

Users' Perceptions of the Effects of Instagram's Lifestyle Posts on Mental Health among South Africans

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Abstract

Globally, social media posts are a common way of social expression and communication among the users of these sites. Social media users often use these platforms to share their views about a wide range of issues including lifestyle, fashion trends, business, entrepreneurship, etc. Additionally, Instagram is the platform commonly used to communicate countless messages among its users. Some studies have shown that this platform has serious ramifications on mental health, particularly among teenagers and young adults. Most of these studies were conducted in the United States of America where the downside of Instagram is well documented. In this paper, the focus is on the users' perceptions on the effects of Instagram posts on the mental health among its users in South Africa. The theoretical underpinning of this paper is anchored by social identity theory and the uses and gratification theory. Also, this study centres around adults from the ages of 18 to 65 years. Qualitative research approach was adopted, and the data collection process was restricted by data saturation. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the purposefully selected participants. Accordingly, reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The study found that some Instagram posts have

serious ramifications on the users' mental health. In addition, the participants posited that lifestyle posts have negative effects on their mental health. The study recommends that the users of this social media platform should consider using certain features such as filters and time restriction to circumvent the negative effects of Instagram posts on their mental health. The study further recommends that users of this online platform experiencing some mental health challenges should consider professional help to deal with these rippling effects.

Keywords: Effects, Instagram, Users, Mental Health, South Africa

Introduction

The culture of sharing lifestyle content is common among Instagram users. The users of this blogging platform share a variety of lifestyle content such as wellness, fashion, entertainment, beauty, and tourism (Nabonik 2019:10; Asmal 2022:22). Often users with a plethora of followers share picture-perfect images based on their lifestyle. In addition, this content is likely to influence the other users on this platform. However, it should be noted that the social media content is shared on multiple platforms (Zsila & Reyes 2023:19). This means that the Instagram content can be shared by the content creator or their followers on other platforms i.e., TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, X etc. This trend has the potential to magnify Instagram content on other platforms. Also, the footprint of this content is no longer restricted to a single platform (Åström 2021:40). Thus, the content is more likely to influence a larger audience in a short space of time (Boer, Van Den Eijnden, Boniel-Nissim, Wong, Inchley, Badura & Stevens 2020:95). In other words, social influencers thrive in these communities. According to Nesi (2020:118), social media influencers are individuals who have more than 5,000 followers on a single social media account. Notably, most of the influencers have multiple accounts on the Web 2.0 platforms. Accordingly, this elevates the status of the influencers. In some instances, the same followers generate revenue through clickbait, particularly the number of likes per post shared on Instagram.

The monetisation of the social media posts has amplified the influence of the influencers. Noteworthy, the elements of advertising have also transformed how influencers create and share their content. Often, the influencers create their content based on their lifestyle. The nature of the content generated by the influencers presents an expensive and flamboyant lifestyle. Most of the

influencers share posts enjoying expensive beverages in the upmarket restaurants. For Mda (2018:109) and Valkenburg (2022:105), the attributes of some of the social media posts are the macrocosm of instant gratification and conspicuous consumption. These aspects are pivotal in the context of this paper. The influencers represent fundamental aspects of these concepts as explicated by Mda (2018:109). The literature highlights the essence of these factors about the effects of Instagram on mental health issues. Thus, both instant gratification and conspicuous consumption play a role in mental health issues.

Literature Review

Lifestyle is a way of life and refers to how individuals curate their lives anchored by their values, attitudes, habits, social behaviour, and consumption patterns. According to Couldry (2012:11), this is influenced by culture, religion, personal preferences, and environment. It underscores both tangible and intangible factors. 'Tangible factors relate specifically to demographic variables, i.e., an individual's demographic profile, whereas intangible factors concern the psychological aspects of an individual such as personal values, preferences, and outlooks' (Couldry 2012:12). Notably, the public platforms such as mainstream media as well as social media represents a myriad of lifestyles. In the context of this study, lifestyle is restricted to personal behaviour, habits, and consumption patterns.

