



Government of Maharashtra

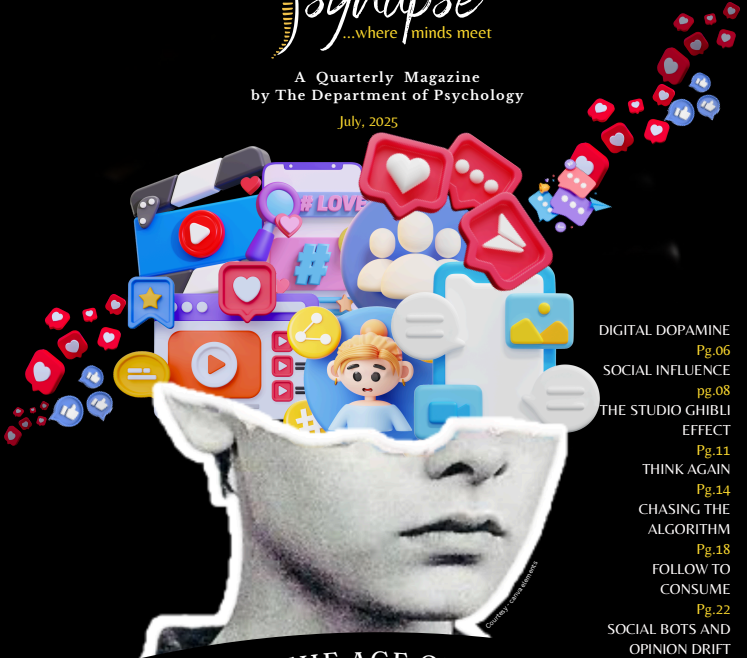
Dr. Homi Bhabha State University, Mumbai  
Elphinstone College



*synapse*  
...where minds meet

A Quarterly Magazine  
by The Department of Psychology

July, 2025



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THE AGE OF  
**INFLUENCE**



# HBSU

Dr. Homi Bhabha State University

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## VISION

"To be a premier institution of higher learning, committed to academic excellence, research, innovation, and social transformation, that prepares future leaders for a sustainable and equitable world."

## MISSION

- Our mission is to provide high-quality education, foster critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and encourage innovative research that leads to social transformation.
- We aim to empower our students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and values to contribute to the betterment of humankind.
- We strive to create an inclusive, diverse and welcoming environment that promotes personal growth, teamwork, ethics and leadership development.



Website :<https://hbsu.ac.in/home>



Contact: 022-35136751



Mail Id: [indo@hbsu.ac.in](mailto:indo@hbsu.ac.in)



Address: Dr. Homi Bhabha State University  
Mahatma Gandhi Road , Fort ,  
Mumbai 400032



@Dr.HomiBhabhaStateUniversityMu



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@Dr.HomiBhabhaStateUniversityMu



**Prof. Vilas Padhye**  
Head, Department of Psychology

# FORWARD

Every generation is pretty convinced that the next one is under the wrong influence. Jazz, cinema, rock 'n' roll, hippies, hallucinogens, television, computer games, junk food, mobile phones...and now social media!

Throughout the history of humankind, civilizations have institutionalized influence to control its populace. At the macro level, aristocracies, religions, governments, and universities have played their role. At the micro level, it has been local communities and families. Over time, dedicated professionals of influencers emerged – clerics, teachers, journalists – and today we see social media influencers, new players in the old game.

But what has changed now is the sheer speed, scope, and scale of influence. Content spreads in a flash, crossing borders, circumventing filters, and dodging sentries, all catalysed by master manipulators at the helm. While influence has always been a means to seek power, too much power today is concentrated in the hands of too few, taking the impact of influence to alarming levels.

Still, it would be naive to judge the present too harshly, for a host of social evils were perpetrated using vehicles of influence in earlier ages too. Wars, ethnic cleansing, hatred, prejudice, and systemic oppression all happened in plain sight, endorsed by powerful influencers. The difference now is that the source of influence is hard to trace. In an interplay of humans, bots, deepfakes, and algorithmic feeds, it is not always clear who, or what, is shaping our thinking. Enter AI, and the milieu becomes murkier.

And yet, as ever before, hope lies in individual endeavour. It takes courage to question the establishment, to confront the forces, to resist the pull, to act against gravity, to defy central tendencies; it takes courage to be an outlier. This courage will be tested again as humanity scrambles for truth in the conundrum of illusions concocted by machines where realities are sacrificed at the altars of influence. The question is, will it be one among us who will rise like a phoenix from the ashes of sanity? Or will we await another *avatar*? A Chat Buddha, a Grok Gandhi, or a Meta Martin Luther to lead us to emancipation? Only time will tell.

# Concept Note



As we introduce the fourth edition of Psynapse, the official magazine of the Psychology Department at Elphinstone College, we focus on a phenomenon that has shaped human behavior throughout history: social influence. Our theme for this edition is "The Age of Influence." This theme highlights the many ways social influence impacts our lives. The methods of influence have changed over time.

In today's world, a "like" can boost our self-esteem, a simple scroll can create an urge to keep scrolling, and a single post can influence millions of opinions and provoke strong reactions. Social media has become one of the most powerful forces of social influence today. Initially, it served as a platform for people to connect, share, and document their lives. However, it has transformed into an environment that often manipulates and challenges individual identities, frequently without users realizing its impact.

This edition explores different kinds of social media influences. Our goal is to create a space where psychological insights meet creativity. Each article, illustration, and activity encourages you to pause and consider: Are we using the product, or are we the product being used? We examine silent bots and their role in shifting opinions, the Studio Ghibli trend and its rapid spread among Instagram users, the rise in digital dopamine with every scroll, like, and follow, the impact of algorithms, and how trends shape our social media identities and authenticity. Finally, we look at how media subtly shows social media influence through programs like "Mismatched."

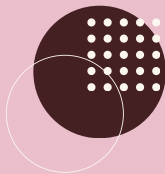
This magazine provides us students with an opportunity to express our thoughts creatively. Our goal is to combine critical insights with artistic expressions for a more engaging and thought-provoking experience. "The Age of Influence" unites various voices to explore different aspects of social media influence. In this edition of Psynapse, we invite readers not only to read and learn but also to feel, reflect, and rethink.



**By Team Editorial**

Reach out to us for any queries at  
[psynapse.elphinstone@gmail.com](mailto:psynapse.elphinstone@gmail.com)

# Meet The Team



## Editorial Team



Anushka Dhamal



Pranav Gaikwad



Shruti Gurav

#insidetheeditorialcortex



Kamlika Das



Maithili Parab



Prerana Gaikwad

## Writers



Arya Raut



Mayank Shukla



Durga Purnima  
Padayachi

#brainsbehindthepages

# Previ

April



## Workshop Series

**Exploring the Human Psyche: A Week of Diagnostic Tools & Insight**  
In an enlightening series of workshops held this April, the Psychology Department of Elphinstone College curated a rich learning experience for students, offering hands-on exposure to essential psychological assessments under the guidance of seasoned professionals.

- 21st April – TAT/CAT Workshop by Sanjana Ma'am

The week began with a deep dive into the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and Children's Apperception Test (CAT).

- 22nd April – Rorschach Inkblot Test Workshop by Sheetal Ma'am. The momentum continued as Sheetal Ma'am led an immersive session on the Rorschach Inkblot Test.
- 25th April – MMPI Workshop by Sanjana Ma'am. The week concluded with a comprehensive session on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), one of the most widely used standardized psychometric tests. Sanjana Ma'am provided a structured walkthrough of the clinical scales, validity indices, and interpretation methods. Students learned how the MMPI can assess major psychopathologies and contribute to clinical diagnosis and treatment planning.

# ously on.

May

VACATION MODE ON, LEARNING NEVER OFF

"AT ELPHINSTONE, GROWTH NEVER TAKES A BREAK."



## Internship Diaries

The Department of Psychology offered a Clinical and Counseling Summer Internship for undergraduate students, which commenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025. The internship lasted for 120 hours and included training on over eight psychometric tests. Another significant aspect of the internship focused on developing counseling skills and learning through various theories and demonstrations. This hands-on experience laid a strong foundation for their Master's in Psychology as they progressed in their careers.



"An insightful and enriching experience that blended clinical assessments like MMPI, WAIS, and Rorschach with practical counseling approaches. It deepened my understanding, emphasized self-care, and gave me clarity before starting my postgrad journey.

Arya Raut,  
Elphinstone College

"It was very insightful, it helped to understand a lot of things beyond the textbook.

Tapasya Wadkar,  
Elphinstone College

## Career Camp Diaries

The Department of Psychology at Elphinstone College, in collaboration with the Counseling Centre of Dr. Homi Bhabha State University, successfully conducted a Career Camp during the months of May and June. Students who had recently completed their SSC examinations were guided through this camp, which also included one-on-one counseling sessions. The camp featured expert-guided assessments on aptitude, interests, intelligence, and personality. Personalized reports were provided to each student, and more than students benefited from this Career Camp, which aimed to guide them towards a brighter future for a nominal fee.



# Clinical Internship



At  
Regional  
Mental  
Hospital,  
Thane



A big thank you to Ramesh Patil sir from RMH, Thane and Ms. Medha Deorukhkar, the Teaching Assistant from Elphinstone College.

