

Understanding the use of Instagram in Shaping the self-image of youth

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Instagram in shaping the self-image of youth. Instagram, a picture and video-sharing online platform with different editing features and being able to comment and 'like', can impact how the individual 'self' is understood and perceived. This research aims to determine how Instagram fulfills the psychological gratifications of youth and how their self-image can be shaped by their Instagram usage. To conduct the study, 8 in-depth interview sessions are taken with students of Journalism and media studies backgrounds from different universities. This study also demonstrates that the participants are aware of their social media usage and gives a diverse image of participants' insight. All participants like Instagram. Some participants think that Instagram boosts their self-esteem through positive feedback on their posts from close friends and family and they also identified the problem areas regarding the usage of Instagram. The exploration of these issues has been helped by the Uses and gratification theory and Self-image Theory.

Keywords: Instagram, Self-image, Psychological gratification

Introduction

With the development of technology and the widespread usage of smartphones, social media is now much more accessible. As of January 2022, Bangladesh has about 47 million active social media users (Statista,2023). Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have drastically changed how people engage and communicate (Liu & Ma, 2018). The internet and smartphones with cameras have revolutionized how people capture, recall and share photographs of everyday life since their invention (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013). According to the most recent data of 2023, Instagram has millions of members worldwide and has become one of the most well-liked social networking sites for young people. Men make up about 68.34% of users, while women make up about 31.66% of users (Oosga, 2023).

Instagram users connect through photos and videos, which makes it different from other social media sites. Users can decide whether they want to post their profile publicly or just with their followers in private (Tiggemann et al., 2018). Concerns regarding the platform's effects on young people's mental health and self-image have also been attributed to it. There is a ton of academic work on online self-presentation as a result of the quick development of digital platforms and online photo sharing (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Areni, 2014). According to studies, social media photos promote the idea of an unbounded, created self (Ducheneaut et al., 2009). This study uses the 'Uses and Gratification Theory' and 'Self-image Theory' as a framework for analysis to examine the role of Instagram in shaping young people's self-image. Here, in-depth interviews will be used to study the relationship between psychological need satisfaction and Instagram usage.

Rationale

The usage of Instagram has been linked to several psychological and social repercussions, and it has become an essential part of young people's everyday life (Trifiro,2018). Instagram's effects on young people's mental health and self-image are one area of concern. While some studies contended that Instagram can be a source of social acceptance and support, others contend that it might increase social comparison and foster poor body image in young people. Due to its high social value and popularity, Instagram is

worth analyzing because, unlike other platforms, the communication on this platform takes place through images, making the aesthetic component of imagery crucial and it is an important component of an online image that each user carefully manages (Deeb-Swihart et al, 2017).

Hence, it is important to comprehend the rewards that young people look for when using Instagram and the potential implications for self-perception and youth.

Research Statement

Instagram stories, a new feature that lets users follow others' daily activities with photographs and videos displayed in an interesting slideshow format, was just added to the platform (Bradford, 2017). The greater access to other people's private lives on Instagram supports the notion that content is essential in helping social media users to build identities, social expectations, and expectations (De Nargis, 2012). Although Denti et al. (2012) claimed that this "perfect" representation will make followers feel as though they are having a poorer existence. Kim and Lee (2011) found that this strategy provides an encouraging self-image that enhances their confidence.

With an emphasis on the "Uses and Gratification Theory" and "Self-image Theory", the current study seeks to understand how Instagram affects young people's self-perceptions. It does this by using in-depth interviews and image analysis. The study specifically aims to investigate how young people use Instagram, the kinds of gratification they look for on the platform, and how these gratifications relate to self-image. Additionally, the study aims to identify any potential negative effects of Instagram and provide knowledge for creating interventions and tactics to encourage young people's responsible use of social media.

Theoretical framework

Uses and Gratification Theory: How Instagram satisfies its users' psychological demands will be examined in this study. According to the uses and gratification theory, people utilize media to further their own ends and experience gratification when those ends are met (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The same will be investigated in this study. Thus, this notion will be applied in the investigation.

Self-image Theory: This theory describes how people create and preserve their sense of the self or mental image of who they are (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The relationship between utilizing Instagram and improving users' self-image will be studied in this study. The idea will therefore be used to explain how Instagram users perceive themselves.

