

Amerensw (2020). Instagram Is Ruining Your Self Esteem and You May Not Even Be Aware. *The Eye*. <https://saseye.com/2020/06/08/instagram-is-ruining-your-self-esteem-and-you-may-not-even-be-aware/>

Assignment #1

Title:
Conference Paper

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Date Submitted: 03/04/2022
Word Count: 2,008 words

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Instagram portraying false identities with content causing harm to mental health

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects Instagram has on mental health issues such as anxiety, social comparison and self-esteem when influencers falsely present themselves on social media. Focusing on the stream of online social networks and identity, we discover how the role of social media The increasing use of Instagram has resulted in a growing number of mental health issues, impacting healthy relationships, eating disorders, social interaction and emotional and psychological responses. Throughout this paper, the studies have highlighted a strong link to all three mental health issues involving social online networks.

Introduction

Instagram is a popular social media platform that allows its users to share photos and video content worldwide to their followers with low levels of censorship. Launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom with an almost instantaneous growth, with approximately 700 million users now on Instagram (Blystone, 2020). Studies have shown that online networks have led to a negative impact on ones self in the way communication is carried out and how mental health, specifically low-self-esteem (body image), anxiety and negative social comparison are impacted through the way users express themselves on these platforms. Studies on passive scrolling, celebrity following, the results mental health has on individuals when comparing body image on Instagram and hiding the like count. Mental health is affected by the changes to the way the 'self' is portrayed on Instagram (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). Results have proven Instagram to be a top effective cause for mental health issues out of other social media platforms as Instagram allows photo and video sharing unlike the others.

Online networking is here to stay and has become an everyday tool and will continue to play a large part in the influence of today's society. With a few clicks, you can read any

news source around the world and discuss social issues, exchange ideas and allow people to freely express themselves. The influence of false presentation on Instagram has a direct effect on psychological, behavioral, relationships, self-esteem, social anxiety and comparison. Social media is one of the most powerful tools when distributing information or constructing virtual connections worldwide. In this case, Instagram content is changing mental health by portraying and uploading fake content, becoming more prominent in people's lives and by studying the effect it has on individuals is a significant aspect to explore. This paper examines the way Instagram can effect an individual's self-esteem and social anxiety when exposed to influencers portraying false identities of themselves on Instagram.

Self-Esteem is an individual's positive or negative self-evaluation, to the point where one believes whether they are worthy or not (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). A change in mental health is made apparent by the way Instagram allows its users to post fake identity, resulting in low self-esteem from others leading to less social interaction, damaging healthy and compassionate relationships that are vital for one's health (Fatima et al., 2017). Influencers tend to have a direct impact on their followers with a natural response in self comparison of body image, abilities and characteristics through viewing images and videos Instagram allows its users to share and upload. Following models, celebrities and influencers, viewing their luxurious lives, perfect bodies and pretty faces will in fact lower self-esteem and life satisfaction. Many struggles with social approval for a better sense of self-acceptance when surrounded by Influencers posting edited content on their profiles, portraying the feeling of being looked down upon as it is hard to compare yourself to someone with no flaws. Considering Instagram is a platform where you can share photos, think about how many fake and edited images are being portrayed to the world. Emotional and psychological responses have been affected by the way users are expressing themselves on their Instagram feeds, by the way of using enhancement filters to falsely remove flaws from their images, in order to present themselves to create a higher self-esteem. (Chua & Chang, 2016). The belief of someone with low self-esteem sees personal traits and characteristics significantly important to everyday life (J.B. White et al., 2006). Furthermore, Martinez-Pecino and Garcia-Gavilan (2019) suggest that the

relationship between Instagram likes and PIU (problematic Instagram use) is moderated by self-esteem meaning the impact will be less on those with high self-esteem rather than those with lower self-esteem (Martinez-Pecino & Garcia-Gavilan, 2019).

