

ADOLESCENTS AND INSTAGRAM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract: *Instagram is, along with Facebook and Twitter, “one of the most popular social network services in the world” [31]. The aim of this original-research review study “was to show what differentiates Instagram from other social network services (features and tools)” [22], how popular it is (linguistic productivity), what Instagram-related topics were studied by the researchers, what was the age range of adolescent-users, whether Instagram has positive or negative effects on adolescents, and adolescents’ motivations / preferences / reasons for using Instagram. Results show that Instagram-related topics are fewer in adolescents than in adults; that Instagram use has fewer positive than negative effects on adolescents, and that adolescents’ motivation / preference / reason for using Instagram is mainly social interaction.*

Key words: *Instagram, adolescents, interaction, Instagram-related topics*

INTRODUCTION

Instagram is, along with Facebook and Twitter, among “the most popular social network services in the world” [13]. Instagram is a social network service for the sharing of photos and videos. The application allows users: “to browse other users' content by tag and location; to connect their Instagram account to other social networking sites, enabling them to share uploaded photos to those sites; to follow other users to add their content to a personal feed; to like photos; to set their account as ‘private’, thereby requiring that they approve any new follower requests; to share posts publicly or with preapproved followers; to upload media that can be edited with filters and organized by geographical tagging; to view trending content” [13].

Instagram has several features and tools, among which: “advertising, algorithm and design changes, explore, fact checking, hashtags, “Instagram direct”, “Instagram stories, photographic filters, “stand-alone apps”, “third-party services”, and video” [13].

Literature in the fields of education, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, etc. abounds in studies on Instagram-related topics, i.e., on aesthetic experience, ageing, anxiety, attention economy, body image, contextual age, cyber victimisation, depression, eating disorders, emotional fatigue, ends of identity, fear of missing out, Instagram addiction, life satisfaction, loneliness, mental health, narcissism, performative activism, peritraumatic distress, privacy, psychopathological risk, satisfaction with appearance, self-esteem, self-expression, self-harm, self-liking, self-objectivization, self-presentation, self-promotion, sharenting (parents posting content) risks, social anxiety, social comparison, social exclusion, strangers followed, stress, subjectivity, substance use, suicide, well-being, etc.

The popularity of Instagram made researchers and users coin new words: Instagram (to post an image to Instagram; to digitally manipulate a photograph using filter effects – [30]), Instagramism [20], Instagrammability (the state or quality of being Instagrammable – [30]), “Instagrammable (visually appealing in a way that is suitable for being photographed for posting on the social media application Instagram)” – [14]), Instagrammatics [11], Instagrammer (a user of Instagram – [30]), Instagramming [29], Instasad [19], and Instastress [29].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following journals were browsed for studies regarding Instagram-related issues: “Body Image”, “Children and Youth Services Review”, “Communication Research and Practice”, “Computers in Human Behavior”, “Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking”, “European Physical Journal Data Science”, “Frontiers in Psychology”, “Future Internet”, “International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health”, “International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction”, “International Journal of Technology in Education and Science”, International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking”, “Journal of Behavioral Addictions”, “Media Psychology”, “New Media & Society”, “PLOS ONE”, “Psychology of Popular Media Culture”, and “The Journal of Social Media in Society”, but only the studies including (early) adolescents (aged 12-26) have been retained.

The systematic literature review of original research articles was conducted taking into account the “Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Literature Reviews and the Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)” method [17,21]. Only 16 of the 50 studies on students’ Instagram use have been retained for this review. This research method was chosen due to its importance in academic studies.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Two of the studies in the corpus are review articles. Picardo et al (2020) conducted a review of studies on suicide or self-harm content on Instagram, while Faelens et al (2021-[25]) summarized research investigating “the relationship between Instagram use and indicators of mental health”.

The rest of the studies are original research articles on 26 Instagram-related topics (Table 1).

Table 1.

Original research articles on 26 Instagram-related topics

Instagram-related topics	Authors	Focus	Sample age range	Findings
Anxiety	Yurdagül et al. (2021)	“effects of problematic Instagram use on different psychopathological outcomes”	14-19	Instagram use is directly associated with general anxiety in male students and indirectly associated with general anxiety in female students
Body image	Kleemans et al. (2016)	exposure to manipulated Instagram photos	14-18	“Exposure to manipulated Instagram photos leads to lower body image”
	Fardouly, Willburger & Vartanian (2017)	relationship between Instagram use and body image concerns	18-25	“Frequent Instagram use is associated with greater body image concerns”
	Chang et al. (2019)	“association between adolescent girls’ various types of Instagram selfie practices and their body esteem”	12-16	there are “negative associations between participants’ photo browsing and editing behaviours and body esteem”
	Yurdagül et al. (2021)	“effects of problematic Instagram use on different psychopathological outcomes”	14-19	psychological effects of problematic Instagram use can be explained by body image dissatisfaction
Cyber victimisation	Longobardi et al. (2020)	association between “Instagram popularity and subjective happiness”	mean age 13.31	Instagram popularity increases exposure to cyber victimization

