

EFFECTS OF IMAGES IN SOCIAL MEDIA
ON LIFE SATISFACTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Social media use is known to impact a variety of psychological constructs. One of the most used social media platforms is Instagram. Previous studies have investigated the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being, including life satisfaction. Only a small amount of the literature assesses the causal relationship between the profiles that users see and their well-being. In this experimental study, 163 undergraduate student participants viewed 12 Instagram profiles and answered questions about their life satisfaction. Based on pilot data, profiles were categorized as portraying high or low life satisfaction. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions that differed with respect to the frequency of the two types of profiles: 1) 0 high-life-satisfaction profiles, 2) 6 high-life-satisfaction profiles, and 3) 12 high-life-satisfaction profiles. We predicted that the more high-life-satisfaction profiles a person saw, the lower their life satisfaction would be. We did not find significant differences between the three groups, and thus we do not have evidence for a causal relationship between the well-being portrayed in profiles and the well-being of users. Because our study was powered to detect an effect of .2, our results are consistent with a null or small effect. Further research is needed in order to determine the connection between Instagram profile content and its impact on psychological well-being.

Keywords: social media, Instagram, life satisfaction, well-being

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

α	Cronbach's index of internal consistency
df	Degrees of freedom: number of values free to vary after certain restrictions have been placed on the data
F	Fisher's F ratio: A ratio of two variances
M	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
SD	Standard deviation: the measure of the amount of variation or dispersion of a set of values
MSE	Mean standard error: the variability of sample means in a sampling distribution of means
p	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
r	Pearson product-moment correlation
t	Computed value of t test
f	Effect size: a number measuring the strength of the relationship between two variables in a population, or a sample-based estimate of that quantity
η^2	Eta-squared: measures the proportion of variance associated with each main effect and interaction effect in an ANOVA model
N	Number of participants
n	Number of participants
%	Percent
<	Less than
=	Equal to

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INTRODUCTION

Many individuals use social media to stay connected to the world around them. With websites such as Facebook, achieving 1.15 billion active users daily (Newsroom FB, 2017), and Instagram, achieving 500 million active users daily (Statista, 2018), there is opportunity for immense social exchange and in turn the emotional/cognitive influence that comes with it. While Facebook and Instagram may share some qualities, they are largely different. Instagram is specifically a photo and video sharing app while Facebook is considered a text-based platform. Based on experience, Instagram and Facebook differ in that the profiles that people will follow on each of the platforms are different. On Instagram one may follow and be followed by millions of anonymous people at a time, including beauty influencers, adventure blogs, as well as friends and family. On Facebook your circle is smaller and limited to 5000 maximum friends. The current study focuses on Instagram because there are few studies that have investigated its impact on its users.

The things that people see on social media sites (SMS) influence them in many ways. For example, built-in algorithms make it so that the people and/or profiles we follow will impact the posts we see most often. Research studies have found that social media can both positively and negatively influence its users. For example, social media has the power to make us feel more connected to others, and at the same time make us feel less content with our lives (Denti et al., 2012; Deters & Mehl, 2013; Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

Invoking the social comparison theory, researchers have been able to examine that social media sites offer a prime platform for stimulating and making comparisons (Denti et al., 2012;

Krasnova et al., 2015). Users tend to make these upward or downward comparisons, which can inadvertently impact the user (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). Additionally, the role that users play, either passive or active, while engaging with social media can impact the positive or negative influence that the user may experience (Deters & Mehl, 2013; Metzger et al. 2012).

The comparisons that users make online may be inaccurate due to the tendency of users to showcase only the positive things that they may experience (Denti et al., 2012; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). Because of this climate on social media and the tendency for individuals to put their best foot forward, so to speak, a correspondence bias may be committed. The correspondence bias is defined as is the tendency for people to under-emphasize situational explanations for an individual's observed behavior while over-emphasizing dispositional and personality-based explanations for their behavior (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). Social media users may be making inaccurate comparisons ultimately resulting in the negative effects of social media. The current study aims to examine how the pages/images that users view on social media, specifically Instagram, influences a user's life satisfaction.

Effects of Social Media Use on the User

There is contradicting evidence suggesting that social media can have a positive or negative impact on psychological outcomes. Social media use has been found to impact an array of variables. One study examining Facebook usage among college students found that Facebook usage was positively correlated with life satisfaction, social trust, and civic engagement (Valenzuela et al., 2009). On the other hand, studies have found that variables such as depression, loneliness, envy, jealousy, and anxiety have also been positively correlated with social network use, or SNU, while life satisfaction and happiness were negatively correlated with SNU (Denti et al., 2012; Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Appel et al. 2015; Satici and Uysal, 2015).

Because the literature finds both positive and negative associations with SNU, it is important to discuss other influences that may moderate or mediate these effects. The role that users play on social media, has been found to impact the positive or negative influence of social media on the user.

Active or Passive Use

Social network use has often been discussed as active or passive based on the characteristics of the users' behavior (Heinonen, 2011; Pagani et al., 2011). Active usage involves creating content and communicating directly with others; for example, posting status updates, commenting, chatting, and sharing posts. Passive usage involves consuming others information without communicating with others. Active social network site use has been found to correlate positively with life satisfaction (Deters & Mehl, 2013). In their study, Deters and Mehl (2013) conducted an experiment where college students were either assigned to a group in which they were given instructions to update Facebook statuses more often (active), or a control group who were not given any instructions. After seven days, they found that the active group reported reduced feelings of loneliness compared to the passive group. The authors suggested that active users had a greater sense of connectedness to their friends.

Verduyn et al. (2015) conducted two studies to examine how the use of Facebook over time could impact wellbeing. Study 1 was an experimental in-lab study in which users were prompted to use Facebook passively as opposed to active use. They found that users who engaged in passive usage show decreased positive affect and life satisfaction compared to users who used Facebook actively. Study 2 replicated these finding in analysis of self-report from users. Their research suggests that passive users are consuming information whilst scrolling

through their social network and being impacted by passive information whether it is consciously or not. What takes place during this potentially unconscious consumption of media?

Comparisons on Social Media

Social media provides a platform on which individuals may represent themselves and showcase their lives in relation to their peers and others. In a study conducted by Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) the authors noted that when people use social media as a channel to showcase their identities, they are inclined to present a highly selective version of themselves. The authors analyzed photos that participants shared online based on categories of qualitative analysis. In this study the researchers found that people tend to share photos representing positive events such as gatherings of friends, holidays, trips, and attractive photos while they often refrain from sharing photos of negative life events.

In the literature it has been suggested that the negative effects of social network use on well-being and depression could be caused by the vast opportunities for unflattering social comparison on social network sites (SNS). Using social comparison theory, researchers have demonstrated that social media consumption is related to higher feelings of envy while also lowering life satisfaction (Krasnova, 2015). In the Krasnova study, the authors surveyed college students and were able to conclude that that social information consumption on an SNS is associated with unintended feelings of envy, which, in turn, are negatively linked to users' cognitive and affective well-being acts a mediator in this relationship. In other words, the relationship between SNS consumption and life satisfaction is mediated by the negative thoughts and feelings that are evoked by consumption.

Another study on social media suggests that individuals make upward, or mood depleting, and downward or mood enhancing, social comparisons unconsciously (Metzger et al.,

2012). Their data was collected from over 42 million users of Renren, the most popular SNS in China. They found that much of the time users spend on social media is focused on viewing others' activities and making comparisons. Their findings corroborate earlier work in the field, which suggested that upward comparisons lower self-regard (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988) and downward comparisons elevate self-regard (Gibbons, 1986). When individuals engage in upward comparison, they are viewing something that is better than their current state (more attractive, more fun, more money, etc.) whereas in downward comparison people view something that is comparatively worse than they envision themselves.

