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The Power of Pictures: Exploring the association between the level and type of Instagram use and wellbeing among female emerging adults

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Female emerging adults (18-25) use social media more than males and predominantly engage in image-focused content, creating and manipulating attractive presentations of themselves through the transformation of images. Female emerging adults are particularly impressionable to media influences because identity development occurs during this stage. Although Instagram use has been associated with increased depressive symptoms, social comparison and body dissatisfaction, the impact of the types of images being viewed has not been measured to date. This is the first phase of a larger study, investigating if various types of images on Instagram impact differently on mental health. This phase aimed to provide information on the types of images that are popular on Instagram through a content analysis of Instagram posts. Instagram displays an 'explore' page, which showcases popular public images and videos. This page is usually modified based on a user's interests and following habits, however a blank Instagram account simply shows a variety of popular and commonly accessed images at any point in time. One hundred images were sampled per day for three consecutive weeks, until saturation of image types was achieved. Preliminary analyses indicate the most popular images on Instagram are posted by celebrity accounts. Selfies, fitness-related imagery and posed photos highlighting aspects of the body are also commonly posted. This study may provide further information on the link between social media and the prevalence of mental health issues, including body image disturbance and disordered eating among female emerging adults. Given the unregulated nature of Instagram content, it is vital to first identify images that are being popularly/routinely followed.

Biography

Carmen Papaluca is a PhD candidate at the University of Notre Dame, Australia. She graduated as the highest performing Health and Physical Education student in 2015, also achieving First Class Honours. Her PhD thesis is titled "The Power of Pictures: Exploring the association between the level and type of Instagram use and wellbeing among female emerging adults."

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