Depression	Frison & Eggermont (2017)	“reciprocal relationships between different types of Instagram use and depressed mood”	mean age 14.96	“Instagram browsing is related to increases in adolescents’ depressed mood”
	Foroughi et al. (2021)	association between Instagram addiction and students’ needs	19-26	Instagram addiction has a positive effect on depression
	Yurdagül et al. (2021)	“effects of problematic Instagram use on different psychopathological outcomes”	14-19	problematic Instagram use is directly associated with depression in female adolescents
Fear of missing out	Balta et al. (2020)	“direct and indirect associations of fear of missing out with phubbing”	14-21	associations of “fear of missing out with phubbing increase fear of missing out” more in females than in males
Instagram addiction	Kircaburun & Griffiths (2018)	relationships between Instagram addiction and self-liking	18-24	Instagram addiction is negatively associated with self-liking
	Longobardi et al. (2020)	association between “Instagram popularity and subjective happiness”	mean age 13.31	Instagram popularity increases the risk of developing a behaviour addiction to Instagram use
	Ballarotto et al. (2021)	relationship between Instagram addiction and alexithymia	mean age 23	Instagram addiction is predicted by alexithymia
	Ballarotto, Volpi & Tambelli (2021)	relationship between Instagram addiction and adolescents’ attachment to their parents / peers	14-18	Instagram addiction is associated with worse attachment to parents / peers
	Foroughi et al. (2021)	association between Instagram addiction and students’ needs	19-26	Instagram addiction is increased by entertainment, recognition, and social needs
Life satisfaction	Foroughi et al. (2021)	association between Instagram addiction and students’ needs	19-26	“Instagram addiction has a negative impact on academic performance and on life satisfaction”
Loneliness	Yurdagül et al. (2021)	“effects of problematic Instagram use on different psychopathological outcomes”	14-19	problematic Instagram use is directly associated with loneliness
Narcissism	Barry et al. (2017)	association between posting self-photographs and narcissism	18-25	posting self-photographs is not associated with narcissism
Peritraumatic distress	Ballarotto et al. (2021)	relationship between Instagram addiction and alexithymia	mean age 23	Instagram addiction increases peritraumatic distress more in female adolescents than in male adolescents
Privacy	Shane-Simpson et al. (2018)	relationship between Instagram use and privacy	mean age 19	Instagram use increases the “levels of self-disclosure, but lowers the levels of bonding social capital”
Problematic Instagram use	Yurdagül et al. (2021)	“effects of problematic Instagram use on different psychopathological outcomes”	14-19	“Problematic Instagram use is directly associated with general anxiety”, depression and loneliness
	Balta et al. (2020)	associations of problematic Instagram use with “neuroticism, trait anxiety and trait fear of	14-21	problematic Instagram use moderates the association of state fear of missing with phubbing

		missing out with phubbing”		
Psycho-pathological risk	Ballarotto, Volpi & Tambelli (2021)	relationship between Instagram addiction and adolescents’ attachment to their parents / peers	14-18	“Worse attachment to parents / peers is associated with adolescents’ psychopathological risk”
Self-esteem	Barry et al. (2017)	association between posting self-photographs and narcissism	18-25	posting self-photographs is not associated with self-esteem
Self-liking	Kircaburun & Griffiths (2018)	relationships between Instagram addiction and self-liking	18-24	Instagram addiction is not associated with self-liking
Self-objectivization	Fardouly, Willburger & Vartanian (2017)	relationship between Instagram use and body image concerns	18-25	“Greater Instagram use is associated with greater self-objectification”
Self-promotion	Sheldon et al. (2017)	relationship between Instagram use and motives and behavioural outcomes	20-25	Instagram use reflects self-promotion
Social anxiety	Foroughi et al. (2021)	association between Instagram addiction and students’ needs	19-26	Instagram addiction “has a positive effect on social anxiety”
	Yurdagül et al. (2021)	“effects of problematic Instagram use on different psychopathological outcomes”	14-19	problematic Instagram use is directly associated with social anxiety in male students and indirectly associated with social anxiety in female students
Social comparison	Chang et al. (2019)	associations between adolescent girls’ various types of Instagram selfie” practices and their body esteem	12-16	“Objectifying standards of beauty may permeate adolescent girls’ value systems”
Social exclusion	Sheldon & Newman (2019)	relationship between Instagram use and excessive reassurance-seeking and interpersonal rejection	12-17	Instagram use is predicted by excessive reassurance-seeking and interpersonal rejection
	Büttner & Rudert (2022)	“not being tagged causes similar negative responses as being excluded in real life”	Mean age 22.74	“Not being tagged in a posted photo strongly threatens fundamental needs”
Social interaction	Sheldon et al. (2017)	relationship between Instagram use and motives and behavioural outcomes	20-25	Instagram use reflects primarily social interaction
	Huang & Su (2018)	“motives for Instagram use and topics of interest”	-	Instagram use involves “social interaction and diversion motives”
Well-being	Longobardi et al. (2020)	association “between Instagram popularity and subjective happiness”	mean age 13.31	Instagram popularity lowers psychological well-being

The age range of the adolescents in the samples investigated is 12-26. The Instagram-related topics investigated in adolescents are: anxiety, body image, cyber victimisation, depression, fear of missing out, Instagram addiction, life satisfaction, loneliness, narcissism, peritraumatic distress, privacy, problematic Instagram use, psychopathological risk, self-esteem, self-liking, self-objectivization, self-promotion, social anxiety, social comparison, social exclusion, social interaction, and well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the motivations and reasons underlying adolescents preferences as shown in the samples investigated in the present research – i.e. they seem to prefer using media such as Instagram to other networking facilities – appear to be: creativity, documentation, self-promotion, social interaction [4,5,7,27,28], creativity, diversion, documentation, self-promotion, social interaction [12,15,19], and communication and connection with familiar others (i.e., social interaction), trust, and visual affordances [22,23,24,26].

Having these preferences and motivations in view, we are able to detect expedient uses for the purposes of interest to the researchers involved in the present study, As such, the overall conclusion of this review is that Instagram use has both positive [6,9,15,18] and negative [1,2,3,5,6,8,9,10,15,16,18,27,32] effects on the adolescents. As discussed above, the positive aspects may have valuable implications for communicative and pedagogical purposes, as the findings are significant for academic educators seeking to engage students in more interactive learning experiences through social media interventions.

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