In another study examining social comparisons, Haferkamp and Kramer (2011) conducted two online experiments in which virtual online profiles of either physically attractive or unattractive persons and profiles of users with either high or low occupational attainment were presented to the participants. The authors found that viewing social media profiles representing highly attractive comparison standards led to worse mood and less satisfaction with one's appearance compared to looking at profiles representing unattractive standards. In a similar study using attractive and unattractive profiles, Appel, Crusius, and Gerlach (2015) presented participants with specifically set up Facebook profiles. Participants were asked to compare themselves to the profile owner and to report their resulting feelings of inferiority and envy. Appel et al. found that attractive profiles caused participants to perceive themselves as inferior and to feel more envy, with inferiority predicting envy.

In one study examining envy on social media Krasnova (2013) found that individuals envied others for various reasons. Things such as travel and leisure, social interactions, and the happiness of others were the main subjects of envy on social media. In contrast, in face to face interactions, travel and leisure, success in job, and abilities are envied more often. Krasnova also

found that people in their mid-thirties were more likely to envy family happiness, while teenagers were indifferent to this information. Similarly, women were more likely to envy physical attractiveness than men. This research suggests that the subjects of envy are potentially contingent on the content that users provide on these platforms, versus in person.

Identity on social media seems to be easily represented through the picture content that individuals post. How do we know what images are good and which are bad according to the social world? Users base comparisons not only on people's written profile information (Appel et al., 2015; Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011; Verduyn et al., 2015) but also on indicators for social support other people receive in relation to themselves. These indicators of social support come in the form of likes, a positive form of social support expressed online by a button that one can hit to acknowledge approval of a post. Studies suggest that likes are of social relevance (Carr et al., 2016; Hayes et al., 2016; Wohn et al., 2016) and work as a mechanism to compare oneself with others. Social support is easily quantifiable in the amount of likes something receives online thus easily accessible for social comparisons. Recently, the amount of likes below pictures have been removed from the social media platform Instagram for some users. Where many studies use likes in an experimental setting to prompt users to make comparisons of their photos to others, now the comparison will have to take place with the content of the images posted.

Online Correspondence Bias

When individuals assume that other people's actions are as a result of dispositional, and not situational inferences they are committing the correspondence bias (Jones, 1979). Therefore, if a social media user sees a positive image, they could assume that the person in the photo is happy and that this is an aspect of their personality. They will not account for the situation that is making the individual happy (Chou & Edge, 2012). People can directly observe others'

experiences and emotions via in person social settings. This limitation in the scope of peer observation may lead to biased sampling of others' emotional lives especially when the exchange is not even in person but rather digital. People experience more positive emotion and less negative emotion in social contexts compared to solitary ones (Diener, Larsen, & Emmons, 1984; Larson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Graef, 1982), and a SNS is constant social context. Failing to see others in solitary contexts, or behind the screen, where they are more likely to feel bad, and which constitute over half of people's daily lives (Oishi et al., 2004), people may underestimate the peer prevalence of negative emotional experiences especially when all that is presented on social media is positive.

As individuals have the tendency to present themselves in a positive way online (Denti et al., 2012), the content that they post will also be of a positive nature. Because of the correspondence bias we may conclude that this person is always happy because we don't think of them behind closed doors especially on social media. As a result, users on social media are being exposed to edited depictions of reality that are easily misconstrued by the user and could potentially create a negative experience for the user.

Measuring Well-being Using Life Satisfaction

Well-being is a complex construct that includes several dimensions. These dimensions can be divided into two encompassing domains: subjective and objective well-being (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015). Because of this, psychologists have developed various scales to measure each of the domains which are explored and explained in depth (Cummins et al., 2010). To summarize, subjective well-being can be defined by the individual as an internal personal assessment of their own life as a whole. Multiple sub-dimensions exist in the subjective wellbeing domain that are studied. These sub-dimensions include social, spiritual, and

psychological aspects of well-being. Of the many scales that measure subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction scales are used frequently. As discussed in the previous sections, social media use in general, as well as the type of use whether passive or active, has an impact on subjective wellbeing. There seems to be insufficient research into the influence of high subjective wellbeing images/profiles on subjective wellbeing specifically user life satisfaction. The life satisfaction scale that I will be using focuses on different aspects of life satisfaction such as relationship satisfaction and job satisfaction, satisfaction with body image etc. I aim to explore the impact that exposure to high life satisfaction profiles could have on the state of life satisfaction of a social media user.

Current Study

Previous studies have focused on the influence of social media use on a number of measures of psychological well-being, including life satisfaction. However, there is only a small amount of research that addresses the question of whether there is a causal relationship between the profiles that users are exposed to (i.e., the images that users see) and the potential change in their well-being. The goal of this study is to extend the previous research. The results should provide new insight because (a) our study focuses on Instagram's photo-dominant profile nature without likes as a basis for comparison, (b) we are varying the number of exposures to high life satisfaction profiles, and (c) measuring the impact on different aspects of life satisfaction. If we can establish a causal relationship between exposure to success profiles (images) and life satisfaction, we can better understand how best to mitigate it.

To test whether there is a causal relation, we will manipulate the number of high life satisfaction profiles participants will view. In the average condition the user will see no high life satisfaction profiles and will view only average life satisfaction profiles. In the mixed condition

the user will see a mix of high profiles as well as average profiles. In the high condition, the user will see only high profiles and no average profiles. The profiles in each condition will be determined by a pilot study as users will rate the profiles on subjective life satisfaction. To reduce the possibility that participants will guess our focus, we will provide a cover story as to why they are reviewing the profiles. We will then measure life satisfaction of the user in their current state after the exposure. If there is a causal relation, the more higher life satisfaction profiles that the user views, the lower their life satisfaction will be, at least temporarily. Specifically, life satisfaction should be highest in the average condition, and lowest in the high condition, with the mixed condition in between.

PILOT STUDIES

The purpose of these pilot studies was to select two comparable public Instagram profiles belonging to each of the categories identified in Pilot Study 1 to be included in the main study, one where the profiler was perceived to have high life-satisfaction, and one where the profiler was perceived to have low(er) life-satisfaction. This process took three steps: choosing a pool of potential profiles, identifying the dimensions along which the high- and low-satisfaction profiles differed, and rating the perceived life-satisfaction of the profilers.

Pilot Study 1 – Choosing Instagram Profile Categories

The purpose of this pilot study was to identify the category of pages that Instagram users typically follow.

Participants

Participants were recruited from two sources. One was The University of Alabama Department of Psychology subject pool, where students received credit toward a course research participation requirement. The other participants were recruited via social media; specifically, Facebook. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 36 ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.49$). In terms of year in college, 38.66% of participants were first-year, 14.67% were sophomores, 13.33% were juniors, 6.67% were seniors, and 26.67% were not in college. For gender, 66.67% of the participants identified as female, 32% identified as male, and the remaining 1.33% did not answer the question. For Race/Ethnicity, 88% of the participants were Caucasian while 9.33% were African American, and 2.67% chose the Other category. Of the participants that completed

this pilot study (n = 75), 15 (19.7%) participants were excluded because of missing or invalid responses, resulting in a final total of 61 participants.

Procedure

Psychology participants signed up for the study through the participant recruitment website organized by the Psychology department. When they signed up for the study, they received a link to the online Qualtrics survey. Other participants were contacted via instructor email and told to contact the author if they were interested. They received a link that took them to the online study. All participants first read a consent form and they clicked *continue* to acknowledge consent. They then completed three questionnaires, which took approximately 30 minutes.