Literature Review

Wang, Chen, and Liang (2011) investigated why young people use social networking sites like Instagram. They discovered that several demands such as social contact, self-presentation, and information searching are satisfied by young people using social media.

They conducted an online poll among 518 people between the ages of 18 and 30 to find out why they use social media and discovered that people use social media for different reasons. The sample included male and female participants from a variety of educational backgrounds, as well as demographic criteria like gender, age, and educational attainment. The participants were recruited using various online social networks and forums.

Cohen et al. (2017) studied to pinpoint the precise SNS (Social network sites) characteristics that are associated with young women's body image issues. 259 women between the ages of 18 and 29 completed the questionnaires regarding their use of SNS (Facebook and Instagram) and concerns about their bodies. They discovered that body image issues in young women were more closely associated with appearance-focused SNS Usage than general SNS Usage.

Fardouly et al. (2018) investigated that using Instagram might enhance body-related social comparison, which can have detrimental psychological effects like reduced self-esteem and higher body dissatisfaction. This is because Instagram frequently offers a highly edited and filtered perspective of reality, which can lead to the perpetuation of the "perfect" image culture and unrealistic beauty standards. Perloff (2014) also found the same results. Here in the study, Fardouly et al. conducted a meta-analysis of 20 studies that investigated the relationship between social media use and body image concerns in adolescent and young adult populations. The studies included in the meta-analysis had sample sizes ranging from 76 to 1,103 participants and were conducted in various countries, including the United States, Australia, and Europe.

On the other hand, Perloff (2014) carried out a content analysis on 90 well-known Instagram profiles belonging to female models and celebrities. The study examined the linguistic and visual elements of Instagram postings rather than a sample of human participants.

McLean et al. (2015) examined social media usage, body dissatisfaction, and dietary constraint. The authors specifically guided a poll of 100 girls in the seventh grade about their usage of social media and their concerns with their bodies and food. Girls who frequently posted pictures of themselves on social media reported significantly higher overestimations of their size and weight, a more internalized idea of the thin ideal, higher levels of body dissatisfaction, and increased dietary restraint than respondents who did not use social media. They also discovered that girls who frequently posted pictures of themselves were more inclined to alter those images to appear slimmer and more in line with an idealized body image

Kleemans et al. (2016) investigated the effect of manipulated Instagram photos on adolescent girls' body image and tried to find the association between social comparison tendencies. A between-subject experiment among 144 girls (14–18 years old) was conducted and they were randomly exposed to either original or manipulated Instagram selfies. Results showed that exposure to manipulated Instagram photos directly led to lower body image. Girls with higher social comparison tendencies were negatively affected by exposure to manipulated photos.

Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) conducted a study that aimed to investigate the motivations behind social media usage among college students in the United States. They surveyed 195 college students and found that the participants used social media platforms, such as Facebook and Myspace, for various reasons, including entertainment, identity exploration, social connection, and social comparison. The authors also found that different types of gratifications were associated with different types of social media use, such as using social media for entertainment or social comparison. Overall, their study highlights the multifaceted nature of social media use and the various needs that social media can fulfill for young people, including those related to entertainment, identity exploration, and social comparison.

The research works on using Instagram and self-image in the Bangladesh context seem limited. So, this study may be a step forward in filling the gap.

Methodology

The study has been conducted using a qualitative approach, involving in-depth interviews with young people who use Instagram. The samples have been drawn from a diverse range of demographic groups, including different ages, and genders. The participants will be of ages 18 to 24.

Data collection involves semi-structured interviews which have been transcribed. Interviewees have been asked about their typical use of Instagram, the types of content they engage with, and how they feel when using the platform. The interviews explore the psychological and social needs that participants seek to fulfill through their usage of Instagram and the impact that this use has on their self-esteem, body image, and overall well-being. In-depth interviews are usually conducted in a natural setting, such as the participant's home or workplace, and may last from 30 minutes to 45 minutes, depending on the topic and the depth of the conversation. The interviews have been analyzed using thematic analysis identifying major themes related to the research questions. Using these methods, the relationships, meaning, and presence of the themes and concepts can be analyzed.