Social media is imperative in exposing its users to various lifestyle content cultivated by the users. However, algorithms play a huge role towards the promotion of some lifestyles (Giedd 2020:130). Most of the common lifestyle content on social media focuses on luxury and opulence, health, fashion, social events, and photography. These aspects are mainly expressed through vlogging and photography. Blogging sites control the consumption patterns of users by feeding them similar content without any guidelines to circumvent adverse effects. Often the excessive consumption of similar content can trigger adverse or positive effects on the users.

Instagram is a content-sharing site owned by Meta Platforms (Hinshaw & Eddy 2023:290). It is also known as a social networking site that allows users to publish photos and videos to their audience. In addition, this platform allows users to interact with content generated and shared by their fellow users. They can like, share, and comment on the uploaded content (photos and videos). The platform has included a story feed that allows users to post their stories (Asmal 2022:38). Other features on the platform include reels and lives.

In recent, times the platform has been under the spotlight for negatively affecting its users' mental health, particularly teenagers. Most of the studies that discovered this demise were conducted in the USA. Thus, this study seeks to explore the effects of this social networking service in the South African context.

In the United States of America, a study was conducted to investigate the impact of social media on mental health issues (McCall 2021:3). This study revealed that teenagers and young adults are susceptible to mental disorders emanating from social media usage. They also discovered that the intensity of the use of Instagram can lead to elevated stress levels, depression, and anxiety (McCall 2021:3). The intensity of consuming online content of this ilk on Instagram has a bearing on stress levels among the users (Kasirye 2022:10). Some of the mental health problems are caused by pressures to achieve physical appearance standards perpetuated by the influencers (Lukose, Mwansa & Ngandu 2023:305). Weight loss content is prevalent on Instagram as the users share pictures and videos on this blogging site. As such, physical appearance issues trigger mental health problems among the users. The posts on this platform promote weight loss through exercise and other methods such as liposuction. There is a myriad of self-proclaimed fitness trainers who regularly post gym workouts and weight loss routines. In some instances, the same fitness trainers encourage the other users to follow their fitness programmes. Thus, studies underscore that content of this nature is likely to cause mental health harm. Some users fail to reach their weight loss targets and they subsequently plunge into depression and other mental health problems (Lin, Zou, Hsu & Chen 2023:11). Nonetheless, similar content that promotes fitness can improve the mental health of the followers of these influencers. It has been discovered that most of the users give positive feedback regarding fitness content.

In terms of instant gratification, some of the social media content compels the users to try to achieve their personal goals instantly (Makananise & Malatji 2021:89). Realistically instant satisfaction of buying the exorbitant attire that you admired from the influencers on Instagram. In contrast, the lack of affordability due to financial constraints can trigger mental disorders. In this context, the forex traders have a propensity to sell the same idea of instant gratification. They use this weakness to attract investors on Instagram. It is worth noting that some of the influencers create positive content that encourages other users to deal with their mental health problems (Åström 2021:11). In other words, these influencers highlight the ramifications of luxurious content on Instagram. This aspect amplifies the significance of Instagram towards galvanising their followers about mental health. Nonetheless, the commercial

nature of this platform overshadows the positive wellness content. As highlighted in the purpose of this study, lifestyle posts are more prevalent on this vlogging site. Accordingly, this factor is also influenced by the algorithms. Malatji and Lesame (2019:84), posit that majority of the social media users prefer sharing their personal experiences with their friends, and followers. Similarly, most social media users are fond of consuming the lifestyles of their fellow users. The influencers generate revenue through adverts and ambassadorship that are amplified through clickbait. Thus, this phenomenon has an impact on the algorithms (Boer *et al.* 2020:95). This, then, means that most users are likely to experience trending content. The intensity of Instagram content consumption exposes users to mental disorders. Furthermore, some studies underscored that the ramifications of online content trigger alcohol abuse among users. In the South African context, alcohol abuse is one of the social ills that contribute to other detrimental issues such as road carnage, violence, gender-based violence, and crime. The literature explicates that the intensity of Instagram usage has a bearing on binge drinking. It is well-documented that alcohol advertisement is popular on the social media platforms.