Questionnaires

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants completed objective response questions about their age, gender, race/ethnicity, and year in school (Appendix A).

Social Media Intensity/Use Scale. To appropriately gauge whether the participant's data were meaningful for this study, it was important to determine whether the participant uses Instagram. An adapted version of the Facebook Intensity Scale (Ellison et. al, 2007) was used (Appendix B). This scale was originally developed to measure intensity and frequency of Facebook usage. The measure assesses social media behaviors through 32 Likert-scale attitudinal questions designed to measure the extent to which respondents are emotionally connected to, for example, Instagram, as well as the extent to which Instagram is integrated within their everyday activities. The scale was adapted for this study to include the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. These platforms were included to mask that we were

specifically studying Instagram use. The Instagram Intensity score is computed by calculating the mean of all of the items in the scale.

Main Questions. To identify the category of page followed by each participant, as well as their importance to the participants, we administered two open-ended questions:

Q1. What kind of pages do you typically follow on Instagram? (e.g., hobbies, beauty, hunting) [DO NOT list Friends, Family, Comedy/Comedian.] List 5.

Q1 was edited to include the DO NOT statement after it was determined that this study could not realistically present each family and friends to participants in the main study. Comedy/comedian was also excluded as it was determined that we could not represent comedy meaningfully in this study.

Q2. Of the pages you follow, rank each one on its importance to you, with the first one being the most important.

Results

Responses from the Social Media Intensity/Use Scale were analyzed to ensure that all participants were using Instagram, and they all were. For the main questions, we focused on the category that participants had ranked as most important. We counted the number of times each category of page was listed. Three of the response categories were excluded for this study (comedy, family, friends) because they could not be captured by our study method. When examining the most important profile categories, the excluded categories were replaced with the next ranked answer provided by the participant. These responses were then sorted into higher-level categories by the author and her advisor using an iterative process. The frequencies for each higher-level category are presented in Table 1. The top four categories were selected for

inclusion in the initial search for profiles and in Pilot Study 2: Hobbies, Influencers, Sports, and Shopping.

Table 1

Category Frequencies

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Hobbies	21	34.42
Influencers	11	18.03
Sports	9	14.75
Shopping	8	13.11
Beauty	4	6.55
School	4	6.55
Animals	2	3.27
Politics	2	3.27
Total	61	100

Initial Profile Selection

Before choosing the initial profiles, the experimenters first reviewed the individual responses from those categories. Because there were so many different categories under the Hobbies label, we chose two different types of hobbies – makeup and travel. The profile categories that we selected were Makeup (Hobbies), Fashion (Shopping), Travel (Hobbies), and Sports (Sports).

After selecting the categories, these words were searched in the Instagram browser. Public profiles were then examined and selected if the profile came up in the search. Our two main criteria for the search were that the content feature women and that the profiles had a lot of followers or few followers. As seen in other social media studies, followers measure the profiler’s status and we initially assumed that number of followers would indicate higher life satisfaction. We decided to focus on content that featured women because we anticipated that most of our participants would be women.

For the current project, 50 profiles were selected, with 5 sets for each of the five categories. In each set, the content and layout of the photos were similar, but one profile had many followers and the other did not. Other than the number of followers, the profiles differed across other dimensions, which we quantified in Pilot Study 2.

Pilot Study 2 – Ratings of Profiles Along Other Dimensions

The purpose of this pilot study was to confirm that the selected pairs of profiles differed from one another on five dimensions that were identified by the author and two research assistants familiar with the study. They were: quality of the profile content, photo quality, attractiveness of profile content, and wealth portrayed. We initially assumed that owners of the profiles that were higher on these dimensions would be perceived as having higher life satisfaction

Participants

Participants ($n = 34$), ages 18 to 22 ($M = 18.90$, $SD = 1.11$), were recruited via The University of Alabama online subject pool. They received research credit for their participation in the study. For gender, 61.77% of participants were female, 35.29% were male, and 2.94% did not report their gender identity. For race/ethnicity, 76.47% of the participants were Caucasian, 8.82% were African American, 11.77% were Other, and 2.94% did not chose a category. In terms of year in college, 70.58% of the participants were first-years, 14.71% were sophomore, 8.82% were juniors, 2.94% were seniors, and 2.95% did not say.

Procedure

Psychology participants signed up for the study through the participant recruitment website organized by the Psychology department. When they signed up for the study, they received a link to the online Qualtrics survey. Participants first read a consent form and then they

clicked *continue* to acknowledge consent. They then completed the same demographics and Social Media Intensity/Use Scale as in Pilot Study 1, followed by the main rating task. The session took approximately 30 minutes.

Dimensions Rating Task. Participants saw the 25 pairs of profiles side by side, one pair at a time. After each pair, they rated the profiles along each of the five dimensions - quality of the profile content, photo quality, attractiveness of profile content, and wealth portrayed - using a 1-4 Likert scale. Responses could be: 1 very similar, 2 (somewhat similar), 3 (somewhat different), 4 very different. In addition, they were asked in an open-ended question whether the two profiles in the pair differed on any other dimension.

Results

The rating for each pair along each dimension was averaged across participants (Table 2).

Table 2***Profile Dimensions Averaged***

Average Profiles (username)	Influence Profiles (username)	Quality of profile content	Photo quality	Attractiveness of profile content	Wealth portrayed	Averaged Dimensions Score (Difference)
gemmaste	ninanik	3.43	3.26	3.35	3.35	3.35
getfitwithsav	dreathomas	3.35	3	3.43	2.96	3.19
cote.zavala	em_popp	3.22	3.04	3.04	3.3	3.15
lizzquinfit	jadejoslyn	3.13	3.13	3.26	2.91	3.11
lischen_outdoors	cecepalm	3.13	3.04	3.26	3.17	3.15
mariootd	tullipe	3.09	3.26	3.09	3.13	3.14
giorgia	negretts	2.91	2.91	3.09	3	2.98
nash.salad	emmalyn	2.87	2.22	2.22	2.04	2.34
euquero	nikietutorials	2.87	2.83	2.52	2.22	2.61
panoram_sup	sup.loving.gil	2.86	2.61	2.48	2.74	2.67
tessacoutur	fashioninflux	2.78	2.57	2.65	2.7	2.68
smadden	hannooberg	2.77	2.35	2.65	2.35	2.53
karavirginia	melissa	2.74	2.64	2.57	2.26	2.55
ilianetnv	surfing_mood	2.65	1.96	2.3	2.52	2.36
brittneybendall	sjanaeese	2.57	1.91	2.22	2.22	2.23
kuytsaa	fashion_jackson	2.52	2.17	2.43	2.3	2.36
iheartfitness	maditidler	2.39	1.83	2.04	2.22	2.12
luminey	xoxots	2.35	2.17	2.04	2	2.14
rivera_alex	honasbarz	2.3	1.96	2	2.09	2.09
katinka	fuerte	2.3	2.43	2.74	2.61	2.52
looks.by.cassie	ampercuttress	2.17	1.39	1.83	1.83	1.81
ldcromer	vivernom	1.96	1.91	1.91	1.83	1.9
maarmakeup	nuria	1.78	1.43	1.7	1.83	1.69
dieboxer	keikei	1.74	1.87	2.04	2	1.91
michelle_vic	explorssarus	1.22	1.13	1.3	1.17	1.21

Note. The profiles were rated by Likert scale from 1 (very similar) to 4 (very different).