8 participants are the Instagram users as a sample who are interviewed. In this research, there is a purposive sampling method. Young people studying in the Media and Journalism department from different universities are interviewed by this method. There are selected participants who have personal experiences with the topic and also have Instagram accounts. There have been taken the interviews of students of Journalism and media studies background from different universities like the University of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar University, University of Rajshahi, Khulna University, Comilla University, and University of Liberal Arts (ULAB). There were 4 male and 4 female respondents in the in-depth interview session. Everyone is aged 20 to 25. Interviews were taken through phone calls and Zoom. The duration of each interview was from 25 to 45 minutes. 3 female interviewees have an Instagram private account and the other one has a public account and of the 4 male participants, 3 of them have kept their account public to communicate and one of the four

males has kept his account private. The 4 female participants use Instagram daily. From them, one female participant uses Instagram for 4 to 5 hours per day, and another user on average half an hour daily. Of the male participants, one uses Instagram 3 to 4 hours daily and the other male participants use Instagram on average half an hour per day. Every interviewee shared their perception and insights about their usage of Instagram.

To analyze data, every interview is transcribed verbatim. All interview transcripts are examined numerous times to find patterns and highlight significant themes that arose from the data. Themes were correlated with categories by considering their relevance to finding answers to research questions.

Findings

1. This section is discussed the findings in line with the themes that occurred during interviews

Psychological Gratification: The first theme that emerged from the interview is ‘psychological gratification’. All participants agreed that they are gratified psychologically by using Instagram. They all know about Uses and gratification theory. But the process of being gratified is different. Some participants feel psychologically gratified by posting pictures, while other participants use it for entertainment purposes and to satiate their social and psychological demands. Another participant fulfills his psychological gratification by gathering information while another participant uses Instagram for emotional release and to spend his leisure time. Some of them have private accounts and 7 participants said that they felt happy while posting pictures and scrolling through posts on their topic of interest.

I think posting pictures gives me satisfaction and gratifies my psychological needs. At some point, I am following the trend and it makes me feel good. And I care about who/how many people follow me. (Participant 1)

Not just posting pictures, even when they open Instagram accounts they get an instant boost of happiness which fulfills their psychological demands. Receiving opinions and

compliments from posted pictures makes them feel gratified. Instagram is also a good source of entertainment to them.

2.The theme related to these research questions gradually occurred during the entire interviewing process. The participants are asked about their insights about self-image. What they view most, the purposes for viewing those users' posts, and their attitudes to likes and comments on their posts.

Self-image as the standard of self : While interviewing the participants about users whose posts they prefer to view on Instagram and sometimes participants compare themselves with others in terms of likes and comments they get on their posts. The participants think the most important factor to shape self-image is comparison with others in terms of physical appearance. The understanding of self-image is kind of the same for every participant. Participants try to make their looks according to their preference influencers and also they are attracted by different cultures of influencers.

We compare ourselves with others in terms of our physical appearance. I think other people's appearance affects me most on my self-image and I realize it's not good for me. (Participant 2)

But there is also a positive thing that participants are also aware of the negative sides of the usage of Instagram among youth.

Instagram creates a false set of standards for people to follow, which often leads to the articulation of false images, and people end up trying to match those standards even though they are not required to. (Participant 4)

Instagram has a negative effect: it promotes white supremacy. It just makes a fake world or hyperreality. (Participant 6)

'Likes and comments' as validation: Likes and comments also can shape people's self-image, though one of the participants thinks likes and comments make him feel better and he doesn't think it to be negative or positive as he is conscious about his self-image. They frequently check whether people react or not.

I like to get validation in social media. I feel better after seeing comments and likes on my post . (Participant 4)

I always pay attention to likes and comments on my picture. More likes and comments make me satisfied at some point. (Participant 1)

Whereas, Some participants don't pay any attention to likes and comments.

It doesn't matter to me how many people follow me. I don't even check reacts (Participant 6)

Conclusion

From the analysis of the research question, it is found that Instagram fulfills the psychological gratification of all participants, though, the process of getting gratification varies among them. It is also found that every participant thinks of self-image as a standard of their self but they believe self-image can be shaped by different factors. Of the 8 participants, two participants face negative self-image issues but Others don't face any negative experiences regarding Instagram usage. Of the 8 participants, 3 participants take likes and comments seriously, but the rest participants do not take likes and comments that seriously but they become happy to get good comments on their posts

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