

## **Instagram: The virtual center of Wellbeing for young women in outlining their identity.**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to carefully delineate with coherent paradigms on the factors nurturing the well-being in young women on a specific social media platform, Instagram. This dominant online bubble works as subterranean yet crucial platform in enhancing their well-being, which consequently outlines and defines their identity. Web 2.0 made it possible to extend this physical reality which flows to a virtual reality, and so does the notion and development of well-being in the lives of young women. This paper discusses about how an online platform can replace the emotional and materialistic support of young females through social networking and social capital. It will also examine how weak ties assist in providing young women with new world views. Financial security is assured online through the personal and professional branding, which can be built up with little or no capital and time. It helps the women to get out of this patriarchy where they can work, be independent and without fear. Finally, with the support of social networking, young women find a space for themselves where women become the backbone of another woman. Through an analysis of these arguments, it will be revealed how wellbeing is achieved online, and thus, with reciprocity impacting real lives of young women.

Keywords: #womenidentity, #socialcapital, #selfbranding, #womenempowerment, #authenticity

### **Introduction**

Social networking site is defined as a platform which enables two-way or more than two-way communication between users, to share a connection which enables the visibility of the social network of each encountered user (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Instagram is considered as the novel platform, though it is commonly thought to be used by an audience of 18-29 years old, however, this do not limit the average social media users to exploit Instagram (Larsson, 2017). The prevalence of social media has scaled up to

such extend that it is no more a tool but accentuated as a variety of tool. Rozgonjuk et al., (2020), states that more than 45% of the world's population are very active in social media, where Instagram claims with a maximum record of 1 billion user. Instagram is no more a 'new' thing but is now growing as a dynamic business valued "between US\$25 billion and US\$50 billion" (Caliandro & Graham, 2020). As observed by Tyer (2016), women use Instagram more than men, as it is fluid, in the sense that they feel easily connected with their preferred celebrities and brand, all in a singular platform. Moreover, Huang & Su (2018) found they like to focus on the details and appearances of the photos as compared to men, thus, demonstrating a strong relationship between Instagram and themselves. Evidently, it suggests that this relationship might strongly influence the well-being of these women in real life, as Fahami et al., (2018) shows that nowadays women value their own 'personal growth'. Therefore, this paper argues that Instagram influences the wellbeing of young women in shaping their identity. Firstly, young women identify strong interest with regards to online social capital on Instagram. Secondly, they seek to establish personal or professional branding, for better opportunities and positive outcomes. Lastly, it is a women empowerment platform, with positive contributions to support other women.

### **Online social capital in the wellbeing of young women**

The influence of online social capital on Instagram, cultivates the sense of well-being in young women networked selves. Research shows that young women maintain bonding in online, where closeness and attachments from strong relationships are established. Currently, where life seems briskly, this 'facility' has reduced the tension of dwelling on relationships, as they are aware that their close ones are connected online. Moreover, the author stretches that online social capital demonstrates emotional support, companionship, and materialistic support for young females (Ali Aksar et al., 2020). Oliver and Cheff (2012), observe, the assurance of knowing that "others will assist them in times of needs" is established and their 'youth identity' is maintained. Therefore, platforms such as Instagram, provide an impartial and a strongbox to delve deeper into their identity by connecting with social capital online. O'Donnell (2018) sustains that

young female participants prioritize the idea of gaining “likes” by disclosing their identity through composed pictures on Instagram and ‘increasing’ online social capital; followers.

Though there is the common narrative that Facebook is better when it comes to build and maintain relationships because of its multiple functions (Pennington & Hall, 2020), Serafinelli (2017) defeats this argument that Instagram is a ‘real’ social media platform which adheres to its significant meaning of social networking, as people get better social interaction from whom they chose to ‘follow’ and thus sharing the same personal interest inside the Instagram community. During a survey conducted by Shane-Simpson et al., (2018), Instagram is the ‘most trusted’ representation platform for them because of their decision to less ‘self-disclosure’, which is attainable with Instagram privacy settings. Therefore, this links to Instagram as a social-networking platform where women choose who they want to share communications with and who to receive content from. Moreover, it has been found that most of the young women construct their identity based on social comparison within their ‘chosen’ social capital network, resulting to positive outcomes such as well-being and higher self-esteem, as they had trouble in establishing their own identity (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

Relationships based on similar interests and affiliations provide its desired outcomes such as support, emotional and tangible help, but they also limit diversity. Crowell (2004) deduced that in women’s social networks, weak ties form a “bridge” between them and respective outcomes. This can be explained that young women on Instagram make considerate choices such as, career decisions. This is only possible when they make connections with diverse communities, where each helping them to learn new skills, new information and thus they get the audacity to explore themselves online, as they are finding out that they are getting opportunities (Maguire, 2016). Moreover, weak ties provide mental support to young women, especially during an identity crisis. Mueller (2020) explores that young women chose to be with weak-ties, as there is ‘less risk of judgements’ and they openly state a feeling that they could not have said to a close

friend (for e.g., stigmas). Hence, social capital satisfies the wellbeing of young women in all grounds possible (versions of themselves).