A post hoc analysis of participants' ratings of overall cohesiveness and aesthetic pleasantness was also performed. An independent samples t-test was performed to examine the difference between the low life satisfaction (influencers) and high life satisfaction (average) profiles. There was a significant difference for aesthetic pleasantness in the scores for the low life satisfaction group ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.63$) and the high life satisfaction ($M = 2.93, SD = 0.69$) conditions; $t(101) = -5.8, p = < .001$. There was also a significant difference for overall cohesiveness in the scores for the low life satisfaction group ($M = 3.95, SD = 0.73$) and the high life satisfaction ($M = 3.23, SD = 0.74$) conditions; $t(101) = -4.9, p = < .001$. As a whole, the low life satisfaction profiles (influencers) were more aesthetically pleasing and cohesive than the high life satisfaction profiles (average).

Pilot Study 3 – Ratings of Profile Life Satisfaction

The purpose of this pilot study was to verify that the profilers associated with the high- and low-life satisfaction profiles were actually perceived as having higher or lower life satisfaction.

Participants

Participants ($n = 51$), ages 18 to 22 ($M = 18.98, SD = .95$), were obtained via The University of Alabama online subject pool. They received research credit for their participation in the study. For gender, 72.55% of participants were female and 27.45% were male. For race/ethnicity, 82.35% of participants were Caucasian, 9.80% were African American, 7.85% were other. For year in college, 70.58% of the participants were first-years, 21.57% were sophomore, 3.92% were junior, and 3.93% were senior.

Procedure

Participants signed up for the study through the participant recruitment website organized by the Psychology department. The study was conducted online. All participants were presented with a consent form and clicked *continue* to acknowledge consent. The participants completed the same demographic survey as in the other pilot studies, but not the Social Media Intensity/Use Scale. Then participants completed the life satisfaction rating task. This process took about 30 minutes to complete. Upon completion, the participants were thanked for their participation.

Ratings Task

Because there were so many profiles to be rated, we divided the profiles into two sets. For each pair, one was assigned to a set by coin flip and the other was assigned to the second set, so that there were equal numbers of high- and low-satisfaction profiles in each set. This results in two sets of 25 profiles each. Participants rated only one set.

To obtain the ratings of perceived life satisfaction of an Instagram profiler, participants used a modified version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Pavot & Diener, 1993). The SWLS has 5 items and uses a 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) scale, with higher scores indicating higher life satisfaction (Appendix C). The coefficient alpha for the scale has ranged from .79 to .89, indicating that the scale has high internal consistency (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

The scale was modified so that the questions replaced “I” and “myself” with “the profile” or “the subject of the profile.” Participants saw the profiles one at a time. After each profile, they rated the owner of the profile on the five items.

Results

The ratings were averaged across participants for each profile. Across the board, the profiles that we had thought of as high (influencers) and low (average) in life satisfaction were reversed (Table 3). Our low (average) life-satisfaction profiles were rated as higher in life satisfaction than the profiles that we thought had high life-satisfaction (influencers).

Table 3

Life Satisfaction of Profiles

Average Profiles	Average LS	Influencer Profiles	Influencer LS	Difference
michelle_vic	3.65	explorssarus	1.336	2.314
cote.zavala	2.909	em_popp	0.622	2.287
nash.salad	4.418	emmalyn	2.171	2.247
Ldcromer	3.248	vivernom	1.864	1.384
Kuytsaa	3.836	fashion_jackson	2.495	1.341
Iheartfitness	3.573	maditidler	2.291	1.282
Luminey	3.818	xoxots	2.581	1.237
Maarmakeup	4.027	Nuria	2.8	1.227
looks.by.cassie	4.276	ambertutress	3.082	1.194
Euquero	3.702	nikietutorials	2.514	1.188
Katinka	2.864	fuerte	1.905	0.959
Dieboxer	2.933	keikei	2.155	0.779
Karavirginia	2.709	melissa	1.945	0.764
Smadden	2.99	hannooberg	2.291	0.700
Tessacoutur	3.838	fashioninflux	3.345	0.493
lischen_outdoor	2.171	cecepalm	1.764	0.408
rivera_alex	3.318	honasbarz	2.943	0.375
Giorgia	2.648	negretts	2.291	0.357
Ilianetnv	2.733	surfing_mood	2.48	0.254
Lizzquinfit	2.755	jadejoslyn	2.657	0.097
brittneybendall	2.4	sjanaeese	2.314	0.086
Mariootd	4.173	tullipe	4.176	-0.003
panoram_sup	2.476	sup.loving.gil	2.573	-0.097
getfitwithsav	2.709	dreathomas	2.848	-0.139
Gemmaste	3.524	ninanik	3.727	-0.203

Note. The SWLS had 5 items and used a 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) scale, with higher scores meaning higher life satisfaction.

Final Profile Selection

We chose the 10 profiles that differed the most in life satisfaction as well as across all dimensions to include in our main study. We had to switch which profiles were high life-satisfaction and which ones were low life-satisfaction. As a result, the high life-satisfaction profiles had fewer followers than the low life-satisfaction profiles. The high life-satisfaction profiles also had lower quality of profile content, photo quality, attractiveness of profile content, and wealth portrayed, compared to the low life-satisfaction profiles.

MAIN STUDY

The purpose of the main study was to determine if there was a causal relationship between extent of exposure to Instagram and one's immediate life satisfaction. In this study we manipulated the number of high life-satisfaction profiles participants saw, from 0 (Low), 6 (Mixed), and 12 (High) out of 12 profiles. We hypothesized that as the number of high life-satisfaction profiles increase, participant life satisfaction would decrease.

Methods

Participants

We used G*Power3.1 (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) software to estimate the number of participants needed, using a one-way between-subjects design with an effect size $f = .15$ (small), significance level of .05 and power = .80, $df = 2$. We chose this level of effect size due to contradictory evidence in the field. This analysis indicated that we would need 150 participants in our study.

The participants were 163 undergraduate students, ages 18 to 40, from The University of Alabama who were enrolled in Introduction to Psychology as well as other classes on campus. They received credit towards a course requirement or extra credit for their participation. The gender and race of this population are displayed below (Table 4 and Table 5).

Table 4***Gender of Participants***

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	37	22.70
Female	125	76.69
Nonbinary	1	0.61
Total	163	100.00

Table 5***Race/Ethnicity of Participants***

Race	Frequency	Percent
African American	19	11.66
Caucasian	127	77.91
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	3.07
Hispanic	5	3.07
Other	2	1.23
Total	158	100.00

Design

The research design of this study was experimental and between subjects. The independent variable in this study was the number of high life satisfaction profiles reviewed, which had 3 levels: Low, Mixed, and High. In the Low group participants saw 0 high life-satisfaction profiles and 12 low life-satisfaction profiles. In the High group participants saw 12 high life-satisfaction profiles and 0 low life-satisfaction profiles. In the Mixed group they saw six of each type of profile. The dependent variable was the participants' life satisfaction ratings after viewing the profiles.

Procedure

The participants navigated to the recruitment website organized by the Psychology department to sign up for the study. Once they signed up for the study, they followed a link from that website to a consent form. To reduce the perceived association between the profiles and participant life satisfaction we gave participants a cover story that they were rating the profiles for cohesiveness, aesthetic, and theme, for a future study (Appendix D). Participants consented to be in the study by clicking *continue*.

The participants then completed the demographic survey and then the Social Media Intensity/Use scale from the pilot studies. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the three groups. The participants saw the profiles for the condition they were assigned. The participants viewed each profile. During the viewing, the participants were asked to rate the profile from 1 – 5 on aesthetically pleasantness and overall cohesiveness. They were also prompted to indicate the theme of the profile in order to keep the participant on task. They repeated this procedure for all the profiles that they were exposed to. The participants then completed the life satisfaction scale about themselves. Upon completion the participants viewed a short 3-minute video to uplift their spirits so there may be no lingering effects of the experiment. They were then debriefed and informed about the true purpose of the experiment and thanked for their participation. The process took approximately 45 minutes for participants to complete.