Merul Gandhi sir (pic on LHS) played a crucial role in formalizing the internship.



As part of the department's academic enrichment initiatives, Master's students commenced their 120-hour clinical internship at the Regional Mental Health Hospital, Thane. This placement offers in-depth exposure to real-world clinical settings, allowing students to observe a wide range of psychiatric conditions, participate in clinical interviews, and conduct psychometric assessments under professional supervision.

The internship provided a well-rounded clinical learning opportunity, covering:

- **Case History & MSE:** Active involvement in conducting Case Histories and Mental Status Examinations.
- **Psychological Testing:** Administering various tests and contributing to case report formulation.
- **Clinical Observations:** Exposure to Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT), OPD and OT procedures, and Tele-Counseling sessions.
- **Holistic Approach:** A visit to the hospital kitchen to understand the dietary aspects of patient care emphasized the importance of integrative mental health treatment.





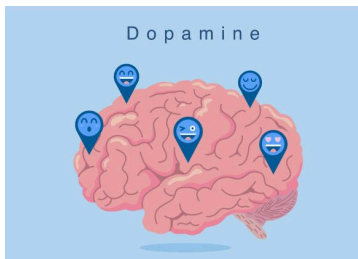
# DIGITAL DOPAMINE

By Kamlika Das, MA-I, SNDT Women's University

Ever seen a hamster's wheel? It's an endless loop which the poor being continuously treads in vain to achieve the treat. Unbeknownst to them, they will never be able to reach their goals no matter how much time or energy they invest. Then there's another kind of hamster who's probably currently reading this article 🐹. (The same kind has written this article too.) No offense, but this article would justify how unwittingly we have become a hamster ourselves.

Before we delve into the topic of discussion, let's understand a few things first. The human body and brain function magnificently. The neurons in the body release certain neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers (or you can say the social media of the body 🗣️) that help transmit signals from one neuron to another, or muscles and organs. They play a key role in converting a neuron's activity into either an excitatory or inhibitory response in the body (Whishaw & Kolb, 2021).

In this article, the neurotransmitter that we're going to focus on is Dopamine (DA), often referred to as the feel-good hormone. Its effects can differ depending on where it is active. It acts as either an excitatory or inhibitory neurotransmitter and plays a role in controlling movement, reinforcement, experiencing pleasure, motivation, learning, and attention (Ciccarelli & White, 2018).



Courtesy - pinterest

Our visionary ancestors once said that anything in excess is harmful. Looks like they were not wrong. When triggered enough, the dopamine rush could be quite intense and addictive. It can be triggered simply by the smell of a sharpie or by a lottery win.

Interestingly, in recent years, we've come across something called Digital Dopamine. 'Digital Dopamine' is the burst of dopamine our brain releases in response to digital rewards like likes, notifications, or new content. This quick rush of pleasure keeps you hooked, wanting for more.

Getting back to the point of how we have become hamsters. The wheel we get trapped in isn't made of metal bars; it's made of endless digital stimuli, reels, stories, and YouTube shorts. We endlessly tread chasing that little treat (the dopamine rush) we get from a like, a new notification, or a funny meme. But here's the catch: the more we run, the further

that level of satisfaction goes. Prolonged exposure to digital stimuli can lead to dopamine desensitization (Ahuja & Elavia, 2025).



Courtesy - pinterest

Just like a hamster needs to run faster for the same piece of treat, we need more intense, constant digital input to feel that same buzz. What used to make us feel good earlier now barely feels like anything. So, we scroll more, swipe more, refresh more, caught in a loop where the reward is always just out of reach. The end product is reduced attention spans, a tired brain, and a shorter fuse.

Now let's also see how we can get out of this trap wheel. These days, the term 'Digital Detox' is quite in trend. A digital detox is when someone takes a break from screens or social media for a set amount of time to unplug and recharge. Here is a list of research-backed strategies that one can start employing in their lives.

- **Set screen-free zones** - No devices in bed or at meals
- **Schedule offline time** - Take regular breaks from screens
- **Turn off notifications** - Cut distractions and reduce stress
- **Do offline activities** - Exercise, read, or go outside
- **Track screen time** - Use apps to limit usage
- **No devices in the bedroom** - Sleep better without screens
- **Practice mindfulness** - Be aware of your tech habits

Have a safe recovery back to humanhood!

## DOPAMINE DETECTOR

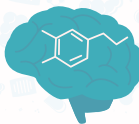
### How to Play

Below is a list of common social media actions. Rank them from 1 (biggest dopamine rush) to 6 (smallest dopamine rush) based on how rewarding you think each action feels.

Check the neuroscience-backed order and fun facts at the bottom!

### ACTIONS TO RANK

- GETTING A LIKE -----
- RECEIVING A COMMENT -----
- GETTING A NEW FOLLOWER -----
- HAVING A POST SHARED -----
- WATCHING A VIRAL VIDEO -----
- GETTING TAGGED IN A PHOTO -----





THE EVOLUTION OF

# SOCIAL INFLUENCE

By Pranav Gaikwad, SYBA (Psy), Elphinstone College

Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde pioneered the study of crowd psychology and collective behavior in nineteenth-century France, investigating how individuals behave differently in groups. However, the curiosity with how people are impacted by those around them is not limited to the nineteenth century; it reflects notions initially espoused by ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, who stated that "humans are inherently social beings shaped by their communities". The ways in which we form and are molded by others are inextricably linked to the tools and technologies of our time, which we employed to exert social influence. Social influence—the subtle, persistent force that influences our beliefs, behaviors, and identities—has always existed, but its application has evolved with each generation. From the intimate gatherings of ancient Athens to the vast expanse of today's digital networks, the tale of social influence is the story of civilization itself.

In the ancient world, the agora of Athens was a living example of the power of face-to-face persuasion. Citizens came together not only to trade products but also to exchange ideas, discuss policy, and lay the groundwork for democracy. The administration of social influence was immediate and personal: conformity was visible in the adoption of local customs and speech, compliance and obedience emerged as townspeople listened to the

words of respected orators and magistrates, and identification took root as young people emulated the city's great statesmen. Through frequent participation in public life, Athenians assimilated the ideas of civic obligation and democratic engagement, incorporating them into the very fabric of their character. The agora, in its vibrancy, reminds us that influence once flowed through the spoken word and the shared experience of communal life.



The rise of mass printing and publishing in India marked the start of a new era in the dissemination of influence. Without regard to geography, books, pamphlets, and newspapers developed into powerful platforms for concepts that might bring people together or fortify ties. Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak's passionate speeches and powerful ideas ignited a global yearning for independence from colonial rule. These leaders provided motivation for dedicated activists and local organizers who took

the initiative to organize open marches and nonviolent rallies, concentrating people's efforts on a single cause. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi soon became beacons of hope, inspiring countless individuals to envision themselves as part of a national awakening. Nationwide, townspeople and villagers banded together in boycotts and civil resistance, and their participation progressively deepened their sense of unity and shared purpose. As families and neighbors stood together, a powerful sense of purpose and national identity blossomed throughout communities nationwide. The printed word, traveling from city to village and across regions, wove these diverse voices together, allowing Indians of every background to unite around a common dream of liberty, forever reshaping the nation's destiny.



Courtesy - pinterest

Progress marched forward, and the age of mass media arrived with radio and television reshaping the way Indians engaged with society. In the decades following independence, television became a central force in shaping public opinion and social movements. Iconic moments, such as the coverage of the Green Revolution, or the images of national leaders addressing the nation during times of crisis, reached millions of homes. The emotional impact of seeing farmers' struggles, or the inspiring speeches of leaders, stirred the

conscience of the nation. Viewers, moved by what they witnessed, began to conform to new ideas of progress and unity; compliance was seen as citizens supported government initiatives or joined community drives; obedience was evident as people followed the lead of respected figures in times of need; and identification grew as individuals found inspiration in national heroes and role models. Over time, the values of unity, progress, and social justice became internalized, influencing laws and reshaping societal expectations. Television, with its ability to connect across vast distances and touch hearts directly, made social influence both a national experience and a deeply personal journey, accelerating the pace of change in Indian society.

However, the advent of the digital age brought about a new paradigm that is characterized by interactivity, immediacy, and global reach, even as mass media brought people's opinions together. The management of influence has grown more accessible because to social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which make it possible for anyone with an internet connection to act as a source and a recipient digital world. The #MeToo movement serves as a striking example of this change. What started out as individual stories shared online swiftly grew into a global chorus: compliance was observed as organizations updated their policies in response to public scrutiny; obedience emerged as workplaces adopted new codes of conduct; identification flourished as people united behind advocates and survivors; internalization occurred as society started to reconsider its views on equality and

consent. Influence is immediate and participatory in this digital agora, with the potential to ignite worldwide movements in a few short days.

Courtesy - pinterest



From the agora to the algorithm, this evolution demonstrates the enduring power of social influence as well as its extraordinary versatility. The predominant technology of each era has influenced the diffusion of influence, its rate of spread, and the extent of its effects. The same basic processes—conformity, compliance, obedience, identification, and internalization—are conveyed through the spoken word, printed page, broadcast signal, and viral hashtag.