Both celebrities and influencers promote lifestyle content that glorifies alcohol brands (Alhabash, Mundel, Deng, McAlister, Quilliam, Richards & Lynch 2021:561). Instagram is not an exception as far as advertising alcohol through influencers is concerned. Social media experts suggest that the consumption patterns are not the same on Instagram (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu 2019: 572). First, some users engage with Instagram content to pass the time without any form of intensity. This group of users hardly invests their emotions in the blogging content. Second, intermittent users with low intensity are not influenced by Instagram's lifestyle posts. This constituency visits their Instagram accounts after a while. In other words, they are not addicted to the platform.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts both the Social Identity and Uses and Gratification theories to expound on the effects of Instagram posts on mental health among users in the South African context.

Social Identity Theory

According to Islam (2015:450), Social Identity Theory (SIT) expounds on the way individuals categorise themselves based on their social experiences and

belief systems. It also posits that issues of self-identity are not restricted to in-group and out-group components. However, it underscores that people can cultivate their own identities. In addition, Islam (2015:450) states that ‘SIT is a classic social psychology theory that attempts to explain intergroup conflict as a function of group-based self-definitions’. This theory is apt in the context of this study as it captures psychological aspects of self-definitions and socialisation. Furthermore, the theory magnifies the essence of interrogating the effects of lifestyle posts on mental health issues among individuals who belong to the meta-community. Meta community, in this regard, extrapolates the key aspects of in-group and out-group which are imperative in this research. The social identity theory expounds on social definitions and socialisation (Fourie 2010:200). Thus, this canon highlights that Instagram is one of the popular social media platforms that permits its users to shape their identity and the trajectory of socialisation. This aspect unfolds in different categories ranging from pop culture, education, entertainment, wellness, and socialisation. This component of the theory is linked to social integration within uses and gratification theory. Both canons accentuate that Instagram like other social media platforms shapes social definitions and socialisation among its users. Also, these elements inform the users of the kind of content they engage with on Instagram. Furthermore, these underscore the content they produce on the same platform. Moreover, social definitions and socialisation encapsulate how Instagram affects the mental well-being of its users as far as lifestyle posts are concerned. This is the salient point that is argued in this paper.

The Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory analyses how people use different types of media for different purposes (Fourie 2010:78). Also, this theory posits that media audiences trigger different facets of their personal needs from media content. According to Fourie (2007:78) and Kasirye (2022:10), the uses and gratification theory is rooted in three psychological components. *First*, it deals with the need for personal identity which underscores how people use media to identify with the content and the group it represents. *Second*, it applies integration which is rooted within the attributes of social integration. Also, this is what triggers how some media audiences use the content for social integration (Malatji & Lesame 2019:84). *Third*, it expounds on social interaction and escapism which is the major function of mainstream media. According to these three components, the uses and gratification theory is pertinent in the context