Questionnaires

Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). To obtain the subjective wellbeing of the participant, participants completed a modified version of the Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (Alfonso et al, 1996). Items from the survey are rated on a seven-point Likert scale from

strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The higher the score represents higher subjective life satisfaction. The 50-item scale can be divided into 9 subscales: General life (5 items), Social life (5 items), Sex life (5 items), Self (5 items), Physical appearance (5 items), Family life (5 items), School life (5 items), Job satisfaction (10 items), and Relationship (5 items) (Appendix E). For the last three scales, participants complete only the sections that are relevant to them. For example, if they did not have a job, they did not complete the job satisfaction section. To calculate the score for each category, the scores of the items in each category are averaged. A high score indicates high satisfaction while a low score indicates low satisfaction. The test-retest reliability for this scale ranges from .74 – .87; it also has high validity (Alfonso et al, 1996).

Results

Nine one-way between-subjects ANOVA were conducted to examine the effect of Instagram profile exposure (i.e., the number of high life satisfaction profiles reviewed) on life satisfaction in the context of the nine subscales of the SWLS. Less than half (45.75%) of the total participants ($n = 153$) answered the job satisfaction questions from the job satisfaction section of the SWLS, which was optional (see Appendix E). This is probably because many of the participants were full time students. Because of this, job satisfaction was not included in our analysis. The relationship satisfaction portion of the SWLS was also optional to complete, however 69.93% of participants answered these questions so the results are included in our analysis.

The first ANOVA was conducted on the general life satisfaction scores. These questions included the general life satisfaction section of the SWLS (see Appendix E). Overall, there was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on general life satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 149) = 0.28$, $MSE = 1.27$, $p = .75$, $\eta^2 = .004$]. However, the means were in the

expected direction (Table 6). The group that saw 12 high life satisfaction profiles had the lowest average general life satisfaction score, the group that saw 12 low life satisfaction profiles had the highest general life satisfaction score, and the mixed group was in-between.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for General Life Satisfaction

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	5.135	1.117	52
Mixed	5.172	1.066	50
Low	5.296	1.197	50

The next ANOVA was conducted on the social life satisfaction scores. These questions included the social life satisfaction section of the SWLS (see Appendix E). Again, there was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on social life satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 149) = 0.71, MSE = 1.81, p = .49, \eta^2 = .01$]. However, the pattern of means was in the expected direction (Table 7). The group that saw 12 high life satisfaction profiles had the lowest average social life satisfaction score, the group that saw 12 low life satisfaction profiles had the highest social life satisfaction score, and the mixed group was in-between.

Table 7***Descriptive Statistics for Social Life Satisfaction***

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	4.908	1.389	52
Mixed	4.928	1.427	50
Low	5.196	1.219	50

The third ANOVA was conducted on the sex life satisfaction scores. These questions included the sex life satisfaction section of the SWLS (see Appendix E). Following the trend from the other measures, there was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on sex life satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 145) = 1.48$, $MSE = 2.94$, $p = .23$, $\eta^2 = .02$]. The pattern of means was not in the expected direction (Table 8). The group that saw 12 high life satisfaction profiles had the lowest average sex life satisfaction score, the mixed group had the highest sex life satisfaction score, and the group that saw 0 high-life satisfaction profiles was in-between. If we just looked at the extreme groups (high, low), however, the pattern was in the expected direction; the group that saw 12 high satisfaction profiles (High) had lower sex life satisfaction than the group that saw 0 high satisfaction profiles (Low).

Table 8*Descriptive Statistics for Sex Life Satisfaction*

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	4.255	1.650	51
Mixed	4.795	1.635	48
Low	4.731	1.847	49

The fourth ANOVA was conducted on the self-satisfaction scores. These questions included the self-satisfaction section of the SWLS (see Appendix E). Again, there was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on self-satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 149) = .83, MSE = 1.43, p = .44, \eta^2 = .01$]. However, the pattern of means was in the expected direction (Table 9). The group that saw 12 high life satisfaction profiles had the lowest average self-satisfaction score, the group that saw 12 low life satisfaction profiles had the highest self-satisfaction score, and the mixed group was in-between.

Table 9*Descriptive Statistics for Self Satisfaction*

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	4.950	1.169	52
Mixed	5.104	1.253	50
Low	5.256	1.174	50

The fifth ANOVA was conducted on the physical appearance satisfaction scores. These questions included the physical appearance satisfaction section of the SWLS (see Appendix E).

Like the other tests, there was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on physical appearance satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 148) = .13, MSE = 2.42, p = .88, \eta^2 = .002$]. However, the pattern of means for physical appearance did not follow the predicted direction (Table 10). The group that saw 12 low life satisfaction profiles had the lowest average physical appearance satisfaction score, the mixed group had the highest life satisfaction score, and the high life satisfaction profiles group was in-between. Even excluding the mixed group, satisfaction for the low and high group was in the opposite direction as that expected.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Physical Appearance

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	3.868	1.396	51
Mixed	3.955	1.646	50
Low	3.796	1.619	50

The sixth ANOVA was conducted on the satisfaction with family scores. These questions included the family satisfaction section of the SWLS (see Appendix E). Here, there was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on family satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 148) = .44, MSE = 2.68, p = .64, \eta^2 = .006$], but the pattern of means followed the predicted direction (Table 11). The group that saw 12 high life satisfaction profiles had the lowest average family satisfaction score, the group that saw 12 low life satisfaction profiles had the highest family satisfaction score, and the mixed group was in-between.

Table 11***Descriptive Statistics for Family Life Satisfaction***

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	5.159	1.663	51
Mixed	5.184	1.622	50
Low	5.436	1.628	50

The seventh ANOVA was conducted on the school satisfaction scores. These questions included the school satisfaction section of the SWLS (see Appendix E). There was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on physical appearance satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 145) = .15, MSE = .77, p = .87, \eta^2 = .002$]. Like physical appearance satisfaction, the pattern of means for school satisfaction did not follow the predicted direction (Table 12). The group that saw 12 low life satisfaction profiles had the highest average school satisfaction score, the mixed group had the lowest life satisfaction score, and the high life satisfaction profiles group was in-between. However, excluding the mixed group, the low group had higher school satisfaction than the high group, even if just barely.

Table 12***Descriptive Statistics for School Satisfaction***

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	5.651	0.785	51
Mixed	5.588	0.980	48
Low	5.682	0.864	49

The eighth ANOVA was conducted on relationship satisfaction scores. There was not a significant effect of Instagram profile exposure on relationship satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 104) = .98$, $MSE = 2.9$, $p = .38$, $\eta^2 = .019$], and the pattern of means did not follow the expected direction (Table 13). The group that saw 12 low life satisfaction profiles had the lowest average relationship satisfaction score, the mixed group had the highest relationship satisfaction score, and the high life satisfaction profiles group was in-between. Even with excluding the mixed group, the results were in the opposite direction as that expected.

Table 13***Descriptive Statistics for Relationship Satisfaction***

Group	Mean	SD	N
High	5.006	1.700	34
Mixed	5.195	1.760	37
Low	4.644	1.646	36

Discussion

In this experimental study we argued that it is the content of social media more than the amount of social media that influences our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. To investigate this, we presented either 0, 6, or 12 (out of 12) profiles from profilers who were rated previously as

high in life satisfaction. We predicted that the more of these profiles a person saw, the lower their life satisfaction would be. We did not find significant differences between the three groups.

