

# Instagram's Influence on Self-representation of Young Users

## Instagram'ın Genç Kullanıcıların Kendini Temsiline Etkisi

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### Abstract

Social media users are attempting to capture every moment of their life, therefore creating the visual global aesthetic that forms virtuality. This study examines the relationship between the usage of Instagram, and its influence on users' mental health through social comparison traps, body image, stereotyping, gender differences, cultural background, unrealistic beauty standards, and fake representations. This research tried to find out that the frequency of social comparisons on Instagram may have detrimental consequences on users such as depression and feelings of inadequacy. Furthermore, due to idealized representations, individuals can struggle to distinguish between their true identities and their digital personas. Additionally, widespread usage of weight loss and body image hashtags and trends may negatively impact young adults. However, Instagram might have a beneficial impact as it allows people to express themselves in front of billions of others. A mixed research method approach was applied to fully understand this study by using the Social Comparison scale and asking open-ended short-answer questions. In this context, 105 participants aged between 18 and 25 were asked about their use of the Instagram platform and their comparisons with other users, through electronic surveys. The study aimed to show how social media affects young adults in different ways and to provide insight into how users can better protect their mental health on Instagram. Research findings reveal that Instagram users think that they make rational choices about their online behavior and personal representation, and that they use the platform in a healthy and beneficial way.

**Keywords:** *Instagram, Self-Representation, Social Comparison, Social Media, Young Users*

### Öz

Sosyal medya kullanıcıları hayatlarının her anını paylaşımlarıyla yakalamaya çalışırken sanallığı oluşturan görsel küresel estetiği yaratıyor. Bu çalışma, Instagram kullanımı ile Instagram'ın kullanıcıların ruh sağlığı üzerindeki etkisini sosyal karşılaştırma tuzakları, beden imajı, klişeleştirme, cinsiyet farklılıkları, kültürel geçmiş, gerçekçi olmayan güzellik standartları ve sahte temsiller aracılığıyla incelemektedir. Bu araştırma, Instagram'daki sosyal karşılaştırmaların sıklığının, kullanıcılar üzerinde depresyon ve yetersizlik duyguları gibi zararlı sonuçları olabileceğini bulmaya çalışmıştır. Dahası, idealize edilmiş temsiller nedeniyle bireyler, gerçek kimlikleri ile dijital kişilikleri arasında ayırım yapmakta zorlanabileceği düşünülmüştür. Ek olarak, kilo verme ve vücut imajı hashtag'lerinin ve trendlerinin yaygın kullanımı genç yetişkinleri olumsuz etkileyebileceğine inanılmaktadır. Ancak Instagram, insanların kendilerini milyarlarca insanın önünde ifade etmelerine olanak sağladığı için faydalı bir etkiye sahip olabilir. Bu çalışmayı tam olarak anlamak için karma araştırma yöntem yaklaşımı uygulanmıştır. Sosyal Karşılaştırma ölçeği kullanılması yanı sıra katılımcılara bazı açık uçlu kısa cevaplı sorular yöneltilmiştir. Yaşları 18 ile 25 arasında değişen 105 katılımcıya Instagram platformunu kullanımları ve diğer kullanıcılarla kıyaslamaları bu bağlamda elektronik anketler vasıtasıyla sorulmuştur. Çalışma, sosyal medyanın genç yetişkinleri farklı şekillerde nasıl etkilediğini göstermeyi ve kullanıcıların Instagram'da zihinsel sağlıklarını nasıl daha iyi koruyabileceklerine dair içgörü sağlamayı amaçlamıştır. Araştırma bulguları, Instagram kullanıcılarının çevrimiçi davranışları ve kişisel temsilleri konusunda rasyonel seçimler yaptıklarını düşündüklerini ve platformu sağlıklı ve faydalı bir şekilde kullandıklarını ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Instagram, Kendini Temsil Etme, Sosyal Karşılaştırma, Sosyal Medya, Genç Kullanıcılar*

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## Introduction

Instagram was launched on Oct. 6, 2010 which is a free, online photo-sharing application and social network platform that can be both used by personal and business purposes and can be linked with other social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr). Instagram acquired by Facebook in 2012. According to recent data published in May 2023 (Kemp, 2023). Instagram has 1.628 billion daily active users worldwide, a 310 million user increased over the previous three months and place in Instagram to 4th in ranking of the world's most active social media platforms. Also, Instagram's advertising audience reach has increased by 12.2% in the last year. According to these data, most of Instagram's advertising audience is between 18 and 24 with 217.7 million. Instagram is used by around 25.9% of all people aged 13 and up worldwide (Kemp, 2023). India has the most active Instagram users, with at least 326.6 million users, according to the most recent data released in Instagram's self-service tools in April 2023 (Kemp, 2023). The United States of America comes in second with 168.6 million active users, while Brazil has at least 132.6 million. Indonesia, Turkey, Japan, Mexico Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy all have a sizable number of active Instagram users ranging from 8106 million to 30.3 million (Kemp, 2023). These figures reflect Instagram's global reach and popularity as a social media network. According to Instagram's advertising audience data, 49.4% of worldwide Instagram users are female and 50.6% are male (Kemp, 2023). Cristiano Ronaldo has the most Instagram followers with over 587 million, whereas Lionel Messi is the most-followed South American on Instagram with over 467 million. Selena Gomez, a female actor, and singer, has the highest number of followers on Instagram

among women, reaching over 420 million followers (sacnilk.com, 2023).