According to the famous social psychologist Herbert Kelman, these types of influence are ageless, but how they are applied varies with each generation, shaped by its culture and technological advancements. The power of influence is more powerful and more democratized than ever in the modern era, when algorithms filter our newsfeeds and viral trends have the ability to affect millions of people. Therefore, the difficulty is to identify the forces at work, comprehend how influence changes our decisions, and use it intelligently, lest we turn into passive recipients rather than active contributors to the creation of our environment.

Looking back on this journey, we can see that the development of social influence is a testament to the human need for connection, purpose, and belonging rather than just a history of evolving technologies. The methods in which we both influence and are influenced continue to shape who we are as a community and as individuals, from the open arguments of the agora to the endless scroll of the digital world.

## DO YOU KNOW?

- Studies show that a post with a single 🍕 or 🐶 emoji gets more likes; apparently carbs and puppies are universal influencers!
- When dining out, people who order last are most likely to copy someone else's dish. It's called the menu mimic effect (a.k.a. "I'll have what she's having").

Psycomic



**Me: Doctor, you've gotta help me! I'm addicted to Social Media.**

**Doctor: I don't follow you.**

# WHICH GENERATION DO YOU BELONG TO?

COUNT YOUR A, B, C, OR D ANSWERS. THE MOST COMMON LETTER REVEALS YOUR GENERATION!

## 1. HOW DO YOU USUALLY COMMUNICATE

WITH FRIENDS?

- A) PHONE CALLS
- B) TEXT MESSAGES
- C) SOCIAL MEDIA DMS
- D) SNAPCHATS OR SHORT VIDEO MESSAGES



## 2. WHAT'S YOUR GO-TO WAY TO WATCH TV SHOWS?

- A) CABLE TV
- B) DVDS
- C) STREAMING SERVICES (NETFLIX, PRIME, ETC.)
- D) YOUTUBE OR TIKTOK CLIPS

## 3. HOW DO YOU PREFER TO SHOP?

- A) IN-STORE, WITH CASH
- B) IN-STORE, WITH A CARD
- C) ONLINE SHOPPING
- D) SOCIAL MEDIA SHOPS OR INFLUENCER LINKS



## 4. HOW DO YOU REMEMBER IMPORTANT DATES?

- A) WRITTEN CALENDAR
- B) WALL CALENDAR OR PLANNER
- C) PHONE REMINDERS
- D) APPS WITH NOTIFICATIONS AND SHARING

### RESULTS

MOSTLY A: BOOMER (BORN ~1946-1964)

MOSTLY B: GEN X (BORN ~1965-1980)

MOSTLY C: MILLENNIAL (BORN ~1981-1996)

MOSTLY D: GEN Z/ALPHA (BORN ~1997-PRESENT)



HOW SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS SHAPE AESTHETIC TASTE AND  
FUEL MACHINE LEARNING MODELS

# THE STUDIO GHIBLI EFFECT

By Durga Purnima Padayachi, SYBA (Psy), Elphinstone College

The Studio Ghibli Effect is one of the most popular trends that took over social media, cutting across generations from Millennials to Gen Z, everyone became part of it. The trend draws inspiration from the iconic artwork of renowned Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki, created under the banner of Studio Ghibli. His creations are known for their dreamy, detailed visuals, which take immense time and craftsmanship to illustrate. Even the smallest elements are depicted with care by skilled artisans. In Studio Ghibli's 2013 film *The Wind Rises* (*Kaze Tachinu*), there's a stunningly detailed crowd scene that took over an entire year to animate despite lasting only four seconds on screen.

Courtesy - pinterest



This is where the art form turned into a trend with the help of AI tools such as ChatGPT and OpenAI. With just a simple upload of a photo and a prompt, the image could be transformed into a picture that looked straight out of a Studio Ghibli film. This easy access, combined with the

willingness to be part of a new social trend and a fondness for Studio Ghibli's art, created a massive wave of participation across social media. According to the article published by THE REELSTARS,2025 in India, the trend was followed so much so that about 5.3 million Ghibli-style photos were generated in a single night, which led to overprocessing of the OpenAI tool.

The rise of such trends highlights the role of social psychology in explaining why people feel the need to follow what's popular, especially in an age shaped by digital influence. Though the initial rise of the trend was largely driven by private acceptance with many users genuinely appreciating the art form and having an understanding of Studio Ghibli's aesthetic the later phase of the trend gained momentum due to a massive wave of people joining in purely for its visual appeal, without any real background knowledge of the style or its origins. This shift highlights the increasing presence of public conformity, where participation was more about fitting in with the crowd than genuine appreciation.

Thus, the understanding of conformity stems from its two foundational forms: normative social influence and informational social influence. Grasping these pillars of conformity is essential, as they help explain why we often choose to

follow social media trends. Who doesn't enjoy feeling wanted, liked, or even being the reason someone else notices and follows a trend? It's a really natural part of being human. This desire to belong and be accepted by others is what is called normative social influence. This mirrors how social media algorithms operate, rewarding content with likes, shares, and visibility, thereby reinforcing the craving for social validation. Because of this, many people join trends like the Studio Ghibli effect even if they don't fully understand the background, just to be part of what everyone else is doing.

Courtesy - pinterest

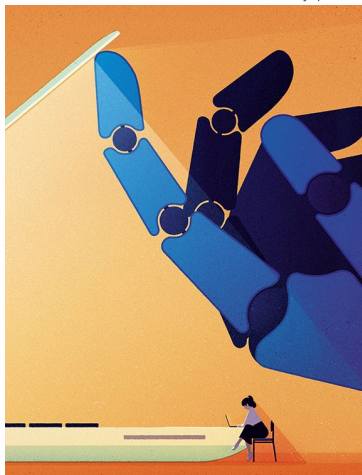


Informational social influence basically means we look at what others are doing or saying to figure out how we should act ourselves. In the case of the Studio Ghibli trend, many people didn't really know much about the art style at first. But when they started seeing everyone around them, from famous celebrities to their own neighbors posting these creative, Ghibli-inspired photos, they naturally felt drawn to join in. Whether it was turning everyday pictures of family, friends, or even pets into something magical, the trend spread quickly. People just felt it was the right thing to do, almost like going along with the flow, because everyone else was doing it. It shows how powerful social influence can be in

what feels popular or acceptable, even if we don't fully understand the original idea behind it.

This trend not only became popular across different groups of people but also served as a source of data for training machine learning AI. The synchronous behavior of users and the creative ways they modified the trend gave AI systems insight into human preferences and patterns of thought. For example, individuals would upload a real-life photo and use prompts like "add a dog" to generate a Ghibli-style image even if there was no dog in the original photo. This gave the AI a new instruction to learn from. The more it saw such requests, the better it became at predicting similar prompts and generating appropriate responses. Over time, this led to AI tools suggesting similar additions even without direct input, fueling another layer of the trend.

Courtesy - pinterest



Interestingly, this also sparked a new wave called “Ghibli trend gone wrong”, where AI-generated images featured odd or unexpected elements initially seen as mistakes but later embraced as part of a fun, imaginative twist on the original trend. What began as errors became a new trend in themselves, showing how machine learning evolves with user creativity and interaction.

In the end, this is just one of many trends that highlight how social influence works in today’s world. Tomorrow, a new trend will likely take over our screens, and in an age where artificial intelligence is accessible with just one tap, it’s important that we stay aware of how social media algorithms and AI tools shape our behavior.

Like every coin has two sides, the Ghibli trend showed us both the beauty and the complexity of this digital age. On one hand, it helped people discover and appreciate the Ghibli art style; on the other, it raised important questions about the role of AI in creative expression. While some choose not to conform, believing that true art can't be replicated by machines, others embrace the trend, reflecting how deeply we are influenced by the need to connect, belong, and express ourselves in this era of social influence.



**“The loudest opinion in the room is like Wi-Fi – everyone connects even when the signal is weak.”**

## AESTHETIC MATCHUP

LOOK AT EACH DESCRIPTION BELOW AND MENTALLY MATCH IT TO ONE OF THE LISTED AESTHETIC STYLES.  
CHECK YOUR ANSWERS ON THE LAST PAGE

Romanticizes rural life with cozy cottages, nature, and soft pastels. Peaceful and nostalgic.

Futuristic neon-lit cities with high-tech and dystopian vibes. Dark, vibrant, and edgy.

Moody, scholarly vibe with dark colors, vintage clothes, and old libraries.

Free-spirited and eclectic, featuring earthy tones, flowing fabrics, and handmade decor.

Inspired by past decades with classic styles, muted tones, and nostalgic charm.

Whimsical, dreamy scenes with soft colors and magical, detailed backgrounds.

**BOHO**

**DARK ACADEMIA**

**STUDIO GHIBLI**

**CYBERPUNK**

**COTTAGECORE**

**VINTAGE**



ARE YOU CHOOSING OR JUST FOLLOWING?

# THINK AGAIN

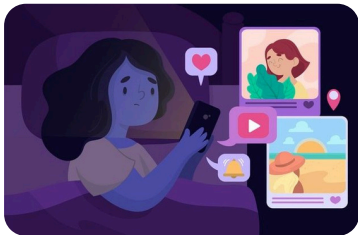
By Arya Raut, TYBA (Psy), Elphinstone College

Raise your finger if you have liked some reel because many other people have liked it. Ohk, all of us are guilty as charged (if you are an exception, 3 cute little stars for you), and this is not some rare occasion.