A null hypothesis is difficult to interpret. It could be that the null hypothesis is true—there is no relation between the number of high life satisfaction profiles people see and their own life satisfaction. Or, it could be that there is a relationship, but we failed to detect it with our study. That is, our study did not have enough power to detect the effect.

If the null hypothesis is true, our results are inconsistent with the research on upward and downward social comparisons concerning the types of profiles that should inspire each. Upward comparisons lower self-regard (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988) and downward comparisons elevate self-regard (Gibbons, 1986). In the current study, we had predicted that life satisfaction would decrease as the number of high life satisfaction profiles increased, because of the upward comparisons. However, we did not find statistically significant differences in life satisfaction among the three conditions, indicating that there are no upward comparisons at least for Instagram profiles.

If the null hypothesis is false, however, the trends in our results fit the expected pattern of means for most of the measures of life satisfaction. The individuals who viewed 12 high life satisfaction profiles reported quantitatively lower general, social, sex, self, family, and school life satisfaction than the individuals who viewed 0 or 6 high life- satisfaction profiles. Recall that the average profiles were rated higher in life satisfaction than the influencer profiles. Therefore, the perceived high life satisfaction of the average profiles could inspire an upward comparison thus driving the life satisfaction of the participants down. Conversely, the downward comparison to the low life satisfaction group would drive life satisfaction up which is the result that we found.

The only exceptions to this trend were for physical appearance satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The participants who saw the low life satisfaction profiles had the lowest satisfaction scores. Recall that the low life satisfaction group was the influencer profiles. This trend has been displayed in previous research, but not examined specifically regarding life satisfaction. Drawing attention to the aesthetic pleasantness of a profile could have had many meanings to an individual as aesthetic pleasantness has to do with appearance. Attractive profiles inspire upward comparison which causes feelings of being inferior which would spark insecurity thus lowering life satisfaction in the respective area. Viewing Profiles of physically attractive persons leads to worse mood and less satisfaction with one's appearance (Appel et al., 2015). It would follow that making the upward comparison to an aesthetically pleasing profile, would drive the physical appearance satisfaction down. Being unhappy with one's appearance causes feelings of insecurity in relationships as well due to upward comparison, and jealousy (Denti et al., 2012). Our attractive profiles could have caused this feeling which would lead to lower relationship satisfaction

There were two other results from our study that were interesting. First, we expected that the profiles that were high in likes and followers (i.e., the influencers), would have been the profiles that participants would consider as being higher in life satisfaction. The influencer profiles on Instagram are typically cohesive and aesthetically pleasing. Most influencers generate income by marketing themselves and products using the platform (Scipioni, 2021) thus, selling themselves and the products must be done in a cohesive, and aesthetically pleasing fashion as marketing research suggests.

People tend to buy products that appear high in quality, are presented by good photo quality, or high definition, that appear attractive, and that are associated with wealth (How, 2018;

Investopedia, 2021;). So, when the influencer is selling themselves or a product they are doing so with regards to this strategy.

However, we did not think this to be the case. Our results showed that individuals rated the average profiles as having higher life satisfaction. This result may be due to the fact that the profiles that are average/have less followers are more relatable than the profiles that are influencers/had more followers. Posting relatable content on Instagram has been found to be positively associated with views and post interaction regardless of influential status; additionally, it can elicit social support (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Klassen et al., 2018).

We feel confident in our choices of high satisfaction profiles because we used dimensions that were consistent with those found in previous literature to rate the average and influencer profiles. Furthermore, when the participants in the main study were asked to rate the profiles on cohesiveness and aesthetically pleasing, the influencer profiles were rated as higher. Although these questions were designed as a task to keep participants focused and make sure that they were spending some time observing the profiles, our data revealed a finding consistent with literature.

The second interesting result involved the categories that we used to select our profiles. In the initial pilot study when we asked what profiles people followed the most, the majority of participants stated that they followed friends and family. Additionally, when asked to rate which profiles as most important, many participants rated friends and family as most important. Average friend and family profiles are directly relatable to users. Participants may be more impacted by friends and family because that is most important and relatable to them. This assumption could be supported by the results of the life satisfaction profile rating pilot study. People rated the profiles that contained average everyday content as having higher life

satisfaction than the profiles which were influencers. Participants may have felt that the average profiles were similar to the average friend and family profiles, resulting in a comparison because of the relatability.

We also found that, aside from family and friends, the most followed categories on Instagram were profiles that displayed hobbies, influencers, shopping, and sports. This information is consistent with consumer research. A recently published article (Razo, 2021) found that people use Instagram to discover new products, follow fashion trends, and (verb needed) health and fitness. In addition, Instagram (2021) found that 60% of travelers and 97% of Millennial travelers), share their travel photos on social media, 65% of teens discover and buy beauty products through social media—specifically, influencers. Further, 90% of Instagram accounts follow at least one fashion brand, and 83% of all Instagram users discover new products and services on the platform. These findings support our choices in categories to use in the study.

Limitations and Recommendations

The main strength of this study is that it is unique in design. It is the first study to directly manipulate and observe how the content of specific profiles may impact life satisfaction of the user. This general methodology may shed light on how social media use may be impacting our life satisfaction (or other measures) – causally. Nevertheless, our study has several limitations.

The survey measures state life satisfaction but does not capture in-the-moment satisfaction. In a future study it would be useful to use items that can measure momentary changes in life satisfaction. We need the participants to think about their lives at the moment they finish rating the profiles.

The questions that our SWLS contain ask them to think beyond the lab. A subtler measure of life satisfaction than the one we used could allow for better participant reflection.

Participants may have known that we were studying life satisfaction and social media which may have skewed the responses. To control for this, additional survey questions could be mixed with the life satisfaction questions. This method could be useful in masking the obviousness of the study. On the other hand, our deception may have worked too well, and individuals may not have answered the questions honestly because they did not think that the questions mattered. To control for this a different cover story would be necessary.

Because there are currently no social media comparison scales or scales that get at how satisfied someone appears to be on social media, the questions had to be adapted to measure life satisfaction of the owners of the profiles. Developing a new scale that could measure social media user life satisfaction would be beneficial for the field with regards to understanding how life satisfaction may be perceived differently online and offline.

Another limitation was that profile viewing time was not controlled for and therefore there was no way to gauge the length of exposure to the profiles. Typically, when a user is on social media, they control their own exposure and essentially this would have impacted assimilation of the material. In a future study the amount of time that the participant is exposed to the profile should be controlled for so that we can ensure that the individual absorbs the information on the screen.

Furthermore, we did not know how many profiles that people should look at to be impacted. Since our study is unique in the methodology, we arbitrarily picked 10-12 profiles. Since there are millions of user profiles the number could increase substantially as long as participant fatigue did not increase. Increasing the number of profiles that participants see may

increase the effect because of the prolonged exposure. It has been found that people who spend more time on social media, multiple hours a day, passively experience increased negative side effects (WebMD, 2020) and increasing the number of profiles should increase the amount of time spent on social media.

Although our power analysis indicated that we would need 150 participants for an experimental study, other correlational studies have many more participants. Now that we have a more appropriate effect size to use (from this study), a future study can better gauge the number of participants needed.

Lastly, the gender specificity of the profiles -- we only included profiles featuring women or that appealed more to women (makeup and women's fashion) -- is a limitation. We did this because social media is used more by females so naturally there is more female content displayed on them. This could have made an impact because males were not excluded from participation in the study. The female content may not have been relevant or relatable to males. In a future study, to account for gender specificity of the content of the profiles, there could be an all men study with profiles that appeal to men and an all women study, or a mixed study in which all participants see both men and women content. This would ensure that the groups contain profiles that are relevant and relatable to the majority of participants in the study.