of this study. It highlights how social media users use the content for personal identity in terms of the status of the lifestyle posts that they engage with on Instagram. *Additionally*, this theory highlights cardinal aspects of this study as it addresses integration of the social media users. This is in terms of the kind of content they engage with to be part of a specific social group. Furthermore, social interaction and escapism are also the canon that needs to be highlighted as far as this theory is concerned in this study. Often, social media users particularly on Instagram use this platform for different purposes as accentuated in the three components as highlighted in this theory. Accordingly, the data collected through semi-structured interviews would respond to some of these aspects as explicated in this theory. On one hand, the intensity of using social media in this case Instagram, will also correlate with personal identity. On the other hand, the social integration aspect is infused through the kind of Instagram content that the users engage with, which is a salient aspect of this study. It also covers how social integration affects the mental well-being of these users. Moreover, in terms of social interaction, this component contextualises the data by zooming in on the social engagement facet between the users and the producers of the Instagram content. Thus, these aspects demonstrate that users and gratification theory are essential in the context of this paper.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach which is considered ideal in exploring the effects of Instagram's lifestyle posts on the users' mental health. Thus, the qualitative approach underscores that human research is cardinal when exposing and studying elements that need human beings to reflect on their behaviour, identity, culture, creed, and languages (Creswell & Creswell 2022:44). In this context, the focus is on how social media particularly Instagram affects the users' mental health which needs their reflection and perceptions. In this case, the participants were sampled through scientific methods that are in line with this research approach.

Research Design

In this research, exploratory research design was employed to explore the effects of Instagram lifestyle posts on the users' mental health in the South African context. In addition, this design is pertinent as it highlights the key facets of how digital media affect human behaviour.

Sampling

South Africa has over seven million Instagram users (McInnes 2024:102). It is worth noting that Instagram is the fourth most used social media platform in South Africa. For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling was used to select and contact 30 participants, aged 18-65 years. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique where researchers select volunteers who will aid the study in achieving its objectives by using their experience (Leedy & Ormrod 2019:32). In addition, the use of this sampling technique to select relevant participants included the use of direct messaging on Instagram to contact some of the potential participants to take part in this study. Participants responded through the same direct messaging channel. Thus, the researcher shared the consent letter with these individuals, and they were willing to take part in this study. Also, ten of these participants indicated that they could only take part in this study through virtual platforms and the other 10 were available to participate in this study physically. Accordingly, arrangements were made with those who were willing to take part online and interviews were conducted virtually through Google Meet platform. As such, the proceedings were also recorded on the same platform. The individuals that were available to be interviewed in person were contacted and appropriate arrangements were made for them to participate in the interviews. It is worth noting that the number of participants that took part in this study was also informed by data saturation. From the 20 participants who took part in this study both virtually and physically, the researchers were satisfied that the data saturation had been reached. Additionally, this aspect was informed by the quality of responses from the participants after participant 18 the subsequent participants proved that the data collection process was redundant as they were repeating similar responses. Although this was initially reflected in participants 14 and 15 the researcher had to proceed with the process to ascertain that the following five participants were not yielding any new information based on their responses.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022:124), data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews are employed to gather qualitative data. They entail a dialogue between the participant and the researcher, facilitated by an adaptable framework of subjects and open-ended inquiries. An interview guide with a list of questions was used to moderate the interviews. In this regard, the focus of

the semi-structured interviews was informed by the aim and objectives of this research. Primarily, the questions that were posed to the participants during the data collection process underscored how Instagram users rely on this platform for information, education as well as entertainment. The major attribute of these participants was that they are Instagram users. In addition, both in-person and online face-to-face interviews were recorded using a recording device. Subsequently, the recordings were transcribed and ventilated for the process of encoding the gathered data.

Data Analysis

The reflexive thematic analysis was employed to dissect the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:90), reflexive thematic analysis refers to a qualitative research method that captures a systematic process to generate codes as well as theme data. This kind of analysis is integral to reflecting on issues that are pertinent to qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006:90). In this regard, the researchers transcribed data to address the questions raised during the interviews. In addition, the researchers applied reflexive thematic steps to familiarise themselves with the data by going through the transcripts. A recording was verified to ensure that all critical components of this data were accurately captured. Subsequently, the researcher highlighted the themes that correlate with the aim and objectives of this study. In this process, the major themes were underscored to ensure that they respond to the objectives of this study and to point out the relevant sub-themes. Additionally, this process was informed by both the objectives of the study as well as the emerging themes from the data itself. Thus, this tedious process dictated that the researchers should zoom in on the salient aspects that capture the essence of the study.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section focuses on the presentation and discussion of the findings. It also expounds on the extracts from the data in the form of responses from the interviewees.