Often, we follow and like some content because many other people are doing it, so basically, we can save ourselves from FOMO (fear of missing out ). That's fine, but the question is, do we really like the content, do we really find it funny/cute/pretty, etc. Personally, my answer is not always.

Sometimes we like something just to go with the flow, and other times, we like some content but hesitate because nobody has liked it yet. And that's normal cause we are wired to be this way. Because throughout the process of evolution, we have associated Conformity with safety and Non-conformity with danger. The only difference is that at that time, we were scared of the wild, and now we are scared of FOMO.

Courtesy - pinterest



According to the Bandwagon effect, people adopt certain behaviors, styles, or attitudes simply because others are doing so. And to back this up, there is Cialdini's principle of social proof, which explains how humans tend to assume the actions of others reflect correct behavior (in our case, cool behavior). And it's great to be cool, but it's even cooler if we define our own "cool" for ourselves as per our own liking and taste.

Do you remember in childhood when anybody asked what their favorite color was, and every other girl used to say pink, and boys used to say black or red. And then there was you who liked yellow, green, purple, but said "pink" out loud just to belong there. But now that we are older, I want you to understand that you need to belong to yourself at most.

According to a survey Guardian (2025), nearly 50 % of individuals express a desire for a world without the internet, highlighting a collective yearning for more authentic, less performative interaction. McLean Hospital's Research indicates that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) drives individuals to engage with social media, leading to anxiety and a sense of exclusion, which can detract from authentic self-perception. Yes, I understand that the sense of belonging is important with society, but it's even more important to maintain it with yourself.

Here is a quick check (no one can see what you like in this article, so be honest)

- Did you ever refrain from liking some content because it might make you look uncool?
- Have you ever followed a creator because some of your friends thought they were cool?
- Have you ever liked some content even if you don't agree with it?
- Have you ever refrained from posting something because it might not get a lot of reach?

If yes to even one of the questions, then don't worry, we are all in this together.

But you know what, it's cool to be uncool sometimes!

If you think glitter is cool, then wear glitter. You think colors are pretty, wear a color Monochromatic look can wait. You think cooking food and crocheting gives you peace, then do it, cool fast bikes can

wait. You think that staying home and not doing anything is your comfort, then go for it; fancy outings can wait.

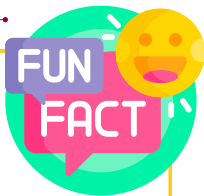
We think 50 likes are so little, just imagine even 5 people telling you that they liked what you said or what you wear, it will make your day. Honestly, we all get influenced by anything and everything we surround ourselves with, and that is completely normal, but how much we let it shape and manipulate our thought process is the power we hold in ourselves.

So what can we do from here on!!

- Before liking any post, ask yourself if you really like it, or if the thousands of likes are making you like that content.
- Start posting what matters to you, even if it's uncool. Remember our analogy.
- Remember, belonging to yourself is greater than belonging to social media because cool is a trend, but being you is timeless.

People walk 11% faster when they think someone is watching.

Yes, the "invisible race" is real!



**Which social media platform vegans hate the most?**

**Google meet**

# CHOICE OR INFLUENCE?



## How to Play

Read each scenario and pick the answer that feels most like what you would do. At the bottom, check the key to see if your choices show independent thinking or social influence.



### 1. Everyone at school is wearing a new brand. What do you do?

- A) Buy the brand to fit in
- B) Wear what you like
- C) Ask friends why they like it

### 2. Your friends are all going to see a movie you're not interested in.

- A) Go with them anyway
- B) Suggest a different activity
- C) Stay home and do your own thing

### 3. A popular influencer recommends a new phone.

- A) Want the phone because they said so
- B) Research reviews before deciding
- C) Wait to see what your friends think

### 4. In a group project, the leader wants to take a risky approach.

- A) Agree without question
- B) Voice your concerns and suggest alternatives
- C) Go along but feel uneasy

### 5. At a party, everyone starts playing a game you dislike.

- A) Join in to avoid standing out
- B) Politely decline and do something else
- C) Watch but don't participate

### 6. Your favorite celebrity posts about a cause.

- A) Immediately support the cause
- B) Learn more before deciding
- C) Ignore it if it doesn't interest you

# WORD SEARCH



C	V	T	N	U	J	W	H	I	L	A	N	A	W	B
O	Q	S	F	G	H	U	M	B	C	X	O	F	G	Z
N	L	D	G	A	Y	E	R	T	Z	V	R	R	C	W
F	J	S	D	F	A	X	Z	W	R	T	M	R	O	Q
O	B	E	D	I	E	N	C	E	A	R	C	R	M	L
R	O	H	K	C	A	E	U	Q	M	L	G	E	P	K
M	H	C	O	H	E	S	I	V	E	D	M	S	L	A
I	F	A	W	Q	T	C	X	S	L	H	F	G	I	P
T	G	K	C	A	N	B	X	C	O	P	E	R	A	U
Y	M	E	A	U	T	H	O	R	I	T	Y	C	N	V
N	B	X	Z	A	S	Q	W	G	J	U	K	L	C	S
S	O	C	I	A	L	P	R	E	S	S	U	R	E	K
N	B	V	C	X	A	H	F	W	E	Q	U	I	O	P
N	O	N	C	O	N	F	O	R	M	I	T	Y	B	L
A	S	D	F	R	W	Q	O	M	B	V	C	X	L	P

- OBEDIENCE
- AUTHORITY
- NONCONFORMITY
- COMPLIANCE
- NORMS
- CONFORMITY
- SOCIAL PRESSURE
- COHESIVE

# #UNFILTERED

## STUDENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

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*"Social media has decreased my time to actually live and experience the world. It had in the past changed my self-perception in a negative way, as I'd get a lot of FOMO. Not really. Talk with my partner. It has helped me much to understand concepts that I couldn't in class. It helps me stay connected and talk whenever I want with my partner, family, and friends. It has also built my network and connections. I am grateful to have amazing close friends, some of whom I met through social media."*

---

*"Social media helps me stay connected and discover like-minded communities. But seeing "perfect" lives online sometimes makes me feel inadequate and distracted from important things like studying. Yes. I often feel the need to show only the good parts of my life—even on tough days. It's exhausting to maintain a perfect image all the time. I take a break—sometimes a few hours, sometimes a weekend. Offline time with friends, books, or creative hobbies helps me feel grounded again. Definitely. I've learned a lot, found mental health resources, and drawn inspiration from creators. It helps me connect with people I wouldn't meet otherwise."*

---

*"Social media has made me witness a decrease in my attention span recently. No, I don't feel such pressure. Using humour as a self-defence mechanism helps at some point, but a lot of it has turned into quarrels and big arguments. Yes, if used properly, social media has the power to influence good habits, sex education, stopping Procrastination and many of self-development techniques and information are given on social media."*

---

*"Daily habits: my attention span has decreased, and screen time has increased. Yes, if I click a picture, it has to be perfect and also stay always happy, at least on screen, even if you are not in reality. That's what is pressurized, being perfect and being cool all the time. I just stay away from it and do something manual work as reading a book or playing music, something like that. Yes, it also has a positive side, such as I get all the info about people and the world with just one click, and it also helps people to earn money if properly used."*

**"WE ASKED  
STUDENTS  
HOW SOCIAL  
MEDIA  
AFFECTS  
THEIR SELF-  
IMAGE,  
HABITS, AND  
MENTAL WELL-  
BEING—AND  
WHAT HELPS  
THEM STAY  
GROUNDED."**

---

*"Social media influenced me in a good way as it made me choose good colour combinations, write quotes, and express views, as I used to create stories that were meant to grab people's attention.*

*Not exactly like pressure, but I used to think that will this story or post or a particular quote would be liked by people or not, would they be impressed and praise me? I constantly saw the views on my story, and if it did not go as I thought, I would just remove that particular post or story after a few hours and would try to make an attractive one again. Yes, it can influence you positively, but it's not always up to you and your perspective on how you see the world and how much you rely on others' confirmation."*

---

*"It can easily get addictive due to the constant dopamine spike. But one can have control over it. I generally use it to stay updated, get entertained, and explore art culture and different perspectives. Yes, I try to put an unedited version of myself. I don't like to hurt someone unnecessarily. But I do share my opinions. If I feel it is overwhelming, I will stay away from it for some time. To get rid of endless scrolling, I watch something useful and immediately end my time on the app. Social media can be quite toxic. X (Twitter) has become a hub to push certain political narratives in a political way. One can spiral into self-comparison and feel negative about her/himself. To use social media positively, one should know their preferences, their purpose for being on social media, and whether the algorithm is in their favour and not otherwise."*

---

*"Social media constantly shapes how I see myself and the world. While it's made me more self-aware and informed, it's also led to overthinking, social comparison, and at times, emotional burnout. Yes, especially on platforms like YouTube and Instagram. I've had to be extra mindful of what I post and how I express myself, since tone and emotion can easily be misunderstood online. I take screen breaks and spend time in nature or with family. Doing hobbies helps me reset and shift my focus back to the real world. Absolutely. When used mindfully, it's a powerful space to share ideas, connect across cultures, and discover new opportunities. It just needs to be balanced and regulated."*

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*"It has helped me to not compare myself with everyone and be self-aware of things. No, I have not. I tend to stay out of it for some time and do something that gets my mind out of it. Yes, it can be, as there are many people who make content that is pure talent or informative things happening around, like it is a good source of daily news."*

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*"It helps me stay informed and connected, but only if we use it responsibly. Otherwise, it can easily become overwhelming. I've even deleted my accounts at times to take a break."*

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## Questions asked:

1. In what ways has social media influenced your self-perception or daily habits?
2. Have you ever felt pressured to portray a certain version of yourself online?
3. What's one coping mechanism you use when social media becomes overwhelming or negatively impacts your mental health?
4. Do you think social media can also be a force for positive influence? How?



