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Instagram

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Instagram

Abstract

Overview: Capturing pictures helps to preserve memories that will be saved forever, and looking at them allows someone to take a journey back in time to when any given picture was taken. In this day and age, smartphones such as Androids and iPhones help to make picture taking quick and easy. With the swipe of a finger and a tap on the screen, a picture can be taken and saved on a camera roll in mere seconds. But it doesn't stop there, with the smartphone application (app) called Instagram, photography can be taken to the next level. Instagram is a website, and also a free app, compatible with most smartphones. It is a form of social media in which users create a profile, including their name and a small biography about themselves. It allows them to upload and post pictures or short fifteen-second videos of anything they please and include a caption that goes with it. Both gender and age play defining roles in how the user actually uses the app. When looking at gender, it is interesting to explore the differences between what men and women post and how often they post. It is suspected there are differences in their usage because of cultural context. In general, women like to share with others what is going on with their lives and men are usually more reserved. This could potentially explain why women post more often, so their followers know what they are experiencing. Age is also something that impacts usage. When looking at the younger generations compared to the older, there is a difference in what and how often they post as well, so it would be interesting to explore why in fact there is this inconsistency in posting rates. Different ages have different audiences, so this could play into why they post what they do. Maybe the younger generation posts more to look cool, and maybe the older generation does not post as much, because they are consumed with more important things, such as work or school. I want to illustrate a clear picture about why there is this split through asking questions about purpose of usage, why they post, and why they post what they post. In summary, I want to uncover what kind of identity they are forming for themselves based on their Instagram activity, and how what they post and like shows others who they are in the social media world.

Keywords

MLA, Writing

Lindsey Michaud

Introduction

Eudora Welty once said, “A good snapshot keeps a moment from running away.” Capturing pictures helps to preserve memories that will be saved forever, and looking at them allows someone to take a journey back in time to when any given picture was taken. In this day and age, smartphones such as Androids and iPhones help to make picture taking quick and easy. With the swipe of a finger and a tap on the screen, a picture can be taken and saved on a camera roll in mere seconds. But it doesn't stop there, with the smartphone application (app) called Instagram, photography can be taken to the next level.

Instagram is a website, and also a free app, compatible with most smartphones. It is a form of social media in which users create a profile, including their name and a small biography about themselves. It allows them to upload and post pictures or short fifteen-second videos of anything they please and include a caption that goes with it. This caption may include an explanation of what the user is doing, an emoji (which is like a small cartoon picture) which depicts what is going on, or a hashtag. A hashtag is this symbol, #, followed by a word or message. When a user hashtags something, it identifies a topic or message they think pertains to their picture. The app also includes different filters, which change the color of the photos, change the angle, add frames, and allows the user to change the contrast and brightness of any photo. An example of one of the filters available is Inkwel. If a user selects this filter, his picture would change to black and white. Users can use these filters to change the mood of the picture and set a tone for what they are trying to portray in their post. For example, if someone wanted to post a picture of himself, he may put a filter on that would brighten up the photo to make the mood

lively and happy. Basically, it is a miniature and much less complex form of Photoshop, right on the user's phone or computer screen.

Instagram has many different users: male, female, young, and old. Although Instagram is thought to be composed mostly of users ages sixteen to twenty, many would be surprised how many users are sixteen and under, and how often that age group posts. Also, some users are twenty and up. When looking at the account of a sixteen-year-old versus one of a twenty-five-year-old, there are apparent differences in not only what they post, but also how often they post. It is interesting to ponder why there are such large differences between these two ages. When gender is brought into the mix, there are also differences between what men and women post and how often they do so.

Now that there is a set idea about what the app Instagram provides its users with and who uses it, it is interesting to look at the clear divide between the types of users and how they use the app itself. Both gender and age play defining roles in how the user actually uses the app. When looking at gender, it is interesting to explore the differences between what men and women post and how often they post. It is suspected there are differences in their usage because of cultural context. In general, women like to share with others what is going on with their lives and men are usually more reserved. This could potentially explain why women post more often, so their followers know what they are experiencing. Age is also something that impacts usage. When looking at the younger generations compared to the older, there is a difference in what and how often they post as well, so it would be interesting to explore why in fact there is this inconsistency in posting rates. Different ages have different audiences, so this could play into why they post what they do. Maybe the younger generation posts more to look cool, and maybe the older generation does not post as much, because they are consumed with more important

things, such as work or school. I want to illustrate a clear picture about why there is this split through asking questions about purpose of usage, why they post, and why they post what they post. In summary, I want to uncover what kind of identity they are forming for themselves based on their Instagram activity, and how what they post and like shows others who they are in the social media world.