Relationship between Intensity and Mental Health Issues

[P1]: *The kind of content I regularly browse and engage with on*

Instagram affects my mental well-being. Sometimes, I envy the kind of content I come across on Instagram because I follow a lot of celebrities on these platforms and celebrities as well as influencers so that shapes how I think about issues and it. Also, it has some element of giving me pleasure to by the kind of things I see these celebrities displaying on their Instagram accounts, so some of these individuals that I followed shared stories of their holidays and the kind of places that I always wanted to visit as a holiday destination so those are some of the elements that give me pressure and sometimes that that level of pressure because I can't afford and that the lifestyle that I see on Instagram it affects my mental health. Also, the kind of content that I follow on Instagram contains strikes inspirational quotes and then these inspirational quotes are important for me to handle issues differently and that is when it is good for my mental well-being, and with the kind of content and the time I spend and browsing and engaging that content indeed it really and affects my mental being both negatively and positively (22, female).

[P3]: Honestly, I browse and follow fashion pages on Instagram just to learn the latest and efficient trends and with the fishing trends it is not necessarily following individuals or celebrities so that doesn't affect my mental being so in other ways I don't stress about what I see there I just want to see the latest fashion trends although sometimes is fish and plants on these pages they use and celebrities particularly on Instagram they sometimes use international musicians and that sometimes affects my how. I perceive how I present myself as far as my dress codes are concerned but the primary purpose of engaging on Instagram is to see how different brands present there and their latest offerings especially international and fishing brands so I don't focus on the lifestyle of certain individuals although I don't regularly visit these pages sometimes when you browse you see content that is aligned to a fashion because whenever I'm on Instagram I always check those kinds of pages so following individuals that are living lavishly it is not my consumption pattern on Instagram because also I don't share a lot of content on this platform so it is easy for me to how void being stressed about what other people are posting and sharing and liking on this platform but I like this platform to engage with the latest fashion and trends in in in South Africa and across the globe (27, female).

[P5]: *The lifestyle posts on Instagram are really what I just browse for passing time and I don't pay attention to the kind of content that people share sometimes I browse the musicians because I like Amapiano so I will just try to check some of the piano artists and they are posted there because I also use other platforms like TikTok that's where I check the latest dance challenges and enjoy and music on these platforms but with lifestyle to post on Instagram I don't pay attention to that (37, Male).*

According to the findings, there is a relationship between the intensity of the usage of Instagram and the negative effects of mental health issues. This finding is consistent with the finding by Boer *et al.* (2020:95) which reported that adolescents are adversely affected by posts on social media. Also, Hinshaw and Eddy (2020:291) posit that digital media has the potential to influence the mental well-being of the users negatively or positively. Individuals who spend more time on the platform reflected that the posts are likely to affect them mentally. Nonetheless, the same group has not linked this problem with a specific mental health issue. On the other hand, some participants stated that Instagram posts do not affect them since they use the platform to pass the time. Most of the participants highlighted that they spend less time on the platform as they log in intermittently.

Influence from the Influencers

[P5]: *Yes influences are affecting how I perceive and how I am really and if you are sitting aspects of life because with what they post normally they share their lifestyle on Instagram and they use the same platform to promote sitting products can be body lotions and latest expensive phones and other gadgets so that like really affect how I feel like I fail in life because I don't own the kind of items they display on and Instagram although sometimes I know that they are not owning some of the things they are just promoting those items but it affects how I view life and then sometimes I can feel that it stresses me a lot because I can't and achieve half of the things that I see these influences and sharing their on Instagram sometimes I just console myself by saying some of them are places them bless us they take them to Dubai today out for holidays and yeah but I think it is not good for my mentality because I envy what they share their lot.*