THE INFLUENCE OF PLATFORM PROMOTION ON INFLUENCER  
LIVELIHOODS AND AUTHENTICITY

# CHASING THE ALGORITHM

By Mayank Shukla, SYBA (Psy), Elphinstone College

In this digital age where trends rule the fame, influencers ignore their own and focus on what the algorithm has to offer. Every post, like, and share is a movement like an established dance choreographed by the social media platforms, and the creators dance gracefully yet endanger their authenticity. Influencers run the danger of losing sight of who they are when caught up in the fleeting glory of fame, which raises issues about health, purpose, and self-identity. This article will investigate the uncertainty of influencers while investigating trends, complications of being true to oneself (Authenticity), the fear of losing out on trends, and missing golden chances to gain fame.

The digital matrix: Algorithmic anxiety. Algorithmic anxiety is increasingly commonplace for influencers and content creators as social media platforms' incalculable nature continues to unfold. Every day, influencers wake up and unconsciously wonder if today is the day their content is seen or ignored, as algorithms are constantly changing for what is buried or to be promoted to the audience. This capricious and inconsistent nature creates a form of anxiety (algorithm anxiety) unique to social media, which causes influencers to feel as though they must constantly adapt, innovate, and chase trends just to stay in the conversation. For example,

an influencer who typically benefited from sharing personal stories may notice a decline in total engagement they receive when the platform pivots to short, viral videos.

Courtesy - pinterest



In an effort to remain relevant, they may abandon their personal style and start mimicking their competitors by jumping on trends even if they feel it isn't authentic. This cycle of self-doubt, shame, and frustration can be deflating, and oftentimes, the overall experience of creative expression can become a burden. Fear of being "shadow-banned" or losing hundreds of followers overnight can compound the emotional burden, leading influencers to overthink every post, caption, and hashtag. This constant pressure affects creativity, but it can also produce mental health repercussions.

In an effort to remain relevant, they may abandon their personal style and start mimicking their competitors by jumping on trends even if they feel it isn't authentic. This cycle of self-doubt, shame, and frustration can be deflating, and oftentimes, the overall experience of creative expression can become a burden. Fear of being "shadow-banned" or losing hundreds of followers overnight can compound the emotional burden, leading influencers to overthink every post, caption, and hashtag. This constant pressure affects creativity, but it can also produce mental health repercussions. Influencers could be dealing with anxiety, not sleeping, or even feeling depressed, trying to make sense of the algorithm. Even the need for likes and comments causes self-esteem issues for creators when they feel their worth is based on some number on a machine.

Courtesy - pinterest



With that said, as we consider the implications of algorithmic anxiety, we have taken some time to reflect on how perhaps the digital spotlight is a double-edged sword. Which leads us to perhaps the next natural question: how do influencers balance authenticity with the pressures of remaining relevant in a world moving quickly and changing often?

The tug of war between staying authentic and staying relevant. The tug-of-war between staying real and staying relevant. The world of social media influencers is a tug-of-war between authenticity and relevance. It's also known as the authenticity paradox, a fight between sharing authentic content and trends the algorithm favours. Audiences want real, relatable stories on the one hand. Other platforms push people to create polished, viral content that may not really represent the creator. For example, an influencer who loves to share wise reviews on books might likely observe that their shared post is hardly attracting the kind of eyes it would have been with dance videos and viral challenges. It's easy to give in to temptation and switch up the content to please the algorithm.

The power that influencers have can lead to a loss of personal identity, which can be caused by the distress of presenting a made-up version of oneself. In addition to confusing followers, this can create a sense of disconnect from one's own creations for the creators. Adding to that paradox is that authenticity is penalized, not rewarded. While these posts may be more honest, less honest about your struggles or failures, they might see less engagement; therefore, an incentive to hide your vulnerabilities. Also, those who are always following trends may accrue followers but may also burn out or feel unfulfilled. Knowing how to strike this balance is so important to the influencer's relationship with the audience, the audience's relationship with the influencer, and the influencer's relationship with themselves. Moving forward, we need to talk more about how these forces financially and

emotionally affect influencers, who in turn earn their livelihoods at the whims of unpredictable algorithms and ever-shifting trends. As influencers are under pressure to stay relevant, the things they post are affected by factors outside their sphere. Algorithms are not applied in the same manner everywhere, which creates noticeable differences in what becomes viral around the world. That brings up the bigger issue of content inequality, since you may get very different access to the internet depending on where you live. Algorithm's map: Naked to the human eye.

Courtesy - pinterest



Are people around the world really accessing the same internet? These things are called platform algorithms, which can sometimes be unpredictable; some content can become viral in various countries, while others cannot. These preferences and rules can change what is popular: while travel vlogs are popular in the US, dance videos take the lead in India, regardless of what the audience follows. An algorithm studies engagement

from certain regions, so a trending Mexican meme is unlikely to appear in South Korea. Because of this, online life is unique to every location, and people's knowledge of algorithms varies—Americans usually grasp them better than users in Mexico or South Korea.

A closer look at algorithms used in the economy explains some big problems. In a capitalist society, such platforms mainly care about attracting users and earning money, so children often encounter “cringeworthy” videos without much substance. Indian kids are allowed a lot of screen time and don't have strict rules about what they watch, so viral trends are all over their social media. China relies on the implementation of laws and regulations by its government. Chinese children can watch special lessons on science, history, and skills, and their time on the app is controlled by parents. If influencers post inappropriate content, it is taken down, and if they encourage negative habits, it leads to their eventual block.

It uncovers the fact that capitalist platforms might favour earning money above helping children learn, whereas state-run systems, such as those in China, are designed to help kids become educated. So, which algorithm shows up in a child's feed can determine the quality of their online experience and might influence their thought development.

Pursuing digital ghosts: how FOMO on viral trends haunts the influencer's is the impact when you base your self-esteem on always catching the next viral trend? FOMO, or being afraid of missing out, is common among influencers. It's a low-level worry, like knowing that someone out there always seems to enjoy life more

than you or gets the chance to post before you. Each time they swipe through their feed, influencers feel they are missing out on opportunities, which makes them wish to stay online all the time. The unending goal may reduce self-esteem, making individuals compare themselves and feel unsatisfied because their worth feels tied to occasional digital recognition. By following this path, an influencer could end up shown only as someone else's version of success instead of who they really are.

Conclusion: Being an influencer today means being genuine while also trying to please the algorithm systems in use. The need to follow the latest trends, manage having less content, and worry about not being up to date pressures both their jobs and their inner selves. Since algorithms have a big impact on what matters to us online, we should consider the cost of trying to be relevant on the Internet. This all comes down to making sure our feelings are real in a world that tries to keep evolving all the time.

## "Quotable Quotes"

“

*"The nail that sticks out gets hammered down."*  
— Japanese Proverb

*"The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently."*  
— Nietzsche

”

psycomic



**What's Thanos's favourite social media platform?  
Snapchat**

## HOW TO PLAY?

A simple "board" is printed with numbered spaces.

Readers pick a starting point and use a "finger walk" to move forward by following prompts (e.g., "If you joined a trending challenge, move 2 spaces; if you stayed authentic, move 1").

Each space has a prompt or dilemma to reflect on.

<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> You started your own trend! Move 3 spaces, and think: How did it feel to lead instead of follow?	<b>18</b> You apologized for a post that didn't land well. Move 2 spaces, and reflect on what you learned.	<b>19</b> You encouraged someone else to be authentic. Move 2 spaces and give yourself a high five!	<b>20</b> <b>FINISH</b> You completed the board! Reflect: What did you learn about your relationship with trends and authenticity?											
<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b> You posted a throwback that made you happy. Move 2 spaces and smile!	<b>12</b> You felt pressured to join a trend but chose not to. Move 1 space and write down why you made that choice.	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b> You went viral! Move 3 spaces, but reflect: Was it for something you're proud of?	<b>9</b> You shared your honest opinion, even though it wasn't popular. Move 1 space and take a deep breath.	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b> You copied a popular influencer's style. Move 2 spaces, but pause and ask: Did it feel like "you"?	<b>6</b> You posted an unfiltered photo. Move 1 space and give yourself a compliment!						
<b>START</b>	<b>1</b> You saw a new meme going viral. If you shared it, move 2 spaces. If you ignored it, move 1 space.	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b> A friend tagged you in a trending challenge. If you participated, move 2 spaces. If you politely declined, move 1 space.	<b>4</b> You spent an hour scrolling through trending hashtags. Stay here and reflect: How did it make you feel?	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>

# Trend Chaser...

# Board game

# Would You Go Along?

By Anushka Dhamal, SYBA (Psy),  
Elphinstone College

Try imagining yourself in a room filled with people, all of them have been asked a simple question: Which of the following line matches the shown standard line?