Literature Review

With social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr on the rise, many scholars have looked into gender and age in relation to social media. Most of these studies support the same ideas and concepts this study explores on Instagram about how gender and identity impact what and how users post. Most studies involve gender, age, and media and audience impact in relation to social media websites.

Haferkamp, Eimler, and Papadakis explore the idea of the “digital divide” in their article titled, “Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus? Examining Gender Differences in Self-Presentation on Social Networking Sites”. They define the “digital divide” as the split of the usage on the Internet and explored how gender contributes to this split in usage. The study was conducted using an online survey with 500 *StudiVZ* users, which is a German social media site similar to Facebook. The subjects were men and women at a relatively equal ratio. They were asked about their Internet usage. The authors wrote the following about their findings, “From this, we may conclude on a more general level that men indeed use SNS for information seeking but not with regard to factual data or knowledge but rather for collecting information on their existing contacts and potential future net-work. On the contrary, women’s motives are driven by a more hedonistic perspective of personal enjoyment and of self-presentation. This is also underlined by the result that women tend to use group names for individual, personality- related

self-presentation (i.e., hedonic aspects), whereas men use group names to search for friends” (Haferkamp, Eimler, and Papadakis 96). The results showed men use social media websites for information rather than self-presentation and women use social networks for audience recognition and self-presentation.

Similarly, Palmer's study found the following results: “...females are more interested that males in the status of others and in keeping tabs of activity of the people they’re connected with” (1). He illustrates the usage difference based on gender and explains how women are more likely to post pictures of them and edit them to look good, while men are more likely to post pictures of their cars and money. In another similar study, Colas, Gonzalez, and De Pablos highlight gender differences, both emotionally and psychologically, to interpret why the genders differ in what they post. The authors state female users tend to be more relational, while male users are more emotional, which impacts what they post. For example, a woman may post a picture with her friends to show the importance of that relationship (Colas, Gonzalez, and De Pablos 1). These authors highlight similar ideas as the above articles, that gender causes a difference in the reasoning users use when posting. Overall, these articles all entail how gender has an impact on the online identity users make for them.

Through his article, “Social Surveillance”, Palmer also highlights the impact age can have on the identity a user is trying to create for himself online. He writes, “The social network is represented as the social ties of the individual, and with two-thirds of the SNW population aged fourteen to twenty-four, establishing identity is essential” (Palmer 35). His findings prove age plays a huge role in identity of the user, because at certain ages represent milestones in the user's life. For teenagers between fourteen and twenty-four, social networks can be a place where they can express themselves and create an identity which they would like to portray to others.

His study shows two-thirds of the social networking sites have users between those essential defining years. This is an overwhelming amount of users and proves the idea that social networks play a large role in a teenager's life. Colas, Gonzalez, and De Pablos also stress the idea age plays a role in social networks. Their study found the average age of a person who starts using social media is twelve and a half, which means they are starting puberty, which is defined as an essential time to begin forming relationships with others. The authors found most of the users had the same type of usage reason: "social need to interact with peers" (Colas, Gonzalez, and De Pablos 19). This again shows how age plays role in identity and how social networks are used as relationship builders.

In "The Place of Emplaced Visualities: A Case Study of Smartphone Visuality and Location-based Social Media in Shanghai, China", Hjorth and Gu interviewed many of the users of a social networking site called *Jiepan* and studied how a younger generation of Chinese teenagers - called the *ba ling hou* - used the site. They observed their postings and even provided some pictures throughout the reading so the readers could understand what the users posted. They also conducted interviews, which showed why the users posted these things. Based on the results of the study, the authors concluded the younger generation is much more open and willing to share components of their lives with others. Age can play a large role in the way users use social networking sites. The above studies show age can influence what users post, how they interact with others, and what they are willing to share.

Lastly, media and audience impact can also have an effect on the identity users attempt to make for themselves using social media sites as a medium. David Gauntlett wrote about media impact in his book titled, "Media, Gender, and Identity". He explains the kind of messages the media sends to its audience through the way they present different genders and characters.

Gauntlett writes the following about the impact of media, “The media shows us situations and relationships from other people's points of view – indeed, it is part of the eternal fascination of drama that we can see 'how the world works' in lives other than our own” (6). He also argues that because of the alarming amount of media consumption in our country, we are influenced by what we see. This has a profound impact on how we conduct ourselves.

