

Instagram as the platform that ‘dupes’ online identities of the users

**Abstract:**

This conference paper explores and underscores how Instagram, as a very well know social media platform, that has redefined identities of its audiences and how they re-build their identities. This paper will elaborate the argument is that, being a very active platform, instagrammers use Instagram as a means to create an alternate identity online. Instagram is a platform where everyone provides a side that is positive and inspiring, but to what extent is that true? The paper elaborates on how Instagram promotes ideal bodies making it become the ‘identifying’ tool for those users. This allows certain users to spread the idea of ‘ideal body images’. This paper also encapsulates the whole idea of how Instagram is a means for users to create an online identity which they tend to enhance with information that are not real.

**Keywords:** #fakeidentity #instagram #bodydissatisfaction #thirdspace #clickbait

Ever since Web 2.0 has emerged, everyone is the editor of their online presence. It is a platform that constructs identities based on how they reach out to their audiences, that is based on they present themselves. With the emergence of Covid-19, most countries were shut, people were in lockdown. This has contributed to people being more active online to share their daily routines or as a medium of distraction (Cinelli et al., 2020). It is a site whose main purpose is to share pictures and videos, and this has escalated during lockdown from making Dalgona coffee to sharing home workout videos. Apart from being a platform that allows people to communicate, it is also a place that has changed how identities are referred to. People play a certain character virtually and a certain, physically. Instagram has a greater impact on users’ identity be it the societal one of the virtual one. People are allowed to explore, experience, and create a new identity online. The virtual identities allow them to experience their preferences, however, to a certain extent it is not the authentic identities. However, apart from having numerous pros, it does come with cons such as promoting unrealistic body images and fake identities. As a photo-based social networking site, Instagram sure does have its benefits, but it undoubtedly also contributes to large number of people facing identity crisis and going through phases of finding themselves because of what the digital platforms promotes (Humphrey, 2016). The identity that they give to themselves can be more dangerous that to what others actually think of them. Referring to the liberal model of identities, individuals are able to reform their identities online. Nevertheless, when the ones who already created their online persona, the ones being influenced by that may therefore face the cons. Barron et al., (2021) suggest that Instagram promotes Body dissatisfaction not only among adolescents and young women but also among men.

**Creating identities on Instagram leads to harming one’s body images.**

The ‘ideal body image’ is considered to be thin, hour-glass figure with great smooth skin for women and for men it is considered to be muscular, bearded, and being manly. This photo-based platform promotes disordered eating. Hashtags such as #bodygoals #fitandhappy, lead to harming one’s ideas of how our bodies should be. As Goffman suggests, identities are ‘performed’, people are made to believe in what is ideal and what is not (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Those who view themselves not fitting in the so-called perfect body image turn into those who mistreat their own bodies. Some stop eating in order to lose weight and some eat too much to gain weight and achieve their ‘ideal bodies’. Fitspiration pictures of women usually in workout outfits have toned and thin bodies have led to a negative impact on

other women who do not form part of those have toned bodies (Slater et al., 2019). The exposure to such kind of content leads to mental pressure, body dissatisfaction and disorder in eating patterns. The research carried out by Barron et al., (2021) also states that social media platforms like Instagram do not only affect its female audience but also the male part too. Women have the tension to face negative moods or they tend to self-rate themselves (Parnell, 2017). There are certain reasons why Instagram leads a way or the other, that contributes to a very unrealistic online identity, as for body images, there is what is usually call as "Instagram perfect" pictures. No one will post pictures where they have dark circles under their eyes, pimples on their cheeks, undone hair, rolls on their stomach or having double chins. Those considered as influences are usually have toned bodies, chiseled jawline or perfect skin. But this is not reality (Erin et al., 2014). There so many things that contribute to creating the perfect "online identity". There are so many things that occur behind perfect pictures such as good lightings, a good angle of the camera or some do actually learn how to pose well or how to flex their physical gains. This leads to fake identities or digital deceptions (Lamas & Caramés, 2020). People believe what they see and end up associating people through what they see online. People are liberal enough to be able to reform identities, which leads to alternative personas (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