CONCLUSION

This is the first study to focus on the content of a profile and to manipulate exposure to the profiles to determine whether the number of high life satisfaction profiles reviewed influences our own life satisfaction. Although the results were not statistically significant, the pattern of results was in the expected direction. The higher the exposure to high-life-satisfaction profiles, the lower life satisfaction was. Additionally, comparing oneself to more attractive profiles lead to lower life satisfaction. We suggested several improvements that can be made for further study. More research is important to understand the enormous influence social media has on our mind.

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APPENDIX A

Demographics Questionnaire

Instructions: Please complete the following demographic questionnaire.

1. Please indicate your age. _____
2. Please indicate your gender.
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Nonbinary
 - d. Prefer not to say
3. Please indicate your race/ethnicity. Check all that apply.
 - ___ African American
 - ___ Caucasian
 - ___ Asian/Pacific Islander
 - ___ Hispanic
 - ___ Other (please specify) _____
4. Year in school
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Other

APPENDIX B

Social Media Intensity/Use Scale

Adapted from Facebook Intensity Scale (Ellison et. al, 2007)

This scale will be used for Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter.

Instructions: Please complete the following questionnaire about each of these social media platforms. Please indicate your response for each question using the numbers 1-5 unless otherwise noted.

- 5 - Strongly agree
- 4 - Agree
- 3 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

Facebook use: (for example)

1. Facebook is part of my everyday activity
2. I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook
3. Facebook has become part of my daily routine
4. I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while
5. I feel I am part of the Facebook community
6. I would be sorry if Facebook shut down
7. Approximately how many TOTAL Facebook followers do you have? *
8. In the past week, on average, approximately how much time PER DAY have you spent actively using Facebook? **

Response categories range from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, unless otherwise noted.

*Will be asked as a closed-ended question. Ordinal scale will be used (e.g. 10 or less, 11–50, 51–100, 101–150, 151–200, 201–250, 251–300, 301–400, more than 400). Will be adjusted based on results from Pilot Study 1.

**Will be asked as a closed-ended question. Ordinal scale will be used (e.g. 1= 0-14min, 2=15-29 min, etc.). Will be adjusted based on the results from Pilot Study 1.

Computing the Scale

The Instagram Intensity score is computed by calculating the mean of all of the items in the scale.

APPENDIX C

Life Satisfaction Scale 1.1

A modified version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993)

Scale

Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding. Remember, you are answering these questions about the profile that you just saw.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

_____ Based on the information displayed in this profile, in most ways this Instagram user's life is close to ideal.

_____ Based on the information displayed in this profile, the conditions of this Instagram user's life are excellent.

_____ Based on the information displayed in this profile, the Instagram user appears satisfied with their life.

_____ Based on the information displayed in this profile, it appears that the Instagram user has gotten the important things they want in life.

_____ Based on the information displayed in this profile, if the Instagram user could live their life over, it appears that he/she would change almost nothing.

Computing the scale:

Sum up scores. A high score indicates high satisfaction while a low score indicates low satisfaction.

APPENDIX D

Cover Story for Main Experiment

Dear Participant,

You have been recruited in order to help us complete a study of memory and observation. Please observe the following social media pages. During your inspection, we are asking you to remember certain aspects about the profile. As you observe the profiles, you will be asked to rate each profile on three characteristics using a scale from 1-5, five being the highest score and one being the lowest score. The characteristics to be rated are as follows - aesthetically pleasing, overall cohesiveness, successfulness of the individual in the profile. We also would like you to suggest a theme of the profile (e.g. fashion, fitness, travel). Your answers will allow us to better understand what the most memorable aspects of an Instagram profile are. The most memorable pages will be used in future study.

Additionally, you will be filling out a new survey that we plan on using in future study. Please answer these survey questions honestly to the best of your abilities. Your name will not be associated with the survey answers as it is an anonymous survey. Thank you for your participation.

Roll Tide!

APPENDIX E

Life Satisfaction Scale 1.2

Adapted from the Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (Alfonso et. al, 1996)

Instructions: Think about your life right now, in this moment. Below are some statements with which you may agree or disagree. Use the scale below to show your agreement with each item. Place the number on the line for that item. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, skip the question. Please be open and honest in your answers. Remember, you are answering about how you feel right now, in this moment.

Scale:

- 1= Strongly disagree
- 2= Disagree
- 3= Slightly disagree
- 4= Neither agree nor disagree
- 5= Slightly agree
- 6= Agree
- 7= Strongly agree

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want from life.
5. I am generally pleased with the life I lead.
6. In most ways my social life is close to my ideal.
7. The conditions of my social life are excellent.
8. I am satisfied with my social life.
9. So far I have gotten the important things I want from my social life.
10. I am generally pleased with the social life I lead.
11. In most ways my sex life is close to my ideal.
12. The conditions of my sex life are excellent.
13. I am satisfied with my sex life.
14. So far I have gotten the important things I want from my sex life.
15. I am generally pleased with the quality of my sex life.
16. In most ways my actual self is close to my ideal self.
17. As an individual I consider myself excellent.
18. I am satisfied with my person or self as an individual.
19. So far I have gotten the important things I want from myself.

20. I am generally pleased with myself as an individual.
21. In most ways my actual physical appearance is close to my ideal physical appearance.
22. I consider my physical appearance excellent.
23. I am satisfied with my physical appearance.
24. There is nothing about my physical appearance that I would like to change.
25. I am generally pleased with my physical appearance.

The questions below pertain to your current "immediate" family not your "extended" family.

26. In most ways my family life is close to my ideal.
27. The conditions of my family life are excellent.
28. I am satisfied with my family life.
29. So far I have gotten the important things I want from my family life.
30. I am generally pleased with the quality of my family life.

DO YOU GO TO SCHOOL? Yes No

IF NOT, SKIP THE NEXT 5 QUESTIONS.

31. The education I get at school is great.
32. I like or respect the other students at school.
33. I am satisfied with my classes.
34. So far I have learned the important things I wanted at school.
35. I am generally pleased with the quality of my teachers.

DO YOU HAVE A JOB? Yes No

IF NOT, SKIP THE NEXT 10 QUESTIONS.

36. The chance for advancement on my job is good.
37. I like the company policies and practices.
38. I like or respect my coworkers.
39. I am pleased with the praise I get for doing a good job.
40. I am given enough freedom to use my own judgment
41. I like the way my job provides for steady employment.
42. My boss handles his or her employees well.
43. I am happy with the competence of my supervisor.
44. The working conditions of my job are excellent.
45. Overall, I am satisfied with my job.

ARE YOU NOW IN AN "EXCLUSIVE" RELATIONSHIP?

Yes (If you checked this box please answer the questions below about your current relationship)

No but I have been in the past (if you checked this box please answer the questions below based on your past relationship)

No and I have not been in the past (if you checked this box you may stop here)

- 46. In most ways my relationship/marriage is close to my ideal.
- 47. The conditions of my relationship/marriage are excellent.
- 48. I am satisfied with my relationship/marriage.
- 49. So far I have gotten the important things I want from my relationship/marriage.
- 50. I am generally pleased with the quality of my relationship/ marriage.

Computing the scale:

The items can be divided into 8 subscales General life (SWLS), Social life, Sex life, Relationship, Self, Physical appearance, Family life, School life, Job satisfaction. Sum up scores on each item. A high score indicates high satisfaction while a low score indicates low satisfaction.

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval, Informed Consent, and Debriefing Documents



October 6, 2020

Toni Rebaldo
Department of Psychology
College of Arts and Sciences
Box 870348

Re: IRB # 20-04-3570, "Effects of Images on Social Media on Life Satisfaction"

Dear Ms. Rebaldo:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent and waiver of one element of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The approval for your application will lapse on October 4, 2021. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the continuing review to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Carpentato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer

Jessup Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066

Study Information

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to better understand the kinds of pages that Instagram users typically follow. Additionally, we aim to gather which of those are the most important or influential to the user.