[P2]: *No way I don't influencers don't affect me I think anyone can be an influencer these days honestly because you can be influenced because you are talented and primarily your talent makes you famous on Instagram you are a good singer you can sing there on the platform share your videos share your audios and people might start liking you a lot so and that's why I'm saying in one can bring influence based on what you are doing in your life in your space and yeah that's why how I see it so whoever is saying they are professional influencers I don't know necessarily care about them I follow people with talents and people that are doing well with their lives over achievers that that is my focus so I don't necessarily regard them as influencers because honestly the whole concept of influence us influences some of the people online it is overrated that's how I see it.*

[P6]: *I think this is a dangerous trend mainly because the people who try to influence them are not projecting their real life so that is a problem you may find that you envy people who are on Instagram sharing their different lifestyles with opulence and that stresses because some of us we can't and like buy those things we can't afford that kind of a lifestyle becomes a problem and yes no it's a problem because they share a lot there they show everything they share their clothes their attire very expensive some people show Louis Vuitton some people so Gucci very expensive or clothing items I think the whole thing is so bad because it stresses a whole lot of people I don't think I'm the only one who's stressing out because I also like that lifestyle but I can't afford it, it's a problem and I think it is really bad and I like coming to think of it affects my mental being.*

The findings suggest that Instagram influencers have a huge influence on other users. According to Åström (2021:40), social media platforms influence social integration and interaction among users. Hinshaw and Eddy (2023:290) corroborate this finding as they discovered that adolescents are negatively influenced by the intense usage of Instagram. First, some participants stated that they follow more influencers on this platform. Second, the same group mentioned that they also consume a lot of content from the influencers. Third, they indicated that these influencers share different lifestyles on Instagram. Fourth, most of the participants explained that the influencers display a perfect life surrounded by flamboyance and opulence. Some of the interviewees

pointed out that the luxurious lifestyle shared by the influencers gives them pressure to try to meet the same standards. One of the participants mentioned that they plunged into depression after failing to afford some of the expensive items that were flaunted by the influencers.

Physical Appearance Posts

[P4]: *That is a problem that is a problem because many people share their physical appearance posts they promote weight loss and products you have a life and the likes but not everyone and you may find that that person didn't necessarily use those products and they affect how I see myself because I also want to lose weight and when affect me I feel like I'm failing to meet those standards and that has been affecting me for many for many years now.*

[P1]: *Yes, the physical posts on Instagram they are sometimes misleading because some people fake and edit their images and mostly there are individuals that edited and filtered their images to look the setting way and you may find that this person because you don't know them in real life outside Instagram they post that uh I feel that image and the percent to be a perfect because that is the main goal to look to look perfect on Instagram to post a perfect pictures and everything should look nice and attractive and that it's really a problem for me it doesn't really in that directly affect me but I can see that it has some elements of affecting how other people see themselves and maybe wanting to achieve the same thing because the whole thing boils down to what kind of a device are you using because some phones don't have those sophisticated tools to filter the images which really means Instagram put trials problem in terms of the consumers and people that share them can really affect some people mentally and maybe they can have social pressures to meet those instructor standards.*

[P5]: *As I've said in the other question I just browse to pass the time so I don't pay attention to how people look on Instagram but what I've observed is that some people fake their images they fake how they look and like, in short, I can say there's too much fake content Instagram fake lifestyle fake looks fake success and there's a whole lot of things that people are faking to look good to feel good and to change how*

they are perceived by people or only to attract more clicks the whole thing of clickbait is affecting what people post because they want more followers they want more likes on their posts so the whole thing of wanting to have more followers and more likes for your post is making people share a lot of fake content and fake lifestyle.