Tortajada, Araña, and Martinez focus on how sexuality is portrayed in the media and how that impacts male and female users when they are deciding what to post. They explain, “Social networking sites are spaces of risk and opportunity deeply affected by gender, and are becoming arenas for negotiation in and increasingly sexualized media environment” (Tortajada, Araña, and Martinez 180). The authors explored how this sexuality portrayed on the media transfers over into how users represent themselves on social media. Carter and Steiner also talk about media impact on a user's identity in their book, “The Media and Gender Reader”. A particular section in chapter one titled “(Re)producing Gender” talks about how media translates gender and provides consumers with ideas of what certain types of people should act like. Carter and Steiner talk specifically about how women are impacted by what the media portrays them as. The authors write, “Women’s magazines continue to raise a host of crucial issues for consideration of gender”(Carter and Steiner 7). They explain how advertisements steer women to believe they need to buy certain things and look a certain way to be truly considered a woman by society. This shows the impact the media has on its consumers; most are always concerned with how they look and act because of fear of being judged.

Similarly, Marwick delves into how audience impacts what people post on social networking sites. She explores how people use social media sites in order to be seen. She highlights the idea that people are always posting with an audience in mind and thinking about

how their audience will perceive their pictures. She writes, “Individuals strategically reveal, disclose and conceal personal information to create connections with others and tend social boundaries” (Marwick 1). Users reveal certain information about their lives in order to create relationships with others because of the idea of “social surveillance”, which she explains that people are always watching other people’s online postings to see what they are talking about or doing (Marwick 1).

Finally, Livingstone demonstrates how social media has played such a large role in the relationships and connections teenager can form, because of the opportunity it offers to become friends with anyone the user pleases. In her article, “Taking Risky Opportunities in Youthful Content Creation: Teenagers' Use of Social Networking Sites for Intimacy, Privacy and Self-Expression”, she talks about how teenagers manage their identity through the profiles they create for themselves online and the risks they take when posting personal information online. The results showed, “Although teenagers tend to describe their social networking activities in terms of freely taken choices, when questioned more closely it appears that they are constrained in two ways: first, by the norms and practices of their peer group and, second, by the affordances of the technological interface” (Livingstone 400). The study concluded their audiences, and also the technology in use, impact users. Overall, many studies also highlight how the media and audience can impact the type of identity someone may develop online.

Many studies have been conducted that have looked at online identity in relation to gender, age, and audience/media impact. My study specifically looked at these variables in relation to Instagram users.

Methodology

In order to discover the reasons why there are differences in digital identities on the social media application, Instagram, in relation to gender and age, I needed to isolate different age groups and gender. When searching for people who fit this criterion, I searched my own Instagram followers to attempt to find people who would be willing to answer questions about their usage. The reason why I chose people I already follow is because they were easy to get in contact with and people who were reliable. Three women and three men committed to completing this study, from each of the following age ranges: 12-16, 17-20, and 21-25. Importantly, each person participating in the survey was an Instagram user who posted at least once a week and who looked at and liked photos at least once a week as well. Using a survey, questions were asked about how much they post, what they post, why they post it, and if they use hashtags or filters. Some of the questions also asked about what kind of photos they like and why they liked them. After conducting the survey, observations were done on the photos of the participating subjects; through these observations interesting statistics arose about different types of posts.

The surveys provided information easy to group and compare, which is why surveys were the best way to look at Instagram usage. I wanted to examine one gender and compare their usage to the opposite gender's, and likewise with age. Surveys allow for easy grouping, and trends become readily apparent, making the differences and similarities between the various demographics clear. I started by asking their name, age, and gender, which are important aspects because the study is looking at how age and gender cause differences in their Instagram identity. There were multiple choice questions asking them about how much they post, what age their followers and who they follow are, what they find themselves posting and liking, and how many likes they received on their most liked photo. The survey also asked them to do some scale rating

questions. For example, they were asked to rate on a scale from one to five how large of an impact their audience has on what they post (one being a small impact and five being a huge impact). The survey also asked them to answer a few short answer questions to **explain** the rationale behind why they use the app in certain ways. Overall, the surveys provided insight about usage.

Observing users photos also provided excellent data that showed apparent differences between the genders. I looked back at postings from the past twenty-five weeks for each user and observed what types of photos they have been posting. This was very beneficial because it showed the clear differences between the types of pictures people post. I went through each of my participants Instagram profile and looked at what types of pictures they posted. I kept a tally of when I saw selfies, pictures with groups, quotes, food, nature, and hobbies. This helped me find concrete statistics of what users posted what types of pictures.

