

INSTAGRAM FILTERS AND SELF-PERCEPTION: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: Social media platforms have become a crucial part of modern life, influencing many aspects of day-to-day living, including one's body image and self-concept. On social media sites like Instagram, users can customize their communication content to create an aesthetic or story that suits them by adding filters, which are thought to be powerful instruments for expression. This study examines the impact of social media filters, specifically on Instagram, within the context of Visual Communication and Culture. The research question of this study is; how do Instagram filters affect self-perception and body image among its users? The research methodology used is quantitative research, which involved the distribution of an online questionnaire through Google Forms to 18 participants who actively use Instagram, with an equal split of 9 male and 9 female participants. The aim of this research was to gather insights into their filter usage patterns and perceptions. The findings suggest that the majority of participants use filters on Instagram to enhance their appearance and obey to societal beauty standards. However, there is also an acknowledgment of the potential for filters to create unrealistic beauty standards. This research contributes to the broader discussion on the role of visual media in shaping cultural norms and individual self-perception. By concentrating exclusively on the impact of Instagram filters on self-perception, it fills a research void by advancing our knowledge of how visual communication on social media platforms affects people's self-perceptions. In contrast to other research that addressed the wider effects of social media, this study offers a thorough examination of Instagram filters and provides insights into how they affect users' perceptions of beauty and self-worth. It provides a more sophisticated knowledge of how visual communication on social media platforms might affect people's impressions of themselves and on overall beauty standards. In contrast to more general studies that cover the broader effects of social media, this study offers more of a focused analysis. In conclusion, the results of this study provide an important light on the complex dynamics of Instagram filters and how they affect how people perceive themselves.

The findings highlight the need for a closer look at how visual communication functions on social media platforms, especially in relation to self-worth and beauty standards. Building on these results, future studies in this field can investigate the changing field of visual communication and its consequences on cultural norms and individual self-perception.

Keywords: Instagram, Social media filters, Visual communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking allows its users to exchange photos, videos, activities, and lifestyle information. This tendency has led to discussion on how social media impacts people's self-perceptions (Scribd, 2022). Social media platforms are now an essential component of contemporary living, impacting many facets of daily existence, such as one's self-concept and body image. A recent systematic review by Krause et al. (2021) suggests three specific self-related processes that can explain various effects on self-esteem while using social media services: social comparison, self-reflection, and social feedback processing (Krause, Baum, Baumann, & Krasnova, 2019). As a multifaceted network to communicate, social media platforms provide users with a variety of ways to express themselves, engage in social interaction and tell visual stories. Beyond these features, the use of filters adds a layer of creativity considered as strong tools of expression that enables users to modify their communication content in order to create an aesthetic or narrative fit for them on platforms such as Instagram. According to a research done by Statista, Latest reports show that Instagram has 2 billion monthly active users (Sprout Social, 2024). The use of filters has become more common thanks to apps like Instagram, which provide a variety of choices for changing colors, tones, and even facial features. According to a study by Fardouly et al. (2015), the use of filters on Instagram has been linked to increased body image concerns among young women. According to Instagram, the platform is designed to be a place where users can share moments from their lives, express their creativity through photography, editing and connect with others who share similar interests (Instagram, n.d.). Understanding the motivations behind Instagram use is essential for comprehending how social media filters influence self-perception and contribute to broader cultural narratives. The purpose of using Instagram varies from person to person, but in general, it focuses on self-expression, social interaction, and visual storytelling. It provides a space for exploring and getting inspired, where users can discover new ideas, trends, and perspectives through visual content. Alongside these positive aspects, there is a growing concern about the impact of Instagram on self-perception, particularly regarding the use of filters and the portrayal of idealized images.

This study explores and attempts to highlight how Instagram, affects people's self-perception and the view on overall beauty, by looking at the reasons behind filter use and the perceived effects of chosen filters. It also explores potential gender differences in filter use and its impact on self-perception, adding nuance to the existing body of research on this topic.