What you will do in the study: You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, a Social Media Intensity/Use Scale and two open ended questions about Instagram. You must be at least 18 year of age to participate.

Time required: The study will require about 30 minutes of your time.

Risks: There are little to no risks associated with this study except slight mental fatigue due to the length of the experiment. These risks are no more than you would expect in your daily life. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Benefits: You will receive no direct benefits from this study. Your responses may help us understand what aspects make an Instagram profile stand out.

Confidentiality: The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your name and other information that could be used to identify you will not be collected or linked to your responses, and all data will be reported in a way that will not identify any individual.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: If you want to withdraw from the study, close the browser. There is no penalty for withdrawing. If you do not click continue when prompt you will not receive credit for participation in the study.

Compensation/Reimbursement: You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You will receive class participation credit (.5 credit) for participation in this study.

Using data beyond this study:

The researcher would like to make the information collected in this study available to other researchers after the study is completed. Your information will be stored, used and shared for future research studies. Researchers of future studies will not ask your permission for each new study. However, the information you provide will be combined with the information provided by others to create a large data set. Your name and other information that could potentially identify you will not be connected to the information shared with other researchers nor will they attempt to identify you.

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue please contact, contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Toni Rebaldo
Title: Graduate Student
Department Name: Psychology
Telephone: 251-605-3599
Email address: tmrebaldo@crimson.ua.edu

Faculty Advisor's Name: Beverly Roskos
Department Name: Psychology
Telephone: (205) 348-5083
Email address: broskos@ua.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns about the research study, please contact:

Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may email the Office for Research Compliance at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

To indicate your agreement to participate in the research described, click on the Continue button.

Study Information

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to obtain ratings about the perceived life satisfaction of the Instagram profilers

What you will do in the study: You will complete a demographic questionnaire. Then you will view a series of Instagram profiles. You view each profile for 30 seconds. After each profile you will complete a survey about the profile; specifically, how satisfied you think the profiled person is about their life. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.

Time required: The study will require about 45 minutes of your time.

Risks: There are little to no risks associated with this study except slight mental fatigue due to the length of the experiment or slight uncomfortableness about a few of the questions. These risks are no more than you would expect in your daily life. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Benefits: You will receive no direct benefits from this study. Your responses may help us understand what aspects make an Instagram profile stand out.

Confidentiality: The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your name and other information that could be used to identify you will not be collected or linked to your responses, and all data will be reported in a way that will not identify any individual.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: If you want to withdraw from the study, close the browser. There is no penalty for withdrawing. If you do not click continue when prompt you will not receive credit for participation in the study.

Compensation/Reimbursement: You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You will receive class participation credit (.5 credit) for participation in this study.

Using data beyond this study:

The researcher would like to make the information collected in this study available to other researchers after the study is completed. Your information will be stored, used and shared for future research studies. Researchers of future studies will not ask your permission for each new study. However, the information you provide will be combined with the information provided by others to create a large data set. Your name and other information that could potentially identify you will not be connected to the information shared with other researchers nor will they attempt to identify you.

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue please contact, contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Toni Rebaldo
Title: Graduate Student
Department Name: Psychology
Telephone: 251-605-3599
Email address: tmrebaldo@crimson.ua.edu

Faculty Advisor's Name: Beverly Roskos
Department Name: Psychology
Telephone: (205) 348-5083
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To indicate your agreement to participate in the research described, click on the Continue button.

Study Information

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to discover which aspects make an Instagram profile most likely to draw the attention of viewers.

What you will do in the study: You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and then view X social media pages. As you observe each profile, you will be asked to evaluate it using rating scales and questions with short answers. Additionally, you will be filling out a survey about your social media usage and other aspects of your personal life. We will use your profile ratings and survey answers to choose stimuli for a future study. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Time required: The study will require about 60 minutes of your time.

Risks: There are little to no risks associated with this study except slight mental fatigue due to the length of the experiment or slight uncomfortableness about a few of the questions. These risks are no more than you would expect in your daily life. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. There may be a slight risk of feeling bad about one's life however everyone will be shown an uplifting video at the end of the experiment to counteract any bad effects.

Benefits: You will receive no direct benefits from this study. Your responses may help us understand what aspects make an Instagram profile stand out.

Confidentiality: The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your name and other information that could be used to identify you will not be collected or linked to your responses, and all data will be reported in a way that will not identify any individual.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: If you want to withdraw from the study, close the browser. There is no penalty for withdrawing. If you do not click continue when prompt you will not receive credit for participation in the study.

Compensation/Reimbursement: You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You will receive class participation credit (1 credit) for participation in this study.

Using data beyond this study:

The researcher would like to make the information collected in this study available to other researchers after the study is completed. Your information will be stored, used and shared for future research studies. Researchers of future studies will not ask your permission for each new study. However, the information you provide will be combined with the information provided by others to create a large data

Project Title: Viewing Instagram Profiles

set. Your name and other information that could potentially identify you will not be connected to the information shared with other researchers nor will they attempt to identify you.

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue please contact, contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Toni Rebaldo
Title: Graduate Student
Department Name: Psychology
Telephone: 251-605-3599
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Faculty Advisor's Name: Beverly Roskos
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To indicate your agreement to participate in the research described, click on the Continue button.

EXPERIMENT DEBRIEF INFORMATION

The Impact of Instagram Usage on Life Satisfaction

Thank you for participating in our study. You were told that you were reviewing Instagram profiles and rating them on certain characteristics and that your information would help us design another study. The actual purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the exposure of different types of Instagram profiles on the in-the-moment life satisfaction of participants. Previous work has shown that social media usage can have both positive and negative impacts on a user. Here, our interest was the impact that exposure to different kinds of profiles may have on an Instagram passive user.

The research design of this study is experimental and between-subjects as it studies the impact of the amount of exposure to high life-satisfaction profiles. The independent variable in this study is dosage which has 3 levels: no high-satisfaction profiles, ½ high-satisfaction profiles, or all high-satisfaction profiles. You were in one of these groups. The dependent variable is your in-the-moment life-satisfaction ratings after viewing the profiles. We could not tell you what the real purpose of the study was because it might have biased your answers.

Sometimes in research it is necessary to not tell people about the true purpose of the study (or study procedures) at the beginning. If we did, it may affect how you responded to the questions asked. This would change the results in a way that may make them invalid. Sometimes the best way to prevent this is to not give all the details about the purpose of the study until after participants finish with the survey.

All the information provided by you is completely anonymous and your answers will not be associated with your identity in any way. Your participation in this research is very important. However, we realize that finding out that we were not up front with you regarding the purpose of the study may affect your satisfaction with your participation. Therefore, you are free to withdraw your data from the study if you wish. *Even if you choose to withdraw your data, you will still receive the same amount of course credit (or extra credit).* If you wish to withdraw your data, please contact the PI Toni Rebaldo (see contact info below).

To exit the study, close your browser window.

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue please contact, contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Toni Rebaldo
Title: Graduate Student
Department Name: Psychology
Telephone: 251-605-3599
Email address: tmrebaldo@crimson.ua.edu

UA IRB Approved Document
Approval date: 10-5-20
Expiration date: 10-4-21

Faculty Advisor's Name: Dr. Beverly Roskos
Department Name: Psychology
Telephone: (205) 348-5083
Email address: broskos@ua.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns about the research study, please contact: Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may email the Office for Research Compliance at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

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