Surveying and observing proved to be the most efficient way to collect data about Instagram usage, because it provided me with a well-rounded set of data. I uncovered ideas about their Instagram identity through the answers to their survey questions. I also found statistics through observations which will prove the validity of my findings. Both were convenient and easy to find participants, and the observations, although time consuming, provided great insight.

Results

After collecting the surveys and making my observations, I discovered many different trends between the opposing genders and age groups. The survey revealed almost all of the participants posted on Instagram one or two times a week; they follow mostly all people in the same age group; and their followers are mostly all the in the same age group as well. As for the

rest of the survey, the results varied from age group to age group, as well as from gender to gender.

When looking at the results from the 12-16 age group, it was found that 42.9% of posts were with friends and significant others. It was also found that over 50% like either selfies or pictures with friends and significant others on other users' accounts. The survey also showed results varied when the subjects were asked how their audience impacts what they post. On a scale from one to five, one being the least impact and five being the most, 16.7% selected that their audience has the least impact on what they post, 33.3% picked two, another 33.3% picked three, 16.7% picked four. 0.0% selected that the audience has the most impact on what they post. The subject who selected one stated, "On Instagram I really do not care what people think about what I post...they should not judge me because of a picture I post or what pictures I like." A subject who selected three on the scale stated the following about audience impact: "I usually only post pictures that I think will get a lot of 'likes.'"

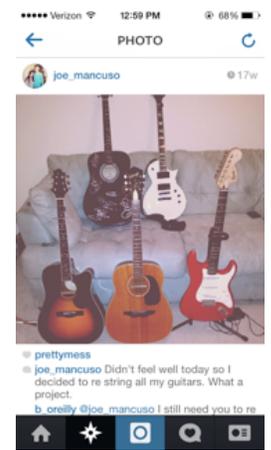
When observing the pictures posted by the participants in the 12-16 year old age group, there were apparent differences based on gender. For the women, 52% of their photos were selfies. When looking at the men, only 15% were selfies. The men had more photos related to sports, cars, and hobbies, while the women had far more selfies and pictures with friends or family.

The 17-20 age group also had interesting survey data. When asked what photos they post the most, 50% said food, while only 20% said selfies and photos of nature. When asked what photos they like the most, 41.7% said photos with friends and significant others. Only 8.3% chose photos with family and photos of food. The audience impact question proved to have an even split: 25% picked that the audience has the least impact on what they post, 25% picked two,

25% picked three, 25% picked four, and 0% picked that audience has the most impact on what they post. One subject who picked one said, “my posts are not impacted by my followers, if they do not like what I post, they simply do not have to follow me.” A subject who picked four stated, “I won’t post anything I wouldn’t want to share with [my followers] or something I don’t want family members to see.”

When observing the posts of these participants, I again found a gender difference in postings. 61% of the female users posted pictures with friends, family, or significant others, while the male users had only 30% of this type of photo. Men had far more food pictures. The women had more selfies than the men.

Lastly, in the 20-25 age group, 33.3% of participants post photos with friends and significant others, 16.7% were selfies, photos with family, and photos of nature. When asked what photos they liked most, 28.6% said selfies, photos with friends or significant other, and other (including motivational pictures and pictures of high fashion), while 14.3% said they like pictures of food the most. When observing this age groups pictures, I found for the women 36% of their photos were selfies, while only 10% of the men’s photos were selfies. 37% of the men’s photos were of hobbies including cars, animals, and food. The women in this age group had many photos of nails, make-up, and clothing, constituting 30% of their photos. Here is an example of some of the women’s photos versus some of the men’s:



After reflecting on the data collected and the previous studies conducted on social media technologies, the data confirms the ideas proposed in many of the studies. Haferkamp, Eimler, and Papadakis explored the idea of the “digital divide”, which looks at how gender creates a division between the postings of female and male users. Based on the findings of their study, they concluded women’s postings are motivated by personal enjoyment and self-presentation, while men’s postings and social media usage is based more on information gathering (Haferkamp, Eimler, and Papadakis 96). My data supported this claim fully through observations and survey data.