The research conducted involves a questionnaire distributed to 18 participants who actively use Instagram, with an equal split of 9 male and 9 female, contributing in the field of quantitative research. The questionnaire consists of a series of questions meant to bring out results and comments from participants about their frequency of filter use, motivations for filtering their content, reported impacts on self-perception and their view on overall beauty. The research question of this study is; how do Instagram filters impact self-perception and body image among young adults? The hypothesis is that the use of Instagram filters is related with a higher probability of body dissatisfaction and a recognition of unattainable beauty standards among young adults. Moreover, it's anticipated that females will be more influenced by the use of filters compared to males, due to societal pressure and media impacts on beauty standards.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Self-perception

According to a study conducted in 2021, The Wall Street Journal reports that 32% of teenagers, mainly girls, said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse (Frier & MacMillan, 2021). Most people attribute body dissatisfaction to social reasons, with the mass media being the most pervasive and powerful (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999).

Effects of Filters on Body Image

Social media filters, particularly those on platforms like Snapchat and Instagram, are becoming increasingly popular. These filters allow users to alter their appearance in photos, often creating a more idealized version of themselves. Knowing the fun the use of them may offer, they can also have a negative impact on mental health, where many people are seeking cosmetic procedures so that they match the filtered version of themselves ("The Mental Health Toll," 2018). The two main types of filters Instagram users most frequently use are; color adjustment filters and beautifying filters (GoWAAA, 2020). Research suggests that the use of social media filters can contribute to body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), a mental health condition characterized by obsessive thoughts about perceived flaws in appearance. People with BDD may become preoccupied with achieving a perfect appearance, leading to anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues ("The Mental Health Toll," 2018). Perloff (2014) discusses the impact of social media on young women's body image concerns from various theoretical perspectives. The article explores how social media platforms can influence body image perceptions through exposure to idealized images and the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. Perloff suggests that social media's pervasive nature and its portrayal of edited and curated images can contribute to body dissatisfaction and negative self-perception among young women.

Psychological impact; The Perception of Reality vs. Filtered images

During adolescence, people undergo significant emotional and physical changes, including sudden weight gain and transitioning to a more mature body. They become more self-conscious and are concerned about how others perceive them. Self-presentation and peer influence play crucial roles in their identity formation and self-esteem during this transitional period. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook provide new avenues for self-presentation and peer comparison, which can influence beauty standards. They often engage in online self-presentation, such as posting selfies and outfit-of-the-day photos, to compare themselves with their peers and project idealized beauty standards. The theoretical framework of self-presentation suggests that individuals use social media to construct their identities and communicate information about themselves to others. These platforms encourage non-anonymity and the extension of offline lives into online environments, where self-presentation and peer comparison occur concurrently (Chua & Chang, 2016).

3. METHODOLOGY

This conducted study has a mixed-methods approach by combining both qualitative and quantitative methods with the aim to explore the influence on self-perception of the filters used on Instagram. Employed was a Google forms questionnaire as the primary data collector. The questions on the questionnaire were designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative insights, from 18 active Instagram users, with an equal split of nine male and nine female participants. As the main research approach, the questionnaire allowed a comprehensive analysis of the participants' experience as well as perceptions on the use of Instagram filters, providing a holistic understanding of the topic. The questionnaire was carefully designed to extract information that would yield personal stories as well as quantitative data, giving researchers a thorough picture of participants' experiences with and opinions about

Instagram filters. This method made it easier to conduct a thorough study, exploring personal experiences in addition to spotting more general patterns and trends. Ethical concerns informed the design and delivery of the questionnaire, guaranteeing the preservation of participants' privacy and confidentiality during the data collection procedure. Furthermore, the questionnaire was disseminated digitally, allowing respondents to reply at their convenience and minimizing potential biases associated with face-to-face interactions. Through the use of statistical analysis and qualitative coding, it allowed to find themes and patterns in the participant responses. The results of this study shed light on the complex relationships between users' conceptions of identity and beauty on social media platforms and digital filters, adding insightful new information to the body of knowledge already available on social media, visual communication, and self-perception.