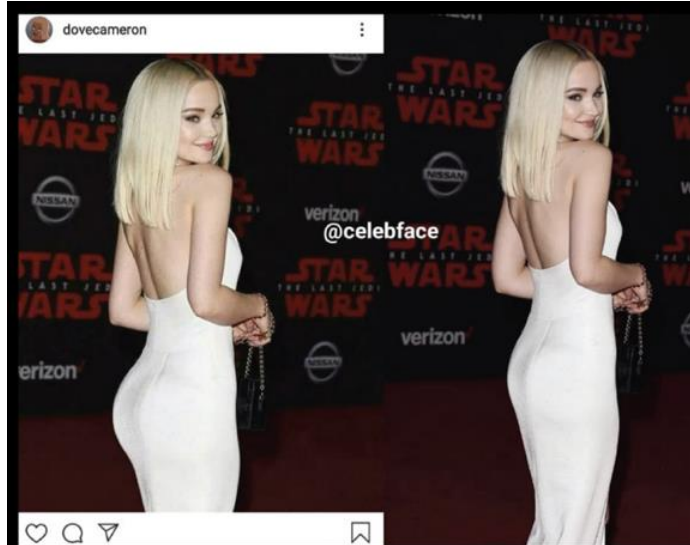


Figure 1. Dove Cameron's edited Instagram post by Amerensw, 2020, The Eye.

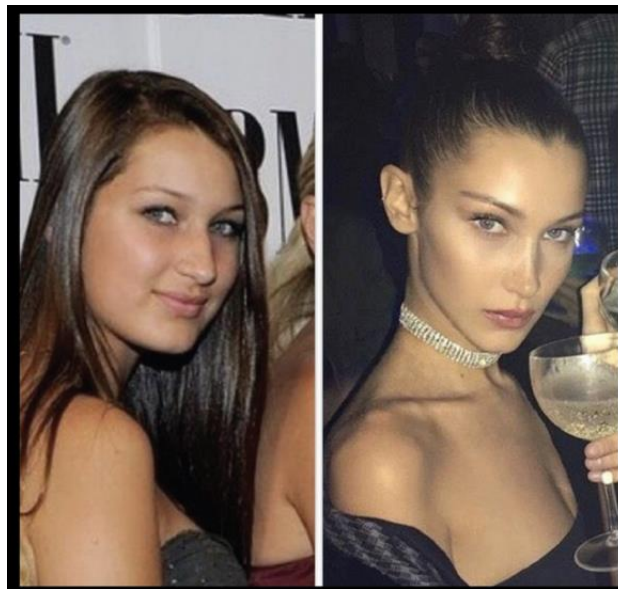


Figure 2. Bella Hadid, Before and after her alleged surgeries by Amerensw, 2020, The Eye.

As seen in Figure 1, Dove Cameron was exposed for editing her body and posting it to Instagram, changing the shape of her bum to appear larger for the public to see. In Figure 2, Bella Hadid's before and after all her alleged surgeries, setting the standards to be

unattainable to Instagram users of today, changing and damaging self-esteem issues by uploading false identity and presentation (Amerensw, 2020). Altered images and images of cosmetically enhanced individuals damages self-esteem. Malacoff (2019) explains that when we are exposed to “perfect” pictures of “perfect” celebrities on a platform, portraying themselves as the “ideal” standard, those who can’t accomplish this impossible level of perfection feel shamed and flawed. Such celebrities/influencers can afford the money to spend on their appearances to ‘better themselves’ when the average person does not have the disposable income available to splurge and change their appearance. These people become the social comparison group that others compare themselves too.

Social comparison theory involves individuals becoming aware and evaluating their attitudes, abilities and traits, later comparing these to those who are similar (Cherry, 2020), in the hope to reduce any uncertainty in these areas (Dion, 2016). Exposing your basic life posts on social media has now been replaced by posts that unrealistically aim for perfection and the impression of idealism resulting in the belief that others have a more interesting and successful life than your own (Stapleton et al., 2017). Unrealistic posts lead to the fear of missing out with jealousy of others’ lives as it is displayed through images and videos for followers to see. Jealousy can have an impact on the relationships we have both online and offline with our peers which can increase the possibility of destructive behavior towards them. Online social network communication leads to less time face-to-face, socializing with friends which could put at risk opportunities for real life relationships. Instagram exhibits more options to enhance, exaggerate and display positive life experiences and scenarios more so than other social media platforms. Visual content displays greater impression creations by growing social presence rather than text-based information on other platforms. It leads to comparing appearances, popularity, social skills and ability. When females are exposed to models and celebrities daily, this becomes their social comparison group (Dion, 2016). Celebrities with no doubt have all the money to travel, spend and indulge in their luxurious lives unlike the average person. Instagram exposes information to and from

other users, exposing a false presentation of their lives that is hard to live up to. Instagram increases self-comparison by being a photo and video sharing social media platform.