It sounds like a easy breezy question, right? But what if people around you start giving the wrong answers?

**What would you choose, the group opinion or your own?**

**In the year 1950's, psychologist Solomon Asch, set out to research the same dilemma,**  
Let's explore this phenomenon with him.....

How would people react when they are with a group and realise that their opinions are quite different from the ones that group hold?

Accomplices

Real Participants

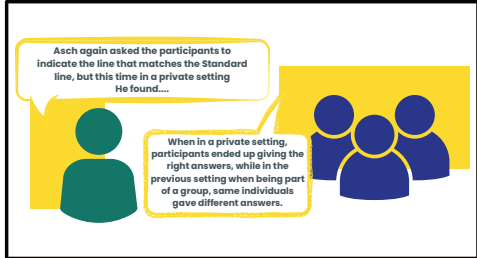
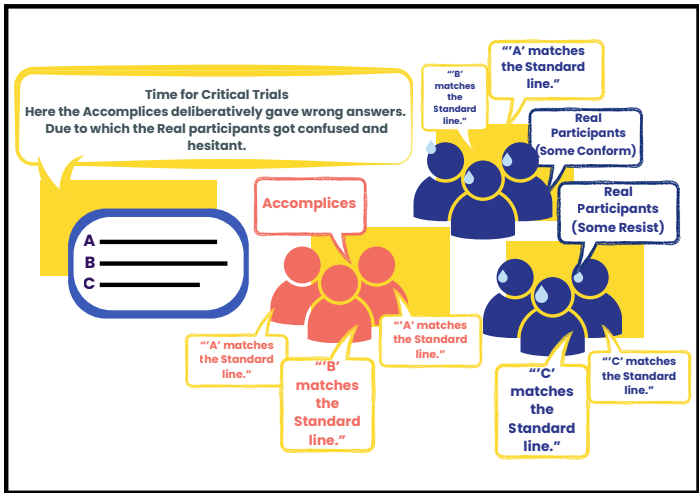
Participants were recruited and brought in a room. Where the real participants were unaware about the accomplices.

Asch showed the participants a Standard line.

A \_\_\_\_\_  
B \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_

FIRST FEW TRIALS  
All the participants gave correct answers

Then the participants were shown three comparison lines. They had to indicate which of the three lines matched the standard line.



Asch found that- Conformity is a phenomenon where people tend to go along with a group in order to avoid conflict and fitting in. This happens because of Social pressure.

He also found that- People tend to have a Public acceptance where the Conformity is high about a particular opinion. However, in case of the Private acceptance the Conformity decreases.



THE CAPITALIST ENGINE BEHIND INFLUENCER CULTURE

# FOLLOW TO CONSUME

By Prerna Gaikwad, MA-II, SNDT Women's University

Social media has transformed from a platform for connections into a space where careers are built. At the heart of transformation lies influencer culture, where we not only communicate but also consume. Influencers have become modern day icons, with polished photos, curated stories and aspiration lifestyles influencers have become modern day icons. You will see picture-perfect lives wrapped in an aesthetic filter, all shared in the name of relatability. This is not just about content creation, it's capitalism dressed in Sunkissed lighting and get-ready-with-me videos.

There is a slight decline in traditional advertisement and the rise of digital intimacy, social media is playing a middle ground for it, relatable enough to seem like friends, but also, on the other hand, aspirational enough to be marketable. The boundaries blur between private and promotional life in the influencer culture, and the line between genuine expression and strategic branding becomes the issue. In traditional advertising, the product is central; in influencer advertising, you are not buying the product, but the life around the product.

The line between an influencer's personal life and their promotional content is increasingly porous, often leaving followers unable to distinguish authenticity from advertisement.

Humans look for connections, and in the world of social media, it's easier to make connections. people easily make "parasocial relationships," this one-sided emotional bond where followers feel personally connected to influencers despite no real interactions.

Courtesy - pinterest



What appears as spontaneous snapshots (captured moments) of daily life is, often, carefully orchestrated performances designed to resonate emotionally with viewers. This is how followers begin to trust influencers not just as content creators but also as friends or their mentors/idols. This trust becomes fertile ground for marketing, making product placements feel like recommendations rather than commercial transactions.

Authenticity is nothing but congruence between a person's internal experience and outward expression; basically, people like content that is "relatable" to them. However, influencers have redefined authenticity into a carefully curated

performance. They share glimpses of vulnerability, struggles, and behind the scenes, but these too are often stylized and edited; the catch is we are comparing our behind-the-scenes with someone else's highlights of the day.

The more an influencer tries to appear "real," the more contrived their content often becomes. In turn, followers consume these narratives as a form of emotional validation, unaware of the capitalist machine driving these moments of so-called transparency.

As a Generational z practicing counsellor, theories like identity formation or social learning in this culture are deeply impactful. Followers, mostly teenagers, begin modeling their choices based on influencers they admire. Whether it is a morning routine, career advice, fashion sense, or even personality traits, they internalize what they see. The desire to become like influencers pushes followers to consume more. This creates a distorted loop for both, influencers feel pressure to share more of their personal lives to remain relatable which may affect their mental health due to burnout, identity confusion as their livelihood depends on public validation, and followers expect constant transparency, the need to keep up which can bring fear of missing out.

According to recent research, the growing skepticism towards influencer culture, particularly regarding the authenticity of the lifestyle and endorsement presented by the influencers. The influencers often portray relatable and genuine personas, much of their content is strategically planned to promote products, which blurs the line between sharing what they like and advertising. Studies also indicate that consumers, especially Gen Z, are critical

of inauthentic content, meaning they get tired of fake or overly polished content on social media. They are starting to see through influencers who only promote products for money without actually using or believing in them.

It's also worth noting that this culture is not just shaped by influencers, but also by their audiences or followers. Followers play a significant role in deciding what content thrives. We as consumers have the power to support voices that align with our values, promote diversity and inclusion, and share content that contributes to collective wellbeing. Whether you follow someone for motivation or consider becoming one yourself, the key is awareness. While influencers strive to maintain a façade of authenticity, their roles often involve strategic self-presentation aimed at marketing objectives. This duality presents challenges in discerning genuine content from promotional material.

As followers, we are not just passive consumers, but active participants every like, view, comment, and share is a signal that tells platforms what matters. It shapes algorithms. It builds careers. Which means we hold real power, the power to reward authenticity, elevate meaningful content, and advocate for transparency over perfection.

In conclusion, authenticity becomes a commodity, sold in the currency of relatability.

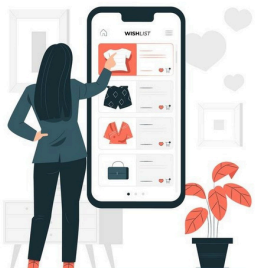
You are doom-scrolling Instagram at 11 pm. An influencer pops up looking effortlessly perfect in a matching gym set, sipping matcha, glowing like never before.

They tag a brand

You click

It's on sale  
You buy it

Courtesy - pinterest



Congratulations! You've just played  
"Follow to consume"

This is influencer culture, even influencers sometimes forget which side they're on.

The ethical dimensions of influencer marketing are also explored, particularly concerning the fine line between persuasion and manipulation. The use of sponsored content raises questions about transparency and the potential for misleading consumers, especially when promotional material is not clearly disclosed.

## Quirky Crowd Psychology

“

If a group of strangers is looking up at the sky, 60% of passers-by will look up too... even if there's nothing there.



Ever notice that when someone claps too long, the whole room keeps clapping? That's the applause trap: we all fear being the first to stop.

”

psycomic



**Damn Social media!!!!!!**

- Facebook wants to know "What's on my mind?"
- Twitter wants to know "What's happening?"
- Google wants to know "Where I am?"
- Siri/Alexa wants me to "Say something"!

**Damn, the internet is turning into an Online Wife!**

# LIKE, SHARE, OR IGNORE?

## INSTRUCTIONS

- **Play the Game:** Players react to each post by choosing Like, Share, or Ignore.
- **Count the Reactions:** At the end, players tally up how many times they picked each reaction.
- **Match the Highest Score:** The reaction (Like, Share, or Ignore) with the highest count determines their influencer personality.



LIKE



SHARE



IGNORE

Post:  
"Just hit 100K followers! Thank you for all the love! 🎉❤️ #Grateful"



Post:  
"Trying out the viral spicy ramen challenge—send help! 🍜🍜 #ChallengeAccepted"



Post:  
"Today marks one year since I started my fitness journey. Progress, not perfection! 💪 #TransformationTuesday"



Post:  
"My cat just photobombed my Zoom call... again. 🐱📺 #WorkFromHome"



Post:  
"Who else remembers these 90s cartoons? #ThrowbackThursday"



Post:  
"Donating 10% of this month's earnings to animal shelters. 🐾 #GiveBack"



Post:  
"Here's my secret recipe for the perfect chocolate chip cookies! 🍪 #BakingWithMe"



Post:  
"Feeling overwhelmed—mental health check-in, anyone else? 🗣️ #RealTalk"





WHO'S REALLY TALKING ONLINE?