Understanding the impact of Instagram is critical for developing effective strategies to promote a sense of mental wellness among young people. This study aims to investigate how Instagram's features and algorithms influence the way users show themselves, the role of social comparison in influencing self-representation, and Instagram's implications on mental health. The study specifically has looked at gender variations in influence style, user stereotyping, reality versus virtuality, and harmful influences including body image, unattainable beauty standards, unhealthy food recommendations, and false representation. Bullingham and Vasconcelos found that participants were willing to re-create their offline lives online, but only altered bits of themselves, rather than adopting whole personas (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013a). This emphasizes Goffman's core idea that when individuals exist on "stage," they decide to project a particular identity. Goffman's original notion has been discovered to be particularly useful as a guide for understanding identity through online engagement and self-presentation (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013a). The mass media impacts the dissemination of cultural stereotypes concerning the aesthetics of body image. Photos on social media are frequently idealized, manipulated, and staged in the same way that photos in magazines and on billboards are (Mingoia et al., 2017). As a result, users are more likely to see overly gorgeous photographs of other individuals, which may lead to social comparisons as well as feelings of body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the adoption of body image and weight loss hashtags and trends might have a detrimental impact on users. According to Mingoia et al. (2017) viewing enhancement-free photographs causes

much decreased face dissatisfaction than exposure to conventional images. Body image and unrealistic beauty standards have been identified as major concerns for users of Instagram (Mingoia et al., 2017).

Social media's idealized pictures of beautiful women can have a detrimental influence on women's body image and wellbeing. Women prefer to portray idealized photographs on social media, but some also upload natural, no-makeup photos. Fardouly and Rapee (2019) found that no-makeup selfies may mitigate the harmful influence of idealized fabricated photos on women's facial worries. Instagram's tendency toward fake representation is causing users to become increasingly concerned as they post images of ideal lives that do not exist (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019). However, the inclusion of hashtags resulted in more face unhappiness than the identical enhancement-free photographs with no hashtags. Gender embodiment has fueled current media studies (Butkowski et al., 2020; Döring et al., 2016; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Goffman, 1976) arguments concerning the link between gender representations in media and gender appearances in virtual environments. In the study of magazine and newspaper photography, Goffman found that women are shown in more subservient attitudes, while males are depicted in more elevated ones (Goffman, 1976).

Additionally, stereotyping is changing its shape on social media, particularly Instagram, and is no longer just an issue between groups, but also among individuals and themselves. With the launch of Instagram, stereotyping has grown more entrenched in society by promoting physical standards that are deemed ideal and magnificent, such that many users seek to be equal by following

beauty standards promoted internationally by actors known as Influencers (Suhada et al., 2022) [Metin girmek için buraya tıklayın veya dokunun..](#) Döring, Reif and Poeschl argued that male and female Instagram users' selfies not only match conventional gender stereotypes but are far more stereotypical than magazine advertisements (Döring et al., 2016). To prevent stereotypes, the media plays a vital role in educating people and familiarizing them with various cultures. Every culture uses social media differently related to cultural values. The disparity between online and real-life pictures causes anxiety and dissatisfaction, and it is linked to emotional control issues (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016; Tiggemann, 2005). Some scholars (Petropoulos Petalas et al., 2021) think that Instagram negatively impacts people's mental health in a variety of ways, including social anxiety, despair, self-harm, and self-criticism. Social media is a source of depression among young adults, although it may also be the most effective tool for raising mental health awareness. However, some other scholars (Coyne et al., 2020) claimed that increased social media use had no influence on mental health. The study aims to investigate how young users are impacted by Instagram platform on both positive and negative levels and how it can affect their real and virtual life (Coyne et al., 2020). To reach this aim, both open-ended and close-ended questions have been asked to participants to collect data. In that way became possible to answer both what and why questions together.

## 1. Literature Review

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of Instagram on its users' self-representation, its broader implications for society and the need for further research to understand the long-term effects of social

media use on users' mental health and well-being. Throughout history, media platforms such as Instagram have seen significant changes. New filters, new features like "Stories," "Insights" and "Archive," new ways for advertisers to exploit the medium, changing camera capacity in mobile phones, and so on are among the developments. All of this has an impact on the topics and aesthetics of shared photographs (Manovich, 2017). The original Goffman framework, according to Bullingham and Vasconcelos, is extremely helpful as a structure of explanation for understanding identity via communication and the presentation of self in the online environment. Additionally, the ability to edit oneself more easily in the internet context might present chances to advance the Goffman framework (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013b).