Lup, Trub and Rosenthal (2016), investigated a study of 18–29-year-olds and called it #Instasad to explore the frequency of Instagram use with negative social comparison and depressive symptoms. The purpose of this study was to acknowledge the effect celebrities, influencers and famous people had on self-esteem and life satisfaction aimed at Instagram (Dion, 2016). 24 participants commented on the study with their experience of following celebrities (Dion, 2016). Respondents commented on their negative feelings towards themselves from the study, “They just showed off their money and what they had and how they looked. Made me feel bad about myself and how I didn’t have that kind of money to look like that.” (Dion, 2016). Another commented on how their lives look unrealistic, “I was annoyed with the amount of photos they posted. It looks like they live such unrealistic lives” (Dion, 2016). These quotes comment on how the exposure to celebrities lives proves a harmful impact with false presentation leading to negative social comparison.

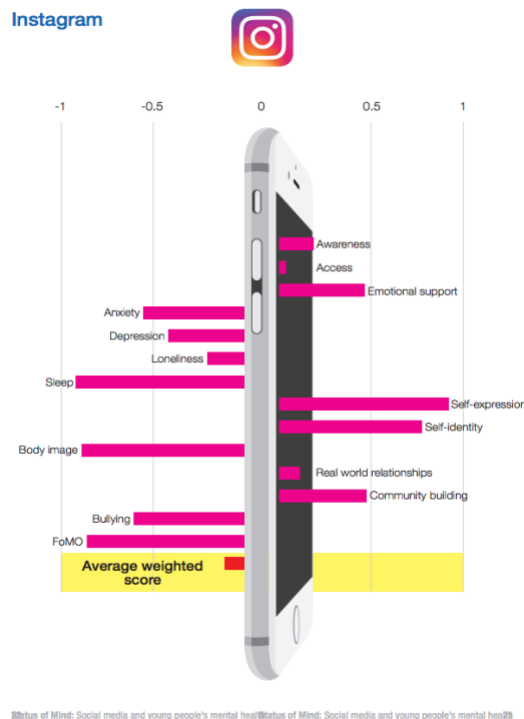


Figure 3. Status of Mind, by Firestone, 2019, PsychAlive.

Considering celebrities are well-recognized individuals, they obtain extreme public attention, usually for their connection and participation in the entertainment world. A survey of 1,500 people between the ages of 14-24 of how different social media platforms impact mental health was conducted. Instagram was found to have the most negative impact specifically focusing on body image and fear of missing out and leads to greater feelings of anxiety and depression (Firestone 2019). When celebrities and their relationship to body image is investigated, the effect on user's body image can have a negative impact. The results from the research project are seen in Figure 3, proving a poor body image is one of the most common mental health issues as an outcome of Instagram use. Furthermore, Shorter, Brown Quinton, and Hinton (2008), found that participants of their study, compared their body size to the posts of celebrity's bodies which positively correlated with disordered eating (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Brown and Tiggemann (2016) found that "interpersonal attraction to thin celebrities, rather than to average or heavy celebrities, was positively associated with eating disorder symptoms." Considering celebrities play an important role in impacting mental health, displaying false identities and presentation to a large following can have a major negative decline in body positivity and self-esteem.

Instagram provides a large variety of filters that can be applied to photos and instant capture of someone to enhance the beauty and create idealized images of one another. Celebrities and influencers frequently use filters and apps that allow editing to images to create a false presentation and identity of themselves to their large following. This can give rise to negative emotions that contributes to poor mental health and social anxiety, especially when so many people look up to celebrities, almost as role models. (Jiang & Ngien, 2020, as cited in Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2018). Jiang and Ngien (2020), proposes that when self-esteem drops, negative navigation or reactions from online social networks become apparent. Negative responses increase social anxiety and self-esteem through the different behaviors and emotional changes when interacting with others (Jiang and Ngien 2020).