# SOCIAL BOTS AND OPINION DRIFT

By Maithili Parab, SYBA (Psy), Elphinstone College

Have you ever scrolled past an online product thinking, “Ugh, no way I’ll buy that”? But then, you check the reviews. Five stars. Pleased orders. Happy community. Suddenly, you change your opinion, and after a few clicks, the item is in your home. Sounds familiar?

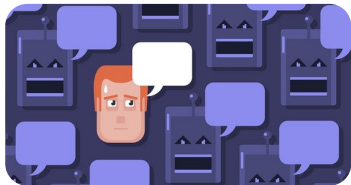
Humans are wired to follow the norm; we have a tendency to change our opinions and actions to fit in, to not stand out as the anomaly. This is an opinion drift. It can begin with something small, like liking a song you didn’t enjoy at first because your friends love it. But over time, these small changes accumulate. They can gradually alter bigger things such as your decisions, your beliefs, even parts of your personality..

But what if these opinion drifts aren’t just shaped by the people around us? What if they’re being subtly steered by programmed bots working behind the scenes? Are our opinions truly influenced by fellow humans, or are they being nudged by non-living digital forces? To answer these questions, we first need to understand a few key concepts.

Conformity refers to the pressure we face to behave in ways consistent with the majority of the community, indicating how we should, or ought to, behave. Laughing at a joke you didn’t find funny because everyone else is laughing? That’s conformity.

We often trust crowd consensus over our own instincts. And online, our minds are even more easily manipulated. We see. We believe. We follow. The bots know this. They’re programmed to make us mindlessly follow the herd by highlighting only selected opinions. Making us feel that it is the majority opinion and the “right” way.

What we see online may or may not be real— it may be an illusion. But when do social bots really become a problem? When we can no longer tell the difference between a bot and a real person.

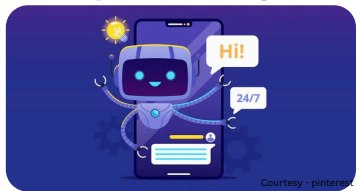


Courtesy - pinterest

Social bots have evolved to camouflage within the crowd. Social bot accounts are as real as human made. They use casual tone, and even slangs and emojis— whatever it takes to appear authentic. These fake accounts often have realistic profile pictures and even believable usernames, making them nearly impossible to spot at a glance. According to a study, Bessi and Ferrara conducted just one day before the 2016 US elections.

an estimated 400,000 bots were operating on Twitter, generating around 20% of all election-related content. These bots shaped and reshaped public opinion, helping influence election outcomes. The same study found that 75% of the bots supported the Republican Party. Thus, bots carry out selective promotion.

Social bots aren't limited to politics. MNCs use them to promote products and push people to buy, promoting consumerism by faking support on a massive scale. And it doesn't stop there. Disguised as real users, bots target vulnerable individuals to sway opinions—not just on politics or products, but also on health, relationships, and even marriage.



Courtesy - pinterest

Ever heard of a man cheating on his wife with an AI? Using apps like Replika, ChatGPT, or chatting through online comment sections of YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc, married and single people alike experience opinion drifts about their partners. Many of them don't even realize they're interacting with bots—they genuinely believe the conversations are real. Is that emotional infidelity or manipulation by these social bots?

Think of the last time you kept on scrolling on a topic. Are you sure what you saw was real? Were the heated debates between two humans, or was there a disguised bot between them? In the vast pool of online information, bots

create a mirage. Unless we dig deeper, we won't know if what we're seeing is real or fake. Social bots aren't loud, but they're powerful. They manipulate the human psyche in their favour, fabricating our very existence.

Even if humans are the ones who have created these portals, why are we so vulnerable to these bots? This is because our brains use mental shortcuts to process overwhelming information. These are called heuristics. Heuristics are the thumb rules we use to store and remember what we see, read, and experience. On the internet, we tend to correlate likes with genuineness and comments with the truth. Bots exploit these shortcuts, and even the smartest, most informed people can fall for it, especially when tired and exhausted.

Sometimes, our opinions drift without us even realizing it. It's like hearing a whisper over and over—until it becomes our own voice. Small nudges lead to a big impact.

Does that mean we are helpless? No, we are not. There are many ways to save ourselves from getting lost in this internet dilemma. Start by first forming your own opinion and then look at the comments and opinions of "others". To check for bots, an AI deepfake detector software can be used.

Courtesy - pinterest



Always cross-check what you see. Read scholarly sources such as articles and journals instead of trusting a 20-second reel. When you see something that is "universally loved," pause, breathe, and think.

Above all, be true to yourself. Don't let the crowd dull your spark or consume your sense of self. Don't let the pool of misinformation consume your sanity.

Don't let a misinformed crowd's opinion influence you. And especially don't let a coded bot's opinion overpower your own. Everyone is different, and you? You are your unique you.

So, the next time you want to buy a product or cast a vote, ask yourself: Is it really my thinking, or are the bots in control?



## BOT OR NOT?

A set of social media post examples are given below. Readers guess which posts are written by bots and which by real people. Answers and explanations are provided upside down or in a separate answer key on the last page.

"Excited to see my favorite band live tonight! Anyone else going?  
#concert  
#livemusic"



"Win a brand new laptop! Click here and enter your details to claim your prize.  
#giveaway #free"



"Breaking news: Scientists discover water on Mars! Read more at [link]  
#science  
#space"



"Can't believe my dog just ate my homework. Classic.  
😂"



"Get 10,000 followers fast! Buy now—guaranteed results. DM for info.  
#growth  
#socialmedia"



"Had a productive day volunteering at the animal shelter. So many cute puppies! 🐶"



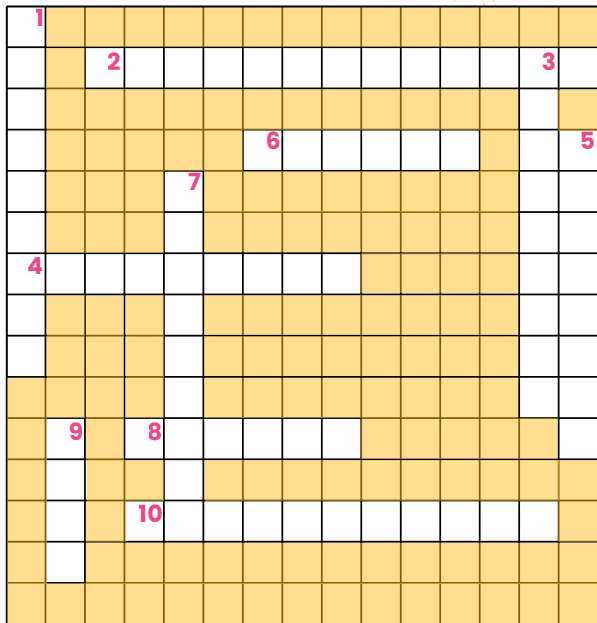
"Retweet if you love pizza! 🍕  
#food #yummy  
#delicious #pizza  
#foodie #instafood  
#bestfood"



"Anyone have tips for starting a vegetable garden? Looking for advice from fellow gardeners!"



# CROSSWORD



## DOWN

- 1] Given by individuals when their personal freedom is restricted due to social pressure.
- 3] \_ Economy captures user attention for monetary profits.
- 5] \_ Technique for increasing compliance, where people are told that they have limited time to avail certain benefits.
- 7] Phenomenon where everyone in a group agrees to the same thing which increases conformity.
- 9] \_ conducted the Line judgement experiment of Conformity.

## ACROSS

- 2] \_ influence is the desire to be right.
- 4] \_ influence is the desire to be liked.
- 6] \_ studied group norm using auto-kinetic effect.
- 8] \_ principle of compliance where we comply to people we like.
- 10] People match their actions with others.



ANALYSIS OF THE SERIES

# MISMATCHED

By Shruti Gurav, SYBA (Psy), Elphinstone College

One of the most fascinating things about psychology is how it uncovers concepts we already experience, often without realizing there's a term for them. From something as simple as agreeing to a request to shifting our perspective to align with others, we've all been there. I'm sure at some point in your life, you've felt that too...

I didn't want to, but everyone else was doing it, so I went along.

They asked for a favor, and I just said yes.

They told me to do it, so I did.

Sounds familiar, right? If it does, you're already seeing social influence in action.

And what's crazy is that this influence is almost invisible, yet we all feel it shaping our everyday choices. The Indian series *Mismatched* brings this influential force to the screen through different characters, making us wonder how much of what we do is really our own decision?

How often have you said "yes" to a party, a group plan, or a favor? Not because you genuinely wanted to, but because someone asked nicely or kept insisting? We've all been there. And if you haven't, think of that one friend who'd rather binge-watch a comfort show or curl up with a book than show up at a noisy party.

Courtesy - pinterest



In *Mismatched*, Dimple is exactly that person. She is focused, independent, and committed to her goals and not someone you will find at a house party. Yet, the one who doesn't like social events ends up attending Zeenat's house party. What pushed her to go? Two things: persistent and pleading messages from her roommate Celina urging her to come, and a sweet message from Rishi saying he wished she were there. And just like that, Dimple shows up. She complies. This phenomenon in social psychology is known as compliance—when an individual changes their behavior in response to a direct request. Dimple didn't really want to go, but anyways she did because she valued their approval and connection. This kind of behavior

happens because humans desire to maintain relationships and avoid disappointing anyone.

Courtesy - pinterest



This moment in *Mismatched* is not just about going to a party. It is about all the different ways that go unnoticed while choosing connection over comfort. It reflects something deeply familiar to many of us, especially Gen Z. In a world where maintaining friendships means showing up even when you don't feel like it, this moment hits close to home. Social pressure does not always appear loud or aggressive. Sometimes it's just a gentle nudge from someone you care about. And most of the times we go along with it not because we're easily influenced, but because connection matters.

Sometimes, the need to connect goes beyond just showing up; it can mean hiding who we really are. Have you ever hidden a part of yourself because you wanted to fit in? Like you played a role and pretended to be someone you're not because you thought the real you might not be accepted? That feeling of keeping a secret and changing your story to avoid awkwardness or judgment is something many of us can relate to.

For example, Namrata from *mismatched*. She's a smart and confident woman and a lovely friend. But as the series unfolds, we get to know she has been hiding a significant part of herself. Her sexual orientation. She hides truly because of the fear of being judged or being rejected. This behavior can be termed as a classic example of conformity, where people change their attitudes or actions to fit in with the social norms around them.

Conformity might help to keep peace and maintain social harmony, but it often comes at a personal cost. For Namrata, hiding her identity meant sacrificing her authenticity and emotional freedom. She's constantly on guard, worried about being found out or judged, which creates stress and loneliness, which highlights the downside of conformity. The pressure to fit in can make us lose touch with our true selves, which further can lead to the feeling of isolation and internal conflict. Her story reminds us that it might feel easier to conform, but embracing who we truly are brings us actual freedom and peace of mind. Have you too ever found yourself in a similar spot, hiding something just so you feel accepted?

Just as the pressure to fit in can lead us to hide parts of ourselves, another form of social influence comes from those in authority guiding us to act even when we're unsure. Like, have you ever done something not because you wanted to but because someone in authority said it was the right thing to do? Maybe a teacher, a coach, or your parent gave you advice or instructions that you followed even when you weren't fully convinced. Not out of disagreement, but because they said so. That is obedience in action, and *Mismatched* gives us a pretty relatable

glimpse of it.

Take Anmol, for example, who is loud, aggressive, and always ready to clash. But underneath all there is a young man battling with some deeper emotions. After one of his fights escalates, Professor Siddharth Sinha steps in not just as a disciplinarian but as a mentor. He doesn't yell. He doesn't punish. Instead, he calmly instructs Anmol to start seeing a therapist if he wants to continue at the college. It's a firm direction and not a suggestion. At first, Anmol resists because, let's face it, opening up to a therapist isn't easy, especially when you're not used to being vulnerable. But he listens. And slowly, he starts therapy with Dr. Suri. Not because it was his idea, but because someone he respects told him it is what he needs to do.

Anmol's decision reflects how powerful this form of influence can be—that we even go against our own instincts or preferences. And sometimes, like in his

case, obedience can lead to growth. But it also reminds us how much control authority figures can hold over our decisions, even the most personal ones.

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Whether it's showing up, fitting in, or following orders, we often adjust to connect, belong, or grow. Psychology reminds us: the choices we think are ours are sometimes shared with the world around us. So, what do you think? How much of what you do is really your own decision?

## Mismatched Moments



### CHARACTERS

Rishi

Dimple

Namrata

Anmol

Celina

Simran

Match each character from *Mismatched* with the type of social influence they experience most strongly. Check your answers on the last page.

### TYPE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Social stigma, internalized shame

Ableism, toxic masculinity,

Social media pressure, image management

Parental pressure

Peer pressure, family expectations

Fear of social rejection, family expectations

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- <https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/it-or-not-social-medias-affecting-your-mental-health>
- Bandwagon effect <https://g.co/kgs/gxjSSEH>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_proof](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_proof)

# ANSWERS

## DOPAMINE DETECTOR

Typical Dopamine Rush Order (from highest to lowest):

- **Getting a New Follower**

Why? New followers signal social approval and growth, triggering a strong reward response.

- **Having a Post Shared**

Why? Sharing means someone values your content enough to spread it—major validation!

- **Receiving a Comment**

Why? Comments are personal and interactive, making you feel noticed and connected.

- **Getting Tagged in a Photo**

Why? Being tagged means you're included in someone's social circle, boosting belonging.

- **Getting a Like**

Why? Likes are quick feedback and feel good, but are less personal than comments or shares.

- **Watching a Viral Video**

Why? Watching content is fun and can be addictive, but it's less about social validation.

## AESTHETIC MATCHUP

Romanticizes rural life with cozy cottages, nature, and soft pastels. Peaceful and nostalgic.

**COTTAGECORE**

Futuristic neon-lit cities with high-tech and dystopian vibes. Dark, vibrant, and edgy.

**CYBERPUNK**

Moody, scholarly vibe with dark colors, vintage clothes, and old libraries.

**DARK  
ACADEMIA**

Free-spirited and eclectic, featuring earthy tones, flowing fabrics, and handmade decor.

**BOHO**

Inspired by past decades with classic styles, muted tones, and nostalgic charm.

**VINTAGE**

Whimsical, dreamy scenes with soft colors and magical, detailed backgrounds.

**STUDIO  
GHIBLI**



# CHOICE OR INFLUENCE?

## Answer Key: Are You Choosing or Influenced?

### Mostly A:

You're likely influenced by social pressure, authority, or the desire to fit in—classic examples of conformity and obedience.

### Mostly B:

You show independent thinking and make choices based on your own values and information—demonstrating autonomy and critical thinking.

### Mostly C:

You weigh social input but still seek more information, showing a blend of influence and independence—this aligns with informational influence, where you integrate social cues with your own judgment

# LIKE, SHARE, OR IGNORE?

## Curated Influencer Personality Styles

### • 1. The Cheerleader (Mostly Likes)

You spread positivity and encouragement!

You love celebrating others, reacting warmly to funny, cute, or uplifting posts. Your feed is full of heart emojis and supportive comments.

Catchphrase: "Love this! Keep it up!"

### • 2. The Amplifier (Mostly Shares)

You're all about spreading the word!

When you see something cool, important, or hilarious, you want everyone to know. You're a trendsetter and a connector in your circle.

Catchphrase: "Everyone needs to see this!"

### • 3. The Observer (Mostly Ignores)

You're selective and mysterious!

You scroll with a discerning eye, only engaging with what truly stands out. You value quality over quantity and keep your feed clutter-free.

Catchphrase: "Only the best makes the cut."

### • 4. The All-Rounder (Balanced Mix)

You're adaptable and open-minded!

You like, share, and ignore in equal measure. You enjoy a variety of content and can fit into any influencer style depending on your mood.

Catchphrase: "A little bit of everything!"



# Here's What's Been Up

## June



Dr. Homi Bhabha State University, Mumbai  
Elphinstone College  
Department of Psychology  
**MA APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY**  
(CLINICAL AND COUNSELING APPLICATIONS)  
ADMISSIONS OPEN: 2025-26  
If it's Psychology, it's Elphinstone!

**PSyMAT**  
(Psychology Master's Admission Test)

A search ends.  
A journey begins.

**TUESDAY**  
30.06.2025

**Time**  
9:00am to 12:00pm

**LOCATION**  
Elphinstone College  
Fort, Mumbai-22

Note: Carry your Aadhar Card for the session.

For more details  
Please follow QR Code

**ENROLL TODAY!**



Dr. Homi Bhabha State University, Mumbai  
Elphinstone College  
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**MA APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY**  
(CLINICAL AND COUNSELING APPLICATIONS)  
ADMISSIONS OPEN: 2025-26  
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**About us**

Established in 1958, Elphinstone College is the oldest college in Mumbai and has a very active Psychology Department. We offer BA Honours, MA in Applied Psychology, and a Doctoral Programme in the department.

**Core Strengths of our Programme\***

- Wholesome Library** - 300+ books across key psychology domains. Managed by students with dedicated access hours.
- University Co-curricular Centre** - 200+ sessions conducted yearly, offering real world exposure and mentorship to in-house students.
- Skill-based Workshops** - 50+ workshops on tools like SPSS, GRE, WAT/TOEFL, and more.
- Clinical Internship** - On-site training at Regional Mental Hospital, Thane- free of cost.
- Outreach Program** - Engage in mental health drives at colleges and schools, turning theory into practice.

**A search ends.  
A journey begins.**

Everything You Need to Know

- Psychology Brochure
- M.A. Psychology Syllabus
- PSyMAT (Entrance Test) Details
- Department Yearbook

**SCAN THE QR CODE**

**ENROLL TODAY!**

June at Elphinstone was all about new beginnings—admissions filled the campus with fresh faces, big dreams, and the excitement of stories yet to unfold.

# Here's What's Coming Up

July →



← *College Diaries*

"The Campus is Ready, Are You?"

**"Where footsteps echo with first  
hellos, and classrooms bloom  
with endless tomorrows."**

*Welcome to the New Academic Year!*