### **Reforming one's identity online can also be fake identity**

Instagram is the platform that promotes fake online identities. Identities in the case of Instagram, are expressed and formed through the use of pictures. There are so many people who provide a sugar-coated side of their lives as if they never had to deal with any issues. When in reality all of us have to face a certain level of frustration, sadness, or any basic problems. For instance, there are influencers who present themselves as being happy all the time, able to afford luxurious holidays and having ideal body image and perfect skin (Erin, 2014). No one presents a facade that shows when they are at their worst, when they are broke, or when they are gaining or losing unwanted weight. Instagram being a photo-based platform indirectly promotes the thought that no one should be presenting things such as violence or being poor. Therefore, it does not match reality because in real life these issues do exist (Lamas & Caramés, 2020). What on social media platforms like Instagram is clickbait turns out to be just a way for users to attract followers, gain tons of like and being appreciated. Lamas & Caramés (2020) terms this as a Digital Deception. They argue that social networking sites do not prove to be responsible enough to promote more constructive feedback. There are so many things that result in the difficulty to have a definite description of Identity. It is very complex and the main reason for the complex understanding of Identity is because users are exposed to many things, especially online. Through becoming a global village due to Globalization, it has resulted into a change from having a social life to now having digital identities. Society is surely built on ideologies, but the ideologies do not leave you even online (Page, 2011). There is the belief that, there are a certain thing when someone does then they will be accepted on Instagram. For example, a person who has more than 10,000 followers is more likely to be considered "intelligent", "rich" or "influential" when in fact it can really not be true at all. Instagram has provided such an impact on people mind that if someone comes up with a picture where they are enjoying a holiday, it automatically associates them with being "happy". A perfect example could be for women; there are many "I woke up like this" pictures where girls pretend to wake up being always beautiful having perfect hair and perfect skin, when it could actually be they are fixing their hair and doing make to pretend to be naturally beautiful. There are so many memes on social sites and even on Instagram itself that show the difference between reality and social media. There are so many edits that take place, those who post sometimes take 10 pictures and then edit what they find best. On Instagram it is simply that people are

living an ‘edited-version’ of themselves. Users do not have an insight about what is going on in others’ personal lives (Erin, 2014). What happens to the others who cannot do same? They end comparing themselves. They question their lifestyles, their abilities and sometimes their financial status. It becomes impossible for one to understand that each one has their own different journeys in life.

### **Instagram makes believe that everyone has perfect lives.**

Users post the one best picture with editing, filters, or maximum smoothness on their faces. As a result, some compare their pictures with the pictures that seem to be ‘perfect’. They tend to critically analyse their own posts that can be a good way to build a strong character or for their own betterment, but it also can turn the way. It can also lead to self-dissatisfaction, self-evaluation, or negative mental health (Barron et al., 2021). Instagram surely is a Third Space where people post what they want, they perform identities they create. They are considered as being someone else, and this is a concept that sociologist Ray Oldenburg came up with. Social media acts as a space where there is an interaction between equals but to what extent is that concept still useful? People have completely grown addicts to Instagram and what they see is what they believe. They are liberated individuals who post whatever contents they want and sometimes it might not reflect reality. By posting what they choose, they build an identity out of what they find perfect, but which again might not relate to real life. For instance, I may be posting about having perfect body, exercising a lot and being happy, but will I post about when I feel low or having mood swings? Therefore, online identities are a total deception as people tend to behave in a way that will be attractive to their audiences (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). According to Cohen et al. (2019), body positivity is present on social media however it does also comprise of the fake meaning behind them. Projecting itself as a harmless platform, Instagram does undoubtedly change the real meaning of ‘identities’.

To conclude, Instagram serves as a tool that enables users to explore and perform different online identities. It does have countless benefits such as being an educative platform which also allows users to communicate or basic things as helps in getting rid of boredom, it also affects the way identities are online. Instagram leads to having a harmful approach to one’s body image. It helps in allowing a third space for its users while also promoting fake identities in terms of reformed online personas. Instagram makes its audience believe that everyone has a perfect life as no one share their dark days online whereas one is supposed to project an identity online that can be connected to what they are in real life. Body dissatisfaction, unrealistic online identities, fake identities and editing that actually make up instagrammers online identity. All in all, there is an unspoken digital deception that takes place and people just keep on consuming what is actually far from what reality is. Social media needs to educate its users that identity should be a true reflection of oneself and not what pleases others.

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