Addiction and habitual behavior stem from the likes and comments users receive that help to serve as status and popularity cues with support shown through the form of ‘likes’. This leads to compulsive checking to see what number they have reached on their recent post. Some even going to the extent of purchasing likes and follows to prove their popularity and worthiness to society for social approval and inclusion. This becomes rewarding for their brain’s circuitry (Martinez-Pecino & Garcia-Gavilan 2019). Instagram use is seen more as a focus for self-presentation and publicity rather than building and upholding relationships. Graham (2018), states that people are “moved by affective experiences to do physical actions that result in concrete effects”, this relates to the way Instagram affects its users by generating personal emotions that the concrete effects have through their affective impact. Instagram fuels new levels of compulsion, keeping us addicted with every tap leading to a new narrative (Lempa 2021). Papacharissi (2010) states that social media sites have become an addiction that raises concerns about the harmful effects from this repetitive use which supports my argument.

Instagram is not seen as a negative by everyone. Gerson (2020 as cited by Meier, 2020), comments on the positives Instagram can portray to their users and states that the effects on the well-being does not always depend on what Instagram users are sharing but how the individual interprets and reacts to the post. Meier designed a study focusing on passive scrolling which was published back in 2018. In this study, Meier suggested that the two forms of envy associated with Instagram was one that motivated the person to see past the envious feeling and the other, where the individual felt bitter towards the posts (Gerson, 2020, as cited by Meier, 2020). The study taken that involved 385 people, revealed that when scrolling through these posts, followers felt motivated that triggered inspiration leading to a higher well-being (Gerson, 2020, as cited by Meier, 2020), However, Saad (2019, as cited by Hunt, 2019), describes the negative effects of passive scrolling of Instagram and their influence on upward social comparison, impacting the damage of one’s mental health. Instagram has acknowledged the pressure and fears that people have about how many likes they reach for each post. Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram highlights that the platform trialed hiding the public like count in order to

reduce a less pressurized environment so that people may feel more comfortable in being able to express themselves (Saad, 2019 as cited by Hunt, 2019). This was a success and is used by many users still until this day as we tend to equate our online success through the number of followers, comments and like counts with our self-worth (Hirose 2022). Instagram is rewarding for the brain with likes being the main motivation for posting content as this makes people feel good about themselves. By limiting screen time, minimization of negative feelings towards comparing yourself will be greatly reduced. As seen in figure 4 below, Instagram use has been summarized with the outcomes it has on mental health through false presentation and identity from Instagram users showing an increase in social comparison, leads to reduced self-esteem, resulting in greater social anxiety.

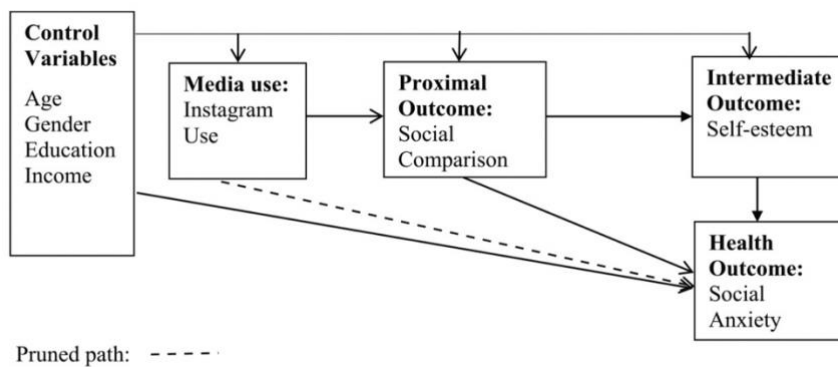


Figure 4. Conceptual Framework by Jiang & Ngien, 2020, Sage Journals.

Conclusion

Instagram allows users to portray false identity and presentation, that brings on harmful mental health issues through content that is shared through images and videos to its online social network followers. Lack of self-esteem, social comparison and social anxiety are all main outcomes of Instagram use impacting healthy relationships, eating disorders, social interaction and emotional and psychological responses. It can be concluded that current studies suggest that there is a strong link – almost a domino effect of mental health issues that lead to one another. Future research should continue to

explore the association between all three mental health outcomes (self-esteem, social comparison and social anxiety), to outline clear results across multiple sources. More studies need to be focused on high school students as teenagers are most likely more engaged in this social media platform than the affects it would have on adults (targeting the correct market). Publishing these results would enhance awareness of the damages caused by these platforms. Future researchers could examine more hypothesis questions and surveys to provide strong, communicative feedback directly from students to researchers. The information researched seems to be very repetitive, testing similar studies with the same age group.

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