

Instagram engagement in young adults: A qualitative exploration of Instagram, body image and well-being

Chloe Ryding
Nottingham Trent University

Background

- Popularity of Instagram increased
- Visual environment can encourage gratifications around self-promotion/ self-presentation and surveillance of others (Sheldon & Byant, 2016; Kircaburun et al., 2018)
- Can lead to comparisons to others perceived as superior = associations with poorer wellbeing e.g. anxiety and low self-esteem

Background

- Influences on body ideals/ satisfaction due to self-presentation and peer influence interact to co-construct standards of beauty
- Interactive features e.g. likes and comments as feedback may shape user's view of bodies
 - Measure of peer approval of physical beauty, with self-presentational behaviours and comparisons driving desire for validation and attention (Chua & Chang, 2016)

Background

- Most social networking site (SNS) research remains based on self-report
- Qualitative approaches can uncover why and how individuals interact and engage with SNS, as well as exploring how knowledge and meanings are attached to experiences with SNS (Snelson, 2016).
- Primary qualitative research has focussed on teenagers under the age of 18.

Aims

- To explore the role of SNS use in body image and well-being in young adults, with a particular focus on the platform Instagram
- To identify the specific features of Instagram that may impact body image and well-being.

Methods

Synchronous focus groups (both online and offline)

- **30 participants** aged between 18-32 (19 female, $M=23.17$, $SD=3.09$)
 - **3 offline** focus groups- two female groups (each group $n=4$) and one male group ($n=4$)
 - **5 online** groups three female groups (group one $n=4$; group two $n=3$; group 3 $n=4$) and two male groups (group 1 $n=4$; group 2 $n=3$).
- Average time = 1 hour 49 min

Analysis

- Thematic analysis underpinned by social constructionism
- Focus on the process of construction and how meanings are created through the dynamics within social interactions between individuals (Losantos et al, 2016)
- Suitable to observe the ways in which focus group members interacted with one another, to gain understanding of how attitudes around SNS, body image and well-being are constructed in response to other Instagram users' perspectives.

Analysis and results

Participant themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Staying cautious on SNS	Agency in well-being Developing caution
Comparisons to others: The highlight reel of Instagram	Wanting to achieve unrealistic ideals Distinguishing what is real and not real Balancing envy and motivation
‘Fake it till you make it’: Seeking validation and social acceptance	Enhancing self on Instagram The ‘social currency’ of likes Navigating opinions, conflict and criticism

Analysis and results: An example...

Agency in well-being

- Most participants revealed that they would try to limit time spent on/curate SNS platforms as a way to mitigate potential negative impacts of SNS.
- Ability to curate newsfeed was described as being dependent on the SNS platform used.
- Instagram explore page - portrayed as a negative Instagram feature and impactful to self-esteem.
- Users do not always have control of content that is displayed on their newsfeed.

Analysis and results

Agency in well-being

- Personal responsibility as paradoxical – diminished own responsibility of curating Instagram and blamed the platform for showing user's unwanted content
- Ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988; English, 2009) – in recognising the extent to which they are willing to actively engage with the customisation of their profiles and attributing fault to the platform for negative wellbeing effects users may face .

Implications

- Avenue for SNS platforms in intervention efforts at both consumer and corporate levels.
- Digital literacy initiatives - evaluate distinct platforms and the affordances they provide to incorporate strategies and target more complex digital skills relevant to the specific platform.
- Corporate level - re-evaluation in the context of stakeholder content and how platforms disseminate content that may influence negative well-being and body image

Conclusion

- Instagram has both positive and negative impacts on well-being and body image
 - Environment that encourages self-evaluation and construction/maintenance of appearance ideals
 - Also support and enhance connections with others
- Qualitative research = Insight into shaping interventions to mitigate negative well-being impacts and increasing benefits

Thank you!



@ChloeRyding



francesca.ryding2018@my.ntu.ac.uk