Psychology and Psychiatry: Open access

Instagram use and depressive symptoms among university students

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Abstract

Individuals who use Instagram have led to the association of various mental health disorders. Instagram was found to have the highest negative correlation associated with depression than when compared to other social media platforms. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the relationship between Instagram and the display of depressive symptoms. Social media use will be defined as checking frequency and time spent. A mix method design consisting of questions gathering how much time participants generally use Instagram for and what purpose they use it for. This study includes the Beck Depression Inventory which measures the severity of depression which has been widely used in previous research. When adolescents use Instagram as a way to relieve stress or habituated of going onto the app, they have been found to feel more psychological distress the more time and frequency spent. Instagram is a platform that helps businesses flourish and help others connect however, without caution and care it could negatively affect an individual's well-being. Instagram helps views set unrealistic expectations of a perfect life where adolescents should occasionally learn to take time off from social media and limit themselves to prevent adding more distress to their personal lives. Nowadays phone and social media settings allow individuals to set a daily time limit on the app. Further research should investigate minimizing the usage of time and frequency spent on Instagram.

The use of social media has been increasing in the past few years with a 25% increase from 2015 to 2017 alone, which means 37% (2.80 billion people) of the world population are today active social media users (Kemp, 2017). The main reason for the numbers is the fast development of technology and information sharing through the internet and the easy access to the social media. The easy access results in around 91% of 16-24 year-olds use internet for social networking (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017). Since social media has become inseparable components of youth's everyday lives, the impact of social media on its users has been long discussed and studied in the field of psychology. Most of the impacts are found negatively influencing to mental-health, for example addiction, loneliness, cyberbullying (alongside texting, which could lead to depression and anxiety), sleep disturbance, body-image issues, and depression (Attwood, 2013; Cabral, 2008; Davey, 2016; Levenson, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz & Primack, 2016; Royal Society for Public Health, 2017; Sidani, Shensa, Radovic, Miller, Colditz, Hoffman, & Primack, 2016; Song, Larose, Eastin, & Lin, 2004; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). Until now, one of the most studied social media is still Facebook since this platform has billion monthly active users years after it was launched in February 2004. A review article was done by reviewing approximately 412 research articles in 5 categories of study, including the descriptive analysis of the users, motivations for using Facebook, self-presentation, Facebook's role as a platform for social interactions, and privacy and information disclosure until 2012 (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012).

But recent studies are shifting into studying the influence of the new popular social media, Instagram. One of the shifting reasons might be the growing number of users accounted for millennials and Gen Z. In 2016, roughly 59% of 18-29-year-old adults in the U.S. were using Instagram and this age cohort dominated among Instagram users. Today, Instagram is one of the popular social media platforms among social media users. Based on its active users, Instagram globally has more than 600 million users around the world with an increase of 100 million users within six months (June - December 2016) (Smart Insights, 2017; Yusuf, 2016). In Indonesia, Parikesit (2016) stated that Instagram has 22 million monthly users with the largest users' age between 18 - 24 years (59%) and more than half of users are female (63%). Instagram main features are photo and video sharing. These features allow its users to also produce their own photos and videos contents. Frequently published content by users in Indonesia includes selfie photos (>50%), visited places (55%), travelling photos (53%), photo or video of friends and family (50%), food (40%), showed off newly purchased item (>20%) (Parikesit, 2016). The photos and videos that are published can be seen on the timeline and feedbacks can be given through likes and comments by other users. Other features which include photo filters to beautify themselves, tag other users to their photos and videos, published Instagram content to other social media, and share photos and videos temporally by using one of the feature in Instagram, namely Instagram story. However, besides these great features, there are several researchers that show Instagram actually has negative effects to mental health (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Lup, Trub, & Rosenthal, 2015; Mullin, 2017; Royal Society for Public Health, 2017). The Royal Society for Public Health (2017) conducted a research regarding the positive and negative impacts of popular social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram. The negative impacts measured are anxiety, depression, loneliness, (lack of) sleep, body image (issues), real-world relationships, bullying, and FOMO. Accounting all those negative impacts, Instagram comes out as the worst social media for young's mental health (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017). They also suggested that young people who are heavy users of Instagram are prone to psychological distress including anxiety and depression (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017). Symptoms of social anxiety in young people particularly linked with operating more than one account simultaneously (Becker, Alzahabi, & Hopwood, 2013). As well as anxiety disorders, approximately 80,000 young people in the UK suffer from severe depression (Green, McGinnity, Meltzer, Ford, & Goodman, 2005). Meanwhile in 2015, nearly 3 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the United States had at least one major depressive episode in the past year (National Institute of Mental Health, 2015). Thus, there is growing evidence linking social media use and depression in young people, with studies showing that negatively comparing oneself with others is associated with significantly increased odds of depressive symptoms.