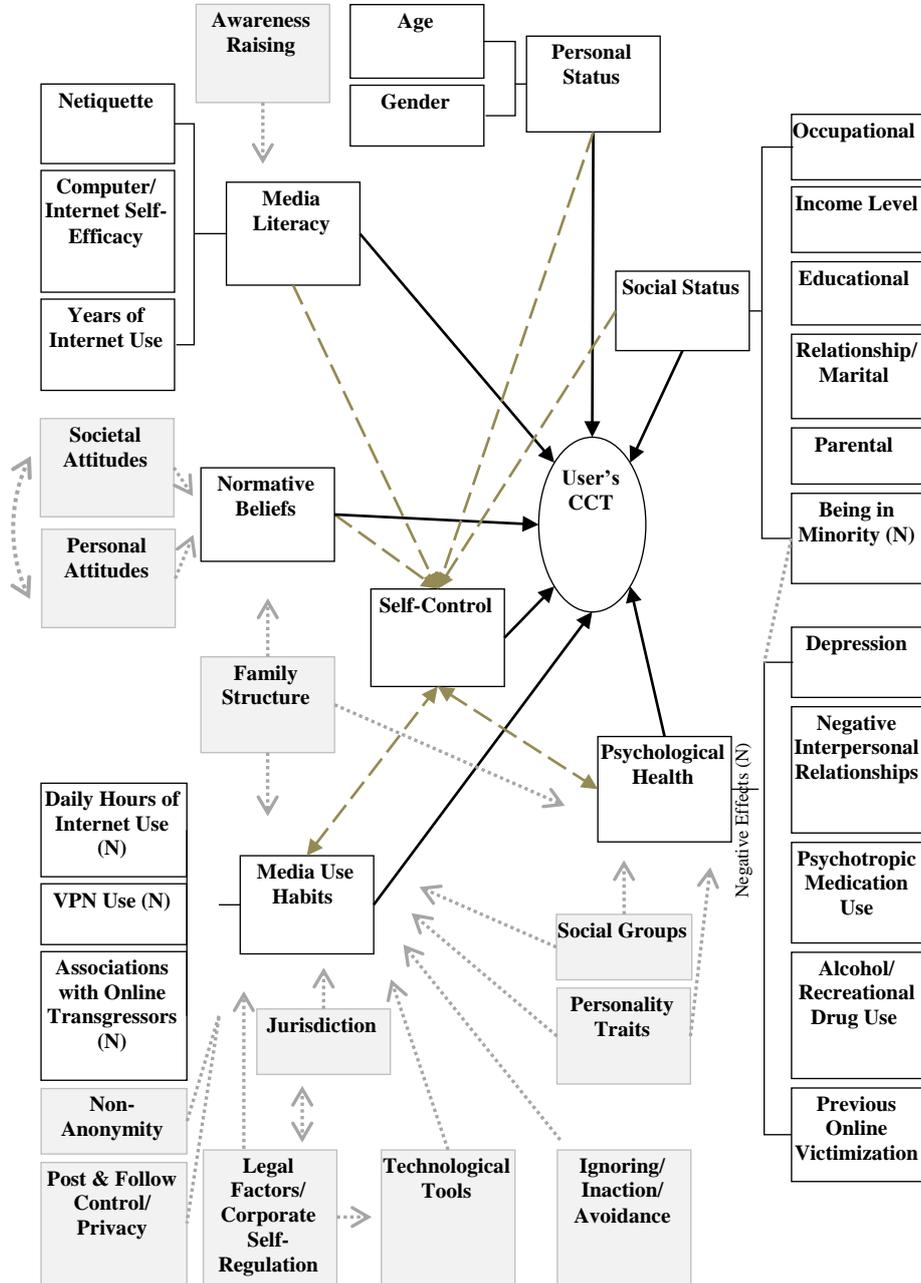
Domestic social media platforms and filtering, as our results show, cannot be used as effective social control means, at least until users have access to other foreign platforms, and highly use VPNs. Many users are not willing to use domestic platforms, and those who would use them will not change their online behaviors, as they apparently do not break social norms and laws. Some hypothetical questions remain unanswered here, as these questions were raised by the "protection of users' rights in cyberspace" bill recently, after our data-gathering phase: What would Iranian users do in the case of serious lags and bandwidth restrictions of foreign platforms? Will users abandon the platform and immigrate to another foreign one? What would Iranian users do in the case of the complete International-Internet shutdown (and the implementation of national Intranet or what is called "National Internet"; Eghtesadnews, 2021)? Will they inevitably move to a domestic platform? These questions could be explored or surveyed by other researchers.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Our research contributed to the literature in the following ways, by: 1) making a taxonomy of Instagram cybercultural transgressions, both behavior and consumption-wise; 2) making a taxonomy of Instagram cyber social control means; 3) recognizing self-control as a mediator for the examined variables, and an important cyber social control means (consistent with General Theory of Crime); 4) demonstrating