### 1.1. Instagram's Features and Algorithms

Instagram has given many editing tools to enhance the appearance of images and videos since its introduction in 2010, and the opportunity to instantly share users' creations across several platforms (Hu et al., n.d.). Instagram's exceptional success validates a Pew Survey stating that images and videos have grown into the primary social currency online (Rainie et al., 2012). Instagram has made various adjustments to its software over the years: digital filters that adapt quickly with the intended launch, a collection of tools for users to "selfie", and the usage of hashtags to engage users in online popular subjects.

The platform's algorithm is a systematic organization of huge data based on Instagram with the goal of answering user demands (Ferina et al., 2019). The Instagram algorithm is divided into numerous sections, including Algorithm post exposure, shadow prohibited, interactions, Instagram stories, hashtag, editing caption, repost and post. According

to one of the research findings, only 20% of the audience will view the material, and this will increase as the algorithm determines how many interactions users have; the more interactions, the greater the chance that the user's content will reach a larger number of people (Ferina et al., 2019). This can have an impact on how users exhibit themselves since they may feel pressured to develop material that would do well in the algorithm and be viewed by more people.

### 1.2. Social Comparison and Body Image

On Instagram, users may compare their accounts to those of others, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and a need to show oneself in a certain manner. In one of the articles, it's argued that self-worth dependent on approval from others controlled the relationship between self-esteem and self-worth, and that self-worth dependent on approval from other people serves an important part in the connection among Instagram use as well as social comparison on the platform (Stapleton et al., 2017). Another research argued that frequency of social comparison has potential negative effects among users such as depression and by looking at other people's updates to status and responding on other people's photos and videos were found to be related to social comparison (Hwnag, 2019).

Many studies suggest that social media use is favorably related to body image problems through a qualitative evaluation of the literature on social media use and body image issues in general. Researchers found that young men and women who use social media are more likely to have body image issues, according to correlational studies, and longitudinal research suggests that this link may get stronger with time (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018; Malighetti et al., 2020; Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). In addition,

the connection between social media and body image is influenced by comparisons of appearance. The findings of a study (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018) show how idealized social media images, particularly slender ideal models for females and muscular ideal models for boys, have a significant impact on how teenagers view their bodies. The impact of social media pressure on body image issues in males, however, need to be further studied in clinical and community populations (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018).

Users may suffer due to the popularity of body image and weight reduction hashtags and trends. Some scholars claimed that viewing photos without augmentation results in significantly less facial dissatisfaction than seeing conventional images (Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). Researchers found that self-photo modification had a moderating effect on face discontent; among women who digitally alter their own photographs, the contrast between baseline and enhancement-free images is more pronounced. However, the inclusion of hashtags resulted in more face unhappiness than the identical enhancement-free photographs with no hashtags. On the other hand, other researchers found that happiness and neutrality were the most often stated feelings on Instagram in relation to body image dimensions, and these findings might give a continual current emotional representation of Instagram body-related trends (Malighetti et al., 2020).

### 1.3. Stereotyping and Gender Differences

Young women prefer to imitate conventional feminine cues promoted in mass media through self-taken smartphone images. Posing behaviors reported in Goffman's gender display framework, which depict a power inequality between men and women, are

among these stereotyped indications (Butkowski et al., 2020). Gender presentation is common in women's Instagram selfies, but it is done subtly, according to (Butkowski et al., 2020). Additionally, women get more criticism when they include and emphasize gender characteristics in their selfies. Verrastro et al. (2020) called for a more thorough evaluation and contextualization of the gender disparity in user-generated content and claimed that the presence of gender stereotyping in Instagram selfies is connected to feedback that is reinforced. Instagram selfies reinforce conventional gender norms and highlight specific gender norms. Furthermore, it's reported that female participants are more likely than men to use filters on their images, utilize applications to enhance personal photos, and share their photos on other social networks (Verrastro et al., 2020)

Every culture utilizes social media differently in relation to its cultural values, and the media is crucial in teaching people about diverse cultures and acquainting people with them to prevent stereotypes. According to collectivism, religious views, and social standards have a considerable influence on how users perceive and utilize Instagram (Al-Kandari et al., 2016). These researchers found that Arabic male users were more likely to use Instagram to upload personal photographs, to share personal information, and to have public accounts, while females are more inclined to have private accounts.

### 1.4. Unrealistic Beauty Standards and "Fake" Representation

Convincing evidence supports the notion that conventional media shapes women's ideas of beauty and self-image by encouraging them to perceive an extremely thin body type as desirable or attractive (Mills et al., 2017). Many people actively seek out idealized pictures in the

media, as opposed to only being passive consumers of the media's artificial beauty norms. In this research it's claimed that social media are more participatory than conventional media, and research into how self-presentation techniques affect people's views of attractiveness has just recently started (Mills et al., 2017).

Body image and unrealistic beauty standards have been identified as major concerns for users of Instagram (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019; Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018; Mills et al., 2017). Social media's idealized pictures of beautiful women can have a detrimental influence on women's body image and wellbeing (Mingoia et al., 2017). Women prefer to portray idealized photographs on social media, but some also upload natural, no-makeup photos. After seeing the research photographs, individuals in the "makeup-only" condition were shown to be less happy with their facial look and more driven to make changes to their face, hair, and skin (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019). The "no-makeup" condition participants' body image and mood were unaffected by viewing the research photographs. The findings of study imply that selfies without makeup may lessen any adverse effects of idealized made-up photos on women's facial worries (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019).

Instagram's tendency toward "fake" representation is causing users to become increasingly concerned as they post images of ideal lives that do not exist. According to some scholars the discrepancy between online and real-life photos leads to anxiety and discontent and is associated with problems with emotional regulation (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016; Tiggemann, 2005). One of the research finding suggest that when users of Instagram post selfies promoting their positive body image, there is a chance that this may lead to Instagram-related conflict and bad results for

romantic relationships (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016). There is a ton of data to suggest that many women and girls in Western nations are unhappy with their body types and sizes, with a specific desire to lose weight (Mills et al., 2017). Furthermore, it's believed that young girls with greater actual body weight and thoughts about being overweight were more likely to have a lack of self-esteem. These factors contribute that young girls are unable to detect and discriminate between actual and edited bodies, as well as unrealistic slimness and proportions of the body. Additionally, users may struggle to discern between their real identities and their digital personas due to idealized representation (Tiggemann, 2005).

### 1.5. Mental Health

In the modern period, the younger generation functions as active users of social media, which tends to have mental health issues. Understanding the dangers of the current scenario requires additional information and the link between mental health issues and social media is only the starting point (Bashir & Bhat, 2017). These authors suggested that social media use has risky repercussions on young adults since issues with mental health that arise in childhood can spread like an epidemic to all people throughout their lives (Bashir & Bhat, 2017).

Sadagheyani & Tatari (2021) demonstrated that social media has both beneficial and detrimental impacts on mental health. Anxiety, despair, loneliness, problems with sleeping, poor mental well-being signs, suicidal and self-harm ideas, elevated levels of emotional distress, cyberbullying, unhappiness with one's body image, anxiety about missing out, and lower life satisfaction were some of the negative outcomes. Accessing other people's health experiences and professional information on health, controlling depression,

emotional support, and community building were all positive impacts (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021)

However, the findings of another research when analyzed at the individual level showed that greater social media use was not linked to higher mental health difficulties across development. This study included an 8-year longitudinal investigation on the relationship between individual social media use, sadness, and anxiety (Coyne et al., 2020). As seen in the literature, the conclusions on the relationship between social media usage and various elements of mental health are frequently ambiguous and, in some cases, contradictory across research (Valkenburg et al., 2022).

## 2. Methodology

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches based on an interpretive paradigm. It utilized both deductive and inductive reasoning at the same time. In the deductive approach, Social Comparison Scale has been used to gather data with a five-point Likert scale. The quantitative method was utilized to make a component structure analysis and to find mean values in participant responses for the social comparison scale, after the collection of all data it was put into tables through SPSS 29. Additionally, qualitative narrative analysis was conducted regarding participants' blog descriptions. The study has investigated several key areas related to the impact of Instagram on its users' self-representation. These include age and gender differences in influence style, users' stereotyping, reality vs. virtuality, and toxic influence, such as body image, unrealistic beauty standards, and fake representation. Open-ended short answer questions have been asked to participants. Their results used to do narrative analysis, in that way discovery of patterns and themes from the data

collected. To carry out this study, 105 participants between the ages of eighteen to twenty-five were questioned about their Instagram activities, their usage and how they feel compared to others. To ensure that this sample is varied in terms of gender, race, and socioeconomic background, purposeful sampling was used. Data was collected using electronic questionnaires with participants.

RQ: How does the Instagram platform affect a person's well-being through comparison with other users?

To answer this research, question this study focused on two research objectives. Firstly, the study has tried to investigate the effects of Instagram on mental health as well as how its features affect how users portray themselves, the function of social comparison in affecting self-representation, and how users express themselves on Instagram. Then, by using the social comparison scale developed by Allan and Gilbert and tried to examine disparities in the impact styles of gender, age, and nationality and to determine relationships between its components (Allan & Gilbert, 1995).

### 2.1. Procedures

This study received ethics approval through Arkin University of Creative Arts and Design an Ethics Board (2022/2023/003). Necessary permission has been taken to use the Social Comparison Scale. The SPSS software (v29, IBM, SPSS Statistics, Chicago, USA) was used for data analyses.

### 2.1. Demographics of Participants

**Table 1.** Demographics Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Study group n,%	
Participants	105	100
Gender		
Male	33	31.4

Female	71	67.6
Other	1	1
Age Range		
18-20	15	14.3
21-23	53	50.5
24-25	37	35.2
Nationality		
-	2	1.9
American	1	1.0
Australian	2	1.9
Belarusian	1	1.0
British	6	5.7
Bulgarian	1	1.0
Chinese	3	2.9
Cypriot	8	7.6
Dutch	5	4.8
Eritrean	1	1.0
Filipino	2	1.9
French	1	1.0
Georgian	1	1.0
German	1	1.0
Hungarian	1	1.0
Indian	3	2.9
Irish	1	1.0
Italian	4	3.8
Jordanian	3	2.9
Kazakh	1	1.0
Kazakh, Russian	1	1.0
Libyan	4	3.8
Lithuanian	1	1.0
Malaysian	2	1.9
Maltese	2	1.9
Moroccan	2	1.9
Netherlands	1	1.0
Palestinian	1	1.0
Peruvian	2	1.9
Polish	3	2.9
Portuguese	4	3.8

Russian	15	14.3
Singaporean	1	1.0
South African	1	1.0
Spanish	1	1.0
Sri Lankan	1	1.0
Syrian	1	1.0
Taiwana	1	1.0
Tanzanian	1	1.0
Turkish	7	6.7
Turkish, Belarusian	1	1.0
Ukrainian	2	1.9
Vietnamese	1	1.0
Yemeni	1	1.0

For this study, 105 participants (33 males, 71 females, and 1 other) took part in this research, and ages were divided into three categories: 18-20 (15 participants), 21-23 (53 participants), and 24-25 (37 participants). Participants were provided with an electronic questionnaire of demographic and frequent questions and a Social Comparison Scale. Only ages 21-25 and Instagram users could take part in this research. The mean daily hours participants spent on Instagram was 2,48 hours (SD = 1.9), which states that people that participate in this research were active users. Totally 41 nationalities participated with four most common were Russian (15 participants), Cypriot (8 participants), Turkish (7 participants) and British (6 participants).

## 2.2. Measures

It was decided to start developing the Social Comparison Scale using a semantic differential technique (Osgood et al., 1957). This entails giving Ss an unfinished phrase before a string of bipolar structures. Although social comparisons must be measured in the interpersonal areas that are relevant to the individual (for instance, being less skilled at football might turn out to be an insignificant comparison for one

person but highly significant for another whose ability in sports was crucial for their self-esteem), overall comparison evaluations, such as "inferior-superior" and "unlikable-likable", appear generally prominent for the majority of people.

A previous version of this scale (Gilbert et al., 1995; Gilbert & Allan, 1994) was built with five social comparisons on important, global dimensions that were thought to be pertinent to comparative judgments of rank and status. The bipolar constructions "inferior-superior", "incompetent-more competent", "unlikeable-likable", "less reserved-more reserved", "left out-accepted", and more were all used as anchors for a ten-point scale that students were asked to use to complete the statement "In relationship to others I generally feel (Allan & Gilbert, 1995). This group of elements was jointly referred to as social comparison (rank).

In the short answer part, these questions were asked to participants:

How many hours do you spend on Instagram daily?

Do you compare yourself to other Instagram users? How often?

Please give a brief description of your blog. What is it about? What do you post? (2-3 sentences)

### 3. Results

The analyses were divided into two sections. First, a factor analysis and internal reliability study of the 105 participants. Also, narrative analysis was done to uncover recurring themes and patterns in the responses provided by participants to description of their blogs. Although theory offered some guidance, it was initially uncertain if the aspects of rank and those related to "fitting in" and feeling accepted would separate out as distinct components in this study.

#### 3.1. Factor Structure of the Social Comparison Scale

The social comparison scale's component structure was examined for participant responses as described below. Apart from item 5 ("same-different"), which had a mean value of 5.32 (SD = 2.37) and was removed from further component analysis since it looked to be more a measure of introversion (bipolar construct), other inter-item correlations were positive and significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that various social comparison areas are differently related. After being checked for deviation, the distribution of values for each of the remaining 10 items was determined to be adequate. The 10-item scale's Cronbach alpha was 0.89.

With a cut of 0.5 for the inclusion of a variable in the interpretation of a component, a principal components analysis with varimax rotation was conducted. Two of the components in the solution provided by this analysis have eigenvalues larger than one. In the factor space, these two variables explained 63.9% of the variation (see Table 1). On one of the two criteria, each of the ten items was loaded over the cutoff.

The answer was translated as follows. Items that were particularly connected to rank and attractiveness structures are made up of component 1. They were "inferior-superior," "incompetent-more competent," "unlikable-more likable," "left out-accepted", "untalented-more talented," "weaker-stronger," "unconfident-more confident," "undesirable-more desirable" and "unattractive-more attractive." Social position and appearance have been linked, with more attractive people being preferred over those who are less attractive. In fact, rank is overflowing with appealing objects that are pleasant, desired, and attractive.

The "outsider-insider" item in component 2 was intended to assess a person's social group fit and acceptability. Being an extrovert or an introvert is tightly correlated, and these traits are more about personal characteristics and not much about comparison with other users.

Because the item "different-same" exhibited a negative item-to-item correlation with "outsider-insider," it was omitted from the analysis, leading to the conclusion that there are two distinct determinants of rank and social group fit. To provide a pure component for rank and a pure element for group fit, it was chosen to consider the personal characteristic item independently. Also, the mean scores of the respondents were higher than 5, indicating that they did not experience issues with self-worth and self-esteem.

**Table 2.** Factor Loadings for the Social Comparison Scale (N=105)

*Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>*

In relation to others, I feel...	Component 1	Component 2
Inferior-superior	5.94	1.72
Incompetent-more competent	6.25	1.84
Unlikable-more likable	6.19	1.89
Left out-accepted	6.16	2.10
Different-same	5.32	2.37
Untalented-more talented	6.05	2.21
Weaker-stronger	6.37	2.08
Unconfident-more confident	6.23	2.36
Undesirable-more desirable	6.05	2.23
Unattractive-more attractive	6.12	2.44
Insider-outsider	5.74	2.13

**Source:** The Social Comparison Scale

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for all participants' responses. All mean values are greater than 5, which means that those users have a sense of superiority over others. One of the highest mean values 6.37 (SD = 2.08) scored the "weaker and stronger" item, which means that participants feel more powerful than others and it represents positive self-worth. Also, one of the lowest mean values 5.32 (SD = 2.37) got the item "different-same" and it was the only one from the bipolar construct which states that participants did not face a mental health issue.

**Table 3.** Means and SDs of The Social Comparison Scale for Gender Differences (N=105)

Gender	Male N: 33	Female N: 71	Other N: 1	
SCS1	Mean	6.18	5.90	1.0
	Std. Dev.	1.78	1.60	-
SCS2	Mean	6.42	6.23	2.0
	Std. Dev.	2.11	1.66	-
SCS3	Mean	6.12	6.20	8.0
	Std. Dev.	1.95	1.87	-
SCS4	Mean	6.36	6.07	6.00
	Std. Dev.	1.98	2.18	-
SCS5	Mean	5.09	5.45	4.00
	Std. Dev.	2.49	2.34	-
SCS6	Mean	5.94	6.41	9.00
	Std. Dev.	2.51	1.97	-
SCS7	Mean	6.33	6.41	5.00
	Std. Dev.	2.34	1.97	-

SCS8	Mean	6.54	6.07	7.00
	Std. Dev.	2.50	2.31	-
SCS9	Mean	6.64	5.82	3.00
	Std. Dev.	1.98	2.29	-
SCS10	Mean	6.39	6.00	6.00
	Std. Dev.	2.37	2.49	-
SCS11	Mean	5.36	5.96	3.00
	Std. Dev.	2.0	2.12	-

Table 3 represents the means and standard deviations for participants' responses to scale according to gender. By looking at the mean values of scales, in 6 out of 11 items males have a greater number, which means that they have a higher self-worth. One of the greatest differences is in item 9 ("undesirable-more desirable"), as males have 6.64 means (Sd = 2.0), while females have 5.82 means (SD = 2.3). It shows that men feel more desirable compared to other Instagram users.

**Table 4.** Means and SDs of The Social Comparison Scale for Age Differences (N=105)

Gender	18-20 N: 15	21-23 N: 53	24-25 N: 37	
SCS1	Mean	5.67	5.66	5.94
	Std. Dev.	1.95	1.36	1.72
SCS2	Mean	5.40	6.13	6.25
	Std. Dev.	2.13	1.64	1.84
SCS3	Mean	5.67	5.87	6.19
	Std. Dev.	2.16	1.71	1.89
SCS4	Mean	5.93	5.79	6.16
	Std. Dev.			

SCS5	Mean	1.79	1.89	2.10
	Std. Dev.	5.33	5.26	5.32
SCS6	Mean	2.02	2.34	2.37
	Std. Dev.	5.53	5.26	6.05
SCS7	Mean	2.06	2.34	2.21
	Std. Dev.	6.20	6.28	6.37
SCS8	Mean	2.57	1.78	2.08
	Std. Dev.	6.07	6.15	6.23
SCS9	Mean	2.40	2.24	2.36
	Std. Dev.	5.60	5.70	6.05
SCS10	Mean	2.26	2.05	2.23
	Std. Dev.	5.20	6.11	6.12
SCS11	Mean	2.70	2.27	2.44
	Std. Dev.	6.00	5.45	5.74
	Mean	2.14	1.94	2.13
	Std. Dev.			

Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for participants' responses to scale according to age categories. It was found that all mean values are greater in the ages of 24-25, except item 11 ("insider-outsider"), which states that people become more confident and have higher self-esteem as they are getting older.

**Table 5.** Daily Hours Spent on Instagram (N=105)

Daily Hours Spent on Instagram	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Hours	.0	12.0	2.48	1.94

Table 5 presents the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviations for a question regarding daily hours spent on the

Instagram platform. For this study, it was important to analyze only active users and according to the results, the mean daily hour participants spent on Instagram was 2,48 hours (SD = 1.9). The term active here has been used to mean the time spent on Instagram.

**Table 6.** Daily Hours Spent on Instagram (N=105)

Comparison with other users	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	17	16.2	16.2	16.2
Often	11	10.5	10.5	26.7
Sometimes	30	28.6	28.6	55.2
No	47	44.8	44.8	100.0
Total	105	100.0	100.0	

Participants corresponded to a question regarding comparison (see Table 6) as follows: “Yes” (17 participants), “Often” (11 participants), “Sometimes” (30 participants), and “No” (47 participants). It was found that 55.2% of the total 105 participants compare themselves and the rest 44.8% do not compare to other Instagram users.

### 3.2. Narrative Analysis of Participants’ Instagram Blogs

For capturing the narratives of Instagram profiles, participants were asked to describe their blogs in 2-3 sentences. This analysis was conducted to understand the themes and motives of participants for using a social media platform “Instagram”. Thus, the relationship between Instagram users' purpose of using Instagram and the benefit-harm balance (the psychological well-being, self-esteem and social comparison of Instagram users) was tried to be understood. All 105 participants of 41 different nationalities gave answers to this question, and it was important to collect a wide range of blog themes and patterns. To

participate in this study, it was necessary to be an Instagram user, however at least seven participants responded that they do not post anything or do not have a proper blog.

#### 3.2.1. Personal Blog and Lifestyle

Many participants responded that they use their blogs for personal needs, share their personal, with friends or family photos and stories. It was also seen that some of users have at least two accounts for their personal blogs and work. Also, users usually have mixed categories of blogs, as they combine shared content of lifestyle with travelling, beauty, education, hobbies, or other things.

“Just my life. Usually, I post photos of me or very exciting places.” (Russian, female, age 18-20)

“My Instagram is generally about me. I like to share my thoughts about my life or about world's events.” (Russian, male, age 24-25)

“I post my personal life, with my friends and family, and photos from my view such as animals or my university.” (Cypriot, female, age 18-20)

“I have 2 Instagram accounts a personal and a work. On my personal account, I do not post a lot of posts but when I do, they are either pictures of me or my friends, I post more on my stories of things I like and on my work account I just post my artwork and support other artists.” (British, male, age 24-25)

“Daily lifestyle and fitness content.” (Portuguese, female, age 21-23)

#### 3.2.2. Exploring and Travelling

Many participants answered that they use their blogs for sharing moments from their traveling experiences, recent places explored, and even photos of nature. Again, it was clearly seen that people

combined this category of their blog with other ones.

“I post about travel mostly. Landscapes and places, not myself.” (French, female, age 21-23).

“I post mainly my travel experiences, party nights and selfies that I like of myself - both posts and stories.” (Bulgarian, female, age 21-23).

“I post my photos from travels, but I also share the places that I visit and also some stories about my studies” (Turkish, female, age 24-25)

### 3.2.3. Beauty and Fashion

Some participants responded that they use their blogs for sharing or viewing beauty, fashion, and make-up content. It was found that usually users add this motive to other categories such as lifestyle and travel. Some users even share or watch tutorials, as well as post professional model photos.

“Beauty. Showing how to make brows and lashes.” (Russian, female, age 21-23)

“I like to post content based on fashion and makeup. As well as express my unique views on life.” (Russian, male, 21-23)

“Lifestyle, beauty, and education are the main topics” (Georgian, female, age 21-23)

“Fashion, Food and Travel.” (Malaysian, female, age 24-25)

### 3.2.4. Arts and Hobbies

Some participants mentioned that they use their blogs for sharing own arts, thoughts, other talents, as well as to follow updates of other artists, athletes, influencers etc. Two of the participants mentioned that they have their first primary account for personal lifestyle, second one for sharing their talents and having some portfolio page.

“Hobby art, video game clips.” (Singaporean, female, age 18-20)

“I do graphic design and videography and I also post other people’s work as well as long as it is considered art.” (Libyan, male, age 24-25).

“Digital artist. Usually post illustrations and reels.” (Russian, female, 21-23)

“I have 2 accounts: 1 personal account and 1 graphic design account. On my personal account I share photos, reels, and stories at least once in 2 days. On my job account I sometimes share lots and sometimes I stop share anything for a month because it is a portfolio account, so when my project is ready, I share it.” (Russian, female, age 21-23)

### 3.2.5. Work and Education

Few participants responded that they use their blogs for work or education, as it was more about being additional information. Some of Instagram accounts were focused on exact work or education, but most of the time it was a one more function or source that Instagram can provide. Most of the participants had personal accounts, but professional accounts faced in few cases, and they stated that it is a good platform for finding customers and sharing offers. Moreover, students usually share reels, stories, and posts of their student life and activities.

“It is a social life blog. The content is mostly centered about student life, as well as on-the-job activities.” (Russian, male, 21-23).

“Company content.” (Spanish, female, 24-25)

“Work psychology.” (Polish, female, 24-25)

## Discussion and Conclusion

Through the narrative analysis of 105 Instagram users, this study's findings show various themes of Instagram blogs and how people use the platform in practical way. Main five categories were found ranging from personal lifestyle to work and

education. Analyzing these narratives will help to get important insights into the goals and passions of Instagram users, which will help to better understand user involvement and behavior on platforms, such as Instagram. It highlights the significance of self-expression and self-representation on social media, as well as giving opportunities of being in touch with other users, keeping abreast of current news and situations, sharing talents, watching tutorials and many others.

The aim of this study was to find how Instagram impacts its users, especially leading to a comparison trap. Participants responded to demographic and frequent questions about Instagram and comparison and filled up the social comparison scale (SCS). Of the 105 participants, 55.2% compare themselves to other Instagram users, while the remaining 44.8% do not. It was essential to carry out a narrative analysis of participants' blogs to uncover their motivations for utilizing the Instagram site, which resulted in five main categories. For social comparison investigation, it was important to identify disparities in the impact styles of age, gender, and nationality.

The social comparison scale items used in this study were developed by Allan and Gilbert based on both theoretical and clinical data (Allan & Gilbert, 1995). The scale included rank elements, attractiveness items, and things related to feeling different and outside the group (Allan & Gilbert, 1995). The hypothesized difference between comparisons of rank and attractiveness, and comparisons of social fit (only "different-same") was distinct for participants. The item "different-same" was left out of the component analysis since it had a negative inter-item correlation with "outsider-insider," as a result there were two distinct components that determine rank together

with attractiveness and separately social group fit. All the mean values were higher than five, indicating that people feel superior to others. Additionally, it was discovered that older people had higher self-worth than younger individuals as well as that women have lower self-esteem than men. According to the Social Comparison Scale creators a semantic differential technique is beneficial and might be modified to study many aspects that other researchers believe are pertinent to psychopathology (Allan & Gilbert, 1995). This study provides early evidence that status, visual appeal, and social 'fitting in' are important aspects. It was anticipated that most participants would have mental health problems due to social comparison, but the study discovered that users' self-esteem was higher than expected.

The study's conclusions can assist Instagram users make wise decisions about how they behave online and represent themselves as well as may also motivate users to use the platform in a positive and healthy way.

Main limitation of this study is that research especially focused on active young Instagram users who uses time basely active their Instagram accounts. By means that spending time on Instagram was the main variable to choose participants. However, this research wasn't differentiating actively content creators from passive users. With this preference it has eliminated the chance to gather data on active, passive and/or stalker (all passive users are not stalkers) Instagram users. Social media usage patterns and social media effect on their psychology may differentiate for active and passive users. Suggestion for further research is to apply wider research both on active and passive Instagram users to reach more comprehensive results.

In addition to that this study focused on only young users who are between 18-25 age categories. However, based on the latest available data (Kemp, 2023), even users aged 18 to 24 account for the largest share of Instagram's with 517.7 million users aged 18 to 24 (32.0%), other age groups also have meaningful shares. 131.1 million users aged 13 to 17 (8.1%), 488.7 million users aged 25 to 34 (29.6%), 246.3 million users aged 35 to 44 (15.3%), 132.2 million users aged 45 to 54 (8.2%), 68.2 million users aged 55 to 64 (4.2%) and 41.5 million users aged 65 and above (2.6%) (Kemp, 2023). In today's conditions where body image has gained such importance, a holistic evaluation of age groups that use Instagram intensively, instead of focusing only on young people, can provide a different perspective to the field.

## Declarations

\* *Approval of Institutional Review Board (IRB)*: Ethical approval was received on 25 May 2023 with 2022-2023/003 numbered decision from the Ethics Board of Arkin University of Creative Arts and Design, TRNC.

\* *Author's Contribution Rate*: The first author's contribution rate is 60% while that of the second author is 40%.

\* *Conflict of Interest*: The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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