When looking the photos posted by the female subjects, there were many selfies and pictures with groups of friends and family. For example, when observing the postings of one of the female subjects from the study, over the past twenty weeks 21% of her photos were selfies, 53% of her photos were of fashion, make-up, and nails, and 21% were relational (meaning the photos had other people in them). As Haferkamp, Eimler, and Papadakis stated in their findings, women are more concerned with personal enjoyment and self-presentation. This female subject is showing both self-presentation through her selfies and personal enjoyment through her postings of loved ones and fashion. When looking at the one of the male subject photos over the past twenty weeks, there were more pictures of sports, hobbies, and cars. 32% of his photos from the past twenty weeks contained one of his many hobbies, producing music, while only 4.5% of his photos were selfies. Also, only 9% of his photos were relational. My findings also support the findings of Haferkamp, Eimler, and Papadakis, because they say men use social media in order to obtain information and network themselves. This subject uses Instagram to make clear his love for music, and he may post certain pictures in attempt to make connections with others who enjoy music or lead to potential growth of his music career via networking. These critical

observations of the photos posted by both a female and male user makes it clear there is a difference in what men and women post on Instagram and shows the continuum from past studies.

Statistical data collected from my surveys also support this idea. 52% of photos posted by women ages 12-16 were selfies, while only 15% of photos posted by men in the same age group were selfies. In the 17-20 age group, 61% of the women's photos were with groups, while only 30% of men's photos fell under that category. These are significant differences which suggest the ideas stated by Haferkamp, Eimler, and Papadakis are in fact true. It is clear women more often post photos motivated by personal relationships and self-image, while men care less about how they present themselves and more about posting pictures of hobbies or simply using the social media app to seek out information rather than using to create a self-image.

In Palmer's article "Social Surveillance", he asserts that age has a huge impact on the type of identity a user is trying to make for him or herself. He highlights that at ages 14-24, teenagers are at a time in their lives most important to form identities. His study showed two-thirds of the population of social networking websites are between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four (Palmer 35). In a study conducted by Colas, Gonzales, and De Pablos, similar findings were collected. They found the younger generations felt they need to use social media websites in order to interact with peers (19).

In the survey, participants were asked how they felt about the impact their audience had on what they posted. I expected to find the 12-16 range would rate audience impact high, since at this time in their life they are trying to form an identity through their usage, so it would make sense they would post with their audience in mind. Maybe they would think if they post a certain picture, their followers would think they were cool and want to be friends with them. But

surprisingly, the data was split. Only a few of the subjects stated their audience had a large impact on what they posted. One subject chose four on a scale of one through five, five being the highest. When asked why he choose four, he stated, “They influence me a lot.” I can conclude this subject really wants his followers to like what he posts and form an opinion on his identity based on the photographs he posts. Another subject in the same age group chose one on the scale from one to five. When asked why she choose one, she said, “On Instagram I really do not care what people think about what I post...they really should not judge me because of a picture I post or what pictures I like.” This was unexpected, since based on what was found in previous studies, I thought the younger subjects would have thought more about audience when posting based on the important timing in identity formation, when actually I found the opposite.

Adding on to the audience influence piece of the study, another question my subjects were asked was how parents impact what they post on Instagram. Although most stated audience did not have a large impact on what they post, when asked about parental influence, the answers were much different. The majority of users stated even if their parents do not have an Instagram or follow them, they still would never post something they would not want their parents to see. For example, a female subject from the 12-16 year old age group stated, “No [my parents] don’t really impact what I post. When I got Instagram, they told me they that would follow me and that they could trust that I would not post anything bad or inappropriate. I would never even think of posting a picture that my parents would not approve of.” One of the male users from the 12-16 age group stated the following, “My parents don’t have Instagram, but if they did have one it would impact me because although I don’t post anything bad, I still wouldn’t post some of the pictures I [currently] have up.” It is apparent these subjects would not want their parents to see anything inappropriate on their Instagram, and they attempt to filter what they post so their

parents do not see something the subject would not want them to see. This is another form of audience impact and how it can have control over what a user may post.

Overall, the data I found about age and gender supported most of the articles on previous studies, but some of the data was surprisingly opposing the ideas other studies have found. Overall, the data collected mostly supported the concepts others have researched about gender and age on social media websites

Conclusion

Social media websites are a medium for users to create their own online identities. Both gender and age can impact the way in which users express themselves on these types of domains. After looking at past studies about age and gender on social media sites and collecting my own data, I drew concrete conclusions about what I found. Women tend to be more relational and self-expressive on social media sites, while men tend to use these sites more to post their hobbies, interests, and assert their status. I also concluded different ages showed variations in usage rates, although the data I collected on age did not entirely match up with the findings from previous studies.

Although there has been past studies conