

The ups and downs of Instagram on adolescent girls' social and emotional development

ABSTRACT

Social networks have grown out of Web 2.0 and people refer to social networks as a Web 2.0 innovation. Where Aguiton & Cardon (2017) mentioned that Web 2.0 is now so widespread, and it is difficult to define the boundaries and characteristics of services it covers. The emergence of the Internet and social networking sites (SNSs) has enabled individuals, in particular, adolescents to create and share information online easily. In contemporary society, many adolescents use social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and so on to interact with each other and receive information posted over the platforms. Social networking sites have opened the door to a world of possibilities for adolescents, however, this paper will be focused on Instagram and the effect of Instagram on adolescent girls' (aged 13 to 18 years) social and emotional development. The role of Instagram has offered users the opportunities to create idealised images of oneself, where something that Instagram is arguable centred around. And thus, the paper will also argue about how self-presentation on Instagram has impacted adolescent girls on both social and emotional development.

Key words: Social Networks, Instagram, Adolescent girls, Self-presentation, Social & Emotional development

The emergence of the Internet and new technologies has redefined the ways individuals, in particular, adolescent girls connect, disseminate information, and express themselves with others. This is because social media is nearly universal among teenagers (Weinstein, 2017) and it has intertwined with their daily life. Lin et al (2014), claim that the use of social media is constantly evolving and ubiquitous, as a result of the increasing number of adolescents having a profile on social networking sites. There are a variety of social network sites that serve different purposes that enable individuals to communicate and connect with each other, be entertained with the content posted online, as well as get up-to-date information or news from around the world. However, the role of Instagram has been growing exponentially among adolescent girls, where self-presentation came into place. Rui and Stefanone (2012) mentioned that image sharing sites like Instagram play a key role in an individual's performance and hence impacted self-presentation online to satisfy and fulfil audience expectations. However, even though the widespread popularity of social media platforms like Instagram is well-established, the increasing numbers of adolescent girls using Instagram to interact, displaying, and receiving feedback has impacted their self-presentation online and thus, connects to social and emotional development.

First of all, according to Boyd (2015) social media has become a central part of contemporary digital life around the world. The rise of social media and networking has integrated into our daily lives. Especially adolescent girls in contemporary society, as they spend much time on social networking sites – in their relationships, for entertainment and in education, where anyone who holds a smartphone can potentially connect with people online. This being said, social media has enabled adolescents to have online interaction with weak ties, this is because social media enables adolescents to connect to online global communities based on shared interests.

One increasingly popular social networking site among adolescent girls is Instagram. Instagram is a platform that enables users to post and share photos with friends or the public. Where Tobin and Chulpaiboon (2016) stated the idea of people who use Instagram to maintain their social connection are more likely to share photos on the platform as it helps them to meet their social interaction goals. Furthermore, Antheunis et al (2014), also stated that adolescents, especially adolescent girls, in today's society are more likely to meet new friends and get to know each other through social networking sites. Social networking sites make it easy for adolescents to communicate with each other, most importantly is free. Supporting the role of social connection, Uhls et al (2017) mentioned that adolescents report that social media like Instagram help them to understand their friend's feelings and they feel more connected to them. Besides that, Manacher (2015) argues that 78 percent of adolescent girls made friends who shared common interests online and stayed connected with them. In terms of how adolescent girls make and maintain their friendships online are through comments and likes. Hence, this means that adolescent girls share photos on Instagram could actually help enhance their social connection with their peers and lead to a positive impact on their social development.

Furthermore, one of the important aspects of adolescents' social lives is their social capital. According to Antheunis et al (2014), social capital refers to "the benefits one receives from one's relationships with other people distinguished between bridging and bonding social capital." This is because adolescents are going through puberty where they are adjusting to the physical and emotional changes, (Antheunis et al, 2014), especially adolescent girls, social networking sites use thus can enhance adolescents' social capital. As mentioned before that social networking sites offer various channels for adolescents to stay connected with weak ties, which in turn may enhance social capital. Instagram in particular, could help enhance adolescent girls' level of social capital. Where Frison and Eggermont (2017) stated that Instagram users can easily express a positive attitude toward any content by simply clicking the Like button. As a result, users who frequently use the Like button reported to have a greater bonding social capital, thus a positive impact on adolescents' social and emotional development. Adolescent girls update and post their personal information and photos on Instagram, where Thomson (2008) stated that social media has become a platform for the younger generation to share their everyday lives to the public and it could be seen as another way of "communicating" with friends and family. For

instance, adolescents posting and sharing photos on Instagram of a recent experience could be seen as a way of updating their friends and family about their life events. Moreover, it has been stated that social network sites have created opportunities for adolescents to create and join groups based on their common interests with the weak ties (Antheunis et al, 2014). Where it has reported that adolescents who share common interests, such as brands, sports, celebrities, and bands are likely to follow each other on social network sites to strengthen the relationship with the weak ties as well as the communities. For instance, many Taylor Swift's fans created a fan-based Instagram account to engage with those who shared or like the celebrity, where Anderson and Jiang (2018) argues that most adolescents say social media has had a mostly positive effect tended to stress issues as it helps them not only to connect with people online but it helps them to build trusting relationship among members and enhances their social capital. Therefore, social networking sites like Instagram have enabled adolescents to enhance their social connection as well as social capital, especially adolescent girls, as girls spend far more time using social media than boys. In short, social network sites like Instagram do play an important role in adolescents' social and emotional development.

With the rise of social networking sites among adolescents' lives, some concerns that have been voiced due to the increased use of the Internet in general and social media in particular. As mentioned before, adolescents are increasingly engaged in social media, where they could explore various positive content through social networks sites including entertainment, humour, and content creation (Rodovic et al, 2017). However, there is a high possibility social media will impact adolescents' well-being and emotion, especially adolescent girls, as previously mentioned that adolescent girls spend more time on social media compared to boys. Activities such as "checking for likes," reading feedbacks or comments and so on could affect their self-esteem as well as well-being (Rodovic et al, 2017). Where Hunt (2018) stated that Instagram has been part of adolescent girls' lives where many of them seek validation of the way they look on social media, which could also be understood as creating an idealised image of a specific 'self' to adjust their public images to audience expectation. The validation comes in the form of comments from friends, however, an image-sharing platform like Instagram can turn into a space of competitiveness, as influencers often become a topic among adolescent girls. Chua and Chang (2016) argue that adolescent girls may encounter and engage in upward comparison, where adolescent girls could compare with those who they believe to be better and thus, a positive impact on their social and emotional development.

At present, adolescent girls manage their self-presentation of beauty on social network sites like Instagram to meet personal and peer expectations. Where it is likely that they may receive both positive and negative feedback from the public regarding images that they share on the platform. In turn, positive peer-feedback could enhance adolescents' self-esteem and well-being, alternatively, negative feedback decreases these outcomes. Yau and Reich (2019) mentioned that the importance of looking attractive

online has reported in studies with adolescents, especially girls. Where this being said that social network sites have the ability to influence or have an impact on adolescents' well-being through the replies and comments they receive from people who they may not know. Besides that, Booker et al (2018) claimed that female adolescents will be more likely to get an impact on their well-being compared to male adolescents. This is because, girls used social media more than boys where studies show that adolescent girls were chatting and using social network sites for more than 1 hour per day (Booker et al, 2018). Also, the role of Instagram came into place in adolescent girls' construction and expression of their identities, thus negatively impacting their well-being. Where Rui and Stefanone (2013) argue that self-presentation on social media like Instagram, plays a crucial role in adolescent girls' performance. This is because many adolescent girls present themselves according to the feedback, they received online to fulfil audience expectations, in turn, negative impact on their well-being therefore emotional development. Hence, it has been argued that although the widespread popularity of social media platforms is well-established, however, adolescent girls' well-being remains controversial due to the influence of social media (Weinstein, 2018).

According to Weinstein (2018), adolescents' social media use is not intrinsically harmful where different adolescent's social media experience can positively and negatively influence their well-being. Where Hunt (2018) mentioned that some adolescent girls feel secure about the way they look through Instagram 'likes,' and it helps to boost their confidence and reassurance. As previously mentioned, with the advancement of technology and the rise of social networking sites, adolescent girls are now able to have a more direct connection with both of their weak and strong ties. According to Anderson and Jiang's research, adolescent girls emphasise how social media has made it easier for them to communicate with friends and family, and they also mentioned that they felt less lonely or alone as social media created a space for them to interact with people (2018). On the other hand, based on an interview on Weinstein's (2018) finding, one of the adolescents said that having a direct connection through social media platforms provides a daily source of positive emotion. For instance, adolescent girls who encounter depressed mood reportedly say that they are more likely to increase in Instagram posting. This is because posting and sharing photos on Instagram not only helps them to enhance their image in the eye of others but in a sense, it also helps them to find encouragement through positive comments (Frison and Eggemont, 2017). Where it could lead to a positive impact on adolescents' social and emotional development as they are able to feel the connection with the weak ties by joining a community that they share a common interest with. However, it is undeniable that adolescents may be at risk of using social media, thus it is important to educate not only their parents on the consequences of high-level use of social media that could impact their future well-being. The generalization of 'adolescent' implies both males and females, however, this study focuses on adolescent girls. In sum, adolescent girls' social media use could be both positively and negatively impact on their well-being and their emotional development depending on how an individual is using it.

According to Vermeulen et al (2018), 89% of adolescents use social media, and 71% use multiple platforms to connect and interact with others online. Hence, there are certain risks adolescents' may face which could impact their social and emotional development and may lead to poorer physical and mental health in adulthood (Booker et al, 2018). Based on Vermeulen et al studies, adolescents aged 14 to 18 share their emotions on multiple social media platforms as adolescents are more likely to experience negative live events regarding family, friends, and school (2018). This is because adolescents have nearly unlimited access to peers through social media platforms, where adolescents in today's society, especially girls tend to express and share their emotions through SNSs that can evoke both positive and negative feelings. However, it also depends on the feedback that users receive from peers online. Besides that, Vermeulen et al (2018) also stated that there are two needs adolescents are looking for when they share their emotions on SNSs: the need for personal expression and the need to receive feedback. Where social network sites could be seen as a platform that offers adolescents new opportunities for emotion regulation. Thus, there are potential risks and harms that adolescents may face such as social filters, triggers, cyberbullying, health self-expression, a sense of community and connectivity, and anonymously accessing mental health resources.

To lower the risks in social network sites, and on adolescents' social and emotional development, parents must become aware of the nature of social media sites as well as the time adolescents spend on social network sites. The term "Facebook depression" has been created due to the depression that develops when preteens and teenagers spend a lot of time on social media sites and according to Dawson (2017), it begins to show classic symptoms of depression. Research shows that adolescent girls in today's society spend seven to eleven hours per day with different media where it has exceeded the typically recommended hours (Dawson, 2017). Although, not all adolescents spend that much time on SNSs, however, it is important to let adolescents understand the risks of social network sites. Also, parents need to help adolescents to understand and cope with their perceptions of the media content (Elmquist & McLaughlin, 2017), and remind adolescents to have discretion when posting pictures and other personal information online. On the other hand, parents should help adolescents to understand the difference between 'friends' and 'followers,' as social network sites like Instagram offer adolescents the opportunity to connect with people from all around the world. Dawson (2017) claimed that parents should ensure that they are having regular conversations with their children about the use of SNSs. Although, it has been argued that although adolescents' may encounter negative content on social network sites that may have an impact on their social and emotional development, Dawson (2017) claimed that SNSs help improve adolescents' empathy, acceptance of diversity, social group acceptability, and respect for the elderly. In sum, adolescent girls may encounter negative and positive uses of SNSs that impact on their social and emotional development, hence, parents and school should

take action and educate adolescents to enhance adolescents' knowledge and understanding of the use of SNSs.

In conclusion, Instagram is affecting adolescent girls' social and emotional development in both positive and negative ways. It is less likely that the current generation will reduce the use of social networking sites as social network sites have played a significant role in today's society. Especially adolescent girls, as they will still be exposed to the positive and negative content of social network sites, Instagram in particular. Social platforms like Instagram will continue to evolve and are deeply ingrained into adolescents' daily lives. Early adolescence represents a particularly vulnerable period of development, where adolescents are about to establish lifelong behaviour. Sharing photos on Instagram allows adolescents to be interconnected with their friends and family and at the same time could increase their well-being by receiving positive thoughts and feedback from peers. In order to prevent or reduce the risk of adolescents exposed to negative content on SNSs that may evoke or affect adolescents' social and emotional development, parents should be aware of the time adolescents spend on SNSs.

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