Survey results

Demographics:

9 female, 9 male participants
 38.9% between the age of 18-24
 38.9% between the age of 25-34
 22.2% between the age of 35-44

Quantitative insights:

Q1: How often do you use filters when posting photos/videos on Instagram?

Rarely 66.7%, occasionally 22.2%, frequently 5.6% and always 5.6%

Q2: What motivates you to use filters on Instagram?

To enhance the appearance of my photos 50%, to fit in with current trends 0%, to hide perceived flaws or imperfections 22.2% and for fun 38.9%

Q3: How do you feel about your appearance when using filters on Instagram?

More confident 33.3%, less confident 11.1% and no change in confidence 55.6%

Q4: Do you think that using filters on Instagram has influenced your perception of overall beauty?

Yes 55.6%, no 33.3% and not sure 11.1%

Q5: Do you believe that the use of filters on Instagram creates unrealistic overall beauty standards?

Yes 94.4%, no 5.6% and not sure 0%

Q6: Have you ever felt pressure to use filters on Instagram to fit in to certain beauty standards?

Yes, frequently 16.7%, yes, occasionally 27.8%, no, never 33.3% and not sure 22.2%

Q7: How do you think the use of filters on Instagram affects your self-esteem?

Positively 16.7%, negatively 38.9%, no effect 27.8%, I'm not sure 5.6%, it makes me think I need some changes so I can fit the beauty standard 5.6% and fake perception 5.6%

Q8: Do you think that Instagram should provide more transparency regarding the use of filters?

Yes 66.7%, no 0% and not sure 33.3%

Q9: Have you ever received feedback or comments on your appearance on Instagram that you believe were influenced by filters you chose to use?

Yes 44.4%, no 27.8% and not sure 27.8%

Q10: Have you ever compared yourself to others on Instagram based on their filtered photos?

Yes, frequently 16.7%, yes occasionally 33.3%, no, never 50% and not sure 0%

Q11: Have you ever felt dissatisfied with your natural appearance after using filters on Instagram for an extended period?

Yes 50%, no 44.4% and not sure 5.6%

4. CONCLUSION

The questionnaire's design provided for the analysis of individual stories with quantitative data, thereby enabling researchers to obtain an in depth understanding of participants' experiences and opinions on Instagram filters. In order to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants, ethical considerations have been a top priority in developing and delivering this questionnaire. The digital distribution of the questionnaire avoided potential biases associated with in-person contacts while enabling participants to respond at their convenience. Themes and patterns in participant responses were found through statistical analysis and qualitative coding, providing insight into the complex connections among identity, attractiveness, and Instagram filters.

The demography of participants in the survey was found to be broad, with an equal distribution of male and female participants. The age range of the majority of participants, 18–34, suggests that Instagram filters are used by a younger audience. Qualitative findings revealed that the main reasons people use Instagram filters are to make their images look better, have fun, and follow the latest trends. When using filters, participants reported they felt more

confident about the way they looked, but they also admitted that filters can lead to unattainable beauty standards and have a negative effect on self-esteem.

The findings point to the need for greater openness regarding Instagram filter usage and raise questions about how users' perceptions of themselves and their mental health may be impacted by filters. Overall, the survey's findings add insightful information to the continuing debate around how Instagram filters affect users' perceptions of their bodies and selves.

Since this field of study is continually expanding, there are perhaps research that have been published or are in the submission process that have not been included in the review. The limitations of each study included in this research must be taken into account, just like in any other research. However, a few specific shortcomings stand out when considering the entire body of data. Initially, the features of the participants did not accurately reflect the global community. The majority of research involved college or high school students. This is understandable given that these age groups have high social network service usage rates and a tendency for body image problems and affecting their self-perception. However, it is important to look into samples that are younger and older in age.

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