### **Express with authenticity in Self-branding**

Instagram gives young women a strong base in authentic personal branding that contributes to their material and personal well-being. Bahtar et al., (2020) explains that young women find it favorable to start a business on Instagram as it is a fast-moving industry. Fransceca et al., (2017) shows that young women use social media to create their own online business with low resources and time to make oneself a brand, so they do not work under an organization. Moreover, the author states that it is the finest way for a young woman to redefine her role in society. According to Liu and Suh (2017), Instagram promotes “self-branding”, which means anyone can become self-employed. This is achieved by authenticity, making self-brands perceived as sources of “proximity and immediacy”, since branding is the representation of the self (Waninger, 2015). With the proliferation of web 2.0, authenticity has become strategic for self-branding. Edited and photoshopped pictures are identifiable by online users and are often cliché. Audiences expect to see raw, ‘authentic’ and ‘detailed’ contents (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Raun and Christensen-Strynø (2021), explain the role of self-branding in Instagram, as the nuance between showcasing the self and the saleable-self. The authors also elaborate that self-branding is ‘complex’, as one must market their identity and qualities, which influence the “feelings and affects, personalities and values”. This means, identity needs to be adopted in “online popularity” whilst procuring “offline respect”, since the construction of the self is an ongoing process (Faleatua, 2018). Though Tarnovskaya (2017) states, disclosure of authenticity can be challenged by opinions of audience, however, Whitmer (2019) perceived this as a form of career advancement, making those owning personal brand to feel famous and claimed.

Nowadays, young women are emerging from the concept of ‘post-feminism’, where they express their ‘masculinity’ and ‘can-do power’, exhibiting as a new form of their identity. Moreover, Edwards and Esposito (2018), instigates that post-feminists view women who

are visible online are going one step towards 'empowerment'. Furthermore, researchers found that young women are more prone to make business in Instagram, during the recent pandemic (Jovic et al., 2020). Niks (2017) explains that it is easy to earn a living in Instagram and making it into a full-time job, especially for young women because of their creativity, enthusiasm, and beauty. Sarah Anne Stewart who is a young and determined Instagram entrepreneur submerge from sharing writing skills on Instagram into a personal blog and is titled as an author and writing coach on Instagram (Stahl, 2018). She says that she has now become a stronger woman. Alkhowaiter (2016) demonstrates how the women of Saudi Arabia are emancipating by using Instagram as a form of business and self-expression. They confirm that it is a medium for them to showcase their talents far from the social and community constraint against men, with regards to Saudi Arabian women and liberal thoughts. Faleatua (2018) justifies confidence and empowerment are both paramount in current society, which is often portrayed by young women of Instagram. Therefore, it improves the personal well-being and financial support.

### **Young women's ideal space**

Instagram is a 'third place' where women empower other women, therefore, improving the psychological well-being of young women in real life. According to Eduardo Riquelme et al. (2018), when young women engage within other online women on Instagram, they experience a boost in confidence, courage, and the feeling of 'showing up' to the world. They interact by sharing posts, commenting, and viewing posts that can make them experience an 'aha moment', as they can relate to them and, empowered. One example could be seen was when Instagram user's posted photos during the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, where online women community were supporting the female players through the hashtags; #SheBelieves, where these communities co-relate and reinforce their identity from those encouraged female players (Pegoraro et al., 2017). From a Post-Marxist point of view, the idea of identity is built through social interactions, where identity formation happens within social interactions, individuals, and language (Delahunty et al., 2013). Moreover, academics found out that

self-confidence of an individual resulted on their wellbeing, as the online community are positively making young women to show their 'true-selves', that is being authentic, flaws, and photos without applied makeup (O'Donnell, 2018). For instance, Instagram started a trend called the Body Positive; #BoPo, which means expressing and accepting the own physical identity. Young and adult women are not afraid to take pictures of how they are, irrespective of their sizes, shapes, scars, and insecurities. Moreover, it is becoming a growing community as the networked individual is remediating this subject with their own touch through quotes, music, selfies, captions, and images. Hence, this improves the psychological wellbeing of young women (Cohen et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, Engeln et al., (2020), predict that when young women are exposed to Instagram, withing minutes they already feel a discontentment with the way they appear. Although, Sherlock and Wagstaff (2019) agreed to the portrayal that Instagram exposes such negative feelings to young women, they themselves counter this argument, that pages and hashtags movements are being created to diminish this feeling in young women. Thus, Instagram caters for the wellbeing of young women and online users in general. Hence, the trend of supporting women continues, through the campaign of #ChallengeAccepted, by tagging women to post their pictures with black and white filters on (Lorenz, 2020). Individuals are posting selfies and tagging 10 other women, to post selfies of themselves to raise awareness about femicide. Consecutively, the hashtag changed into #WomenSupportingWomen. It can be said that through this social activism, women online are becoming a 'helpline space' for other women in need. This makes women feeling proud of their identity as a woman (Cohen, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this paper provides evidence that Instagram promotes wellbeing in the lives of young women, as it is often perceived that social media platforms are deteriorating the human state of mind through addiction, social comparison, and making an individual to become unproductive. The approach pertaining to 'young women' was realistic, which fits into the contemporary world. These young women are dynamic and are 'always on the go'. Instagram and other social media platforms now form part of our

daily lives and so does for young women. The reason why gender was considered in this paper, was because women are more inclined to the usage of Instagram as compared to men and they are literate in social media platforms, therefore better analyzing its positive impact on their lives. Presently, Instagram has become a variety of things, that is one can afford different type of interactions. Instagram is the pivot in maintaining and building strong ties and keeping up with weak ties. It adheres to the wellbeing of young women because they are caught up with responsibilities every day, hence, the online world is a preferred way to keep up with any relationships. Moreover, as tangible prizes and capital contributes to the wellbeing of young women, Instagram facilitates these outcomes by turning their online presence as a marketable self. Furthermore, Instagram is a great women's empowerment platform, consisting of motivative and positive inspirations for personal development. This makes the young women to become mentally strong and confident. Therefore, these directly impacts on the person's wellbeing. In terms of research, it would be preferable to get other reasons on why wellbeing is improved from different articles and web sources. As a society, we need to bring forth more arguments in relation to social media and young female.

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