the impacts of the following variables on cybercultural transgressions: I. LSC (compatible with the findings of , Mills & Allen , 2020; Lyngs, et al., 2019; Purba and Istiana, 2019; Baek, et al., 2016; Li, et al., 2016; Donner, et al., 2014; Vazsonyi, et al., 2012; Higgins, et al., 2008), II. Depression, and III. Negative Interpersonal Relationships (consistent with General Strain Theory, and Peterson and Densley’s (2017) notion of the internalizing traits of online aggressors), IV. Computer/ Internet Self-Efficacy (consistent with the findings of Nevin, 2015; Kumar, 2017), V. Netiquette and VI. Normative Beliefs; 5) recognizing the impacts of gender (consistent with findings of Hen, et al., 2020; Nicklin, et al., 2020; Baranowski, et al., 2019; Nevin, 2015; and the Gender ratio problem), age (compatible with the results of Nevin, 2015; Kumar, 2017; and the Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control), relationship and parental status, educational and occupational status, and household income level (consistent with Akers’ concept of Differential Location in the Social Structure; Akers & Jennings, 2009), years and hours of Internet usage, VPN use, psychotropic medication use, alcohol and/ or recreational drug use, previous online victimization (consistent with the findings of Pratt, et al., 2014; Reyns, et al., 2019), associations with online transgressors (consistent with the results of Holt, et al., 2012), and being in minority, on low self-control, and/ or TB, and TCC; 6) recognizing transgression-inconducive demographic factors; 7) recognizing the importance of jurisdiction and non-anonymity as social control means, and 8) demonstrating the failure of filtering, and forced user migration to Iranian social media platforms as coercive controlling policies, at least until other foreign platforms, and VPNs are still available to users.

From a qualitative viewpoint, we integrated our quantitative findings from SEM and group comparisons (i.e., white boxes), with qualitative findings (grey boxes) in the model below. In order to categorize the examined variables, and to visually present a comprehensive model, we grouped variables under some new labels. We presented the quantitatively tested relationships between predictor and outcome variables with direct solid lines, and between predictor variables, themselves, with direct dashed lines. The qualitative findings’ relationships with predictor variables that were not tested in the current research are shown with indirect dotted lines. We encourage further quantitative research in these areas. To show the negative effects of some variables, we used the letter “(N)” after them, or on their relational line.



**Figure 2: The Model of Effective Means of Cyber Social Control for Iranian Users' Cybercultural Transgressions (CCT)**

Altogether, we can conclude from our quantitative findings that non-depressed, older, married, middle-income, university educated, non-student users (especially women) with high self-control, more positive interpersonal relationships, moderate levels of computer/ Internet self-efficacy, normative beliefs, and with more years of Internet use experience and less daily Internet use, who are knowledgeable about netiquette, are parents, have a job (also retired individuals and housewives), do not use VPNs, psychotropic medications, and alcoholic beverages and/ or recreational drugs, did not previously experience online victimization, do not associate with online transgressors, and do not feel being in minority, are less likely than others to commit online TB, or consume TC.

These findings can be useful in devising new non-coercive policies and initiatives to socially control the cybercultural transgressions, especially in countries like Iran in which the tendency to top-down governance of cyberspace is dominant. We can also conclude that educating users, raising their awareness, and improving their psychological health and wellbeing can contribute to decreasing cybercultural transgressions.

Our findings are limited to the noncriminal transgressions in the Iranian social media sphere, particularly on Instagram. Our second qualitative study was also limited to the special characteristics of its participants. We recommend further research to explore cyber transgressions and social control means on other platforms, and among users with different cultural and demographical characteristics. We also recommend more research into the role of self-control as a cyber social control means.

In conclusion, it is important to mention that all cyber transgressions are not unfavorable as those we examined here. Some transgressions are vital for every society to maintain its dynamism and revive its norms and values.

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