According to the participants, the Instagram posts amplify perfect physical appearance. On one hand, the participants indicated that most of the posts they see with many likes' present picture-perfect physical appearances. This reflects the similar finding from Lin *et al.* (2023:11)'s report which enunciated that Instagram influences the well-being of the users. Similarly, Hinshaw and Eddy (2023:290) claim that Instagram affects how they perceive their physical appearance based on the posts shared on the platform. They also indicated that some of these images are used to promote weight loss and fitness. In addition, these interviewees stated that most of these lifestyle posts on Instagram are edited to sell a specific idea to the public. One of the participants averred that fitness photos pressurised her to lose weight since the content suggested that her weight was not good enough. She stated that this issue triggered severe stress as she could not meet Instagram's standards of beauty. On the other hand, some of the participants posited that they fathom certain standards of beauty and physical appearance only exist online since the content is edited. This group also mentioned that such content does not affect them.

Number of Likes and Comments

[P8]: *It is stressful sometimes when you upload a post or you share a picture of yourself on Instagram and then you don't get more likes let's see you get three or four likes and it feels like it's a rejection from the Instagram community particularly your followers on the side and that that is problematic and it is stressful to see that what you have shared people are not commenting or no one is engaging with your post at all.*

[P3]: *Generally I don't I don't have a problem with a lack of comments against my posts on Instagram because I know I'm not a celebrity people like to follow celebrities and like posts from popular individuals and influencers and what stresses me a lot is negative comments on my post I find that people are ridiculing comments it's a picture and the*

comments are not good that gives me problems and it is quite stressful for me and sometimes um the people that are the community you can't point them out because you don't know their real identity and some of this person who comes with nasty comments they don't use their real names they use seed or names so that is also a problem because now you don't know the faceless person is just insulting you it's just insulting what you have posted on Instagram which is bad.

The participants revealed that the number of likes against their content can cause anxiety and stress. Some participants stated that a lack of likes affects them mentally. They indicated that fewer likes or no likes when they post their selfies trigger some mental health issues. One of them posited that when the post does not generate many likes it feels like a rejection from the Instagram community which is tantamount to stress. According to Åström (2022:22), the number of likes and comments dictates how the users judge lifestyle posts on Instagram. It was also stated that when their content does not generate decent likes they end up deleting it. In addition, some of the participants highlighted that sometimes their posts are met with negative comments from their fellow users which negatively affects their mental well-being.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Social networking services are the centre of socialisation in the 21st century. Social identity components are shaped by the trends and modern activities widely shared on these Web 2.0 platforms which has a major effect on health mental. All spheres of life are captured and reconstructed through social media commentary. If an issue is not widely magnified and disseminated on social media individuals consider it irrelevant. Accordingly, Instagram possesses the same attributes that mostly what is captured affect the perception of users. Thus, the users of this platform are advertently and inadvertently influenced by the content they consume on this platform. According to the findings of this study, more often than not, the users of this application are exposed to harmful content rooted in the dynamics of algorithms. To some extent, algorithms exacerbate the excessive consumption of Instagram content which is psychologically harmful to the audience. While social and identity and uses and gratification theory provided a valuable insight, it is important to highlight factors such cultural differences, socio-economic status, and access to mental health resources that influence mental health issues among South African

Instagram users. Additionally, the study has simplified the complex relationship between social media use and mental health by focusing solely on Instagram posts. It was crucial to take a holistic approach when studying the effects of social media on mental health, considering the multitude of factors at play.

There is a need to sanitise the manner in which this platform has positioned itself in the digital media space. The social media literacy model should be intricately designed to circumvent the ramifications of the multifaceted content. According to the findings of this study, the users of this social media platform need to take into cognizance of different features that would allow them to circumvent the negative effects of the platform on their mental well-being. There is a need to inculcate the culture of digital literacy among the users of social media platforms such as Instagram to negate some of the adverse effects that come with intensive consumption of the site. Furthermore, this study recommends that the users of these platforms who experience some mental health problems should consider seeking professional help to manage the mental ramifications of consuming content on the platforms. Moreover, the users of Instagram need to exploit some of the cardinal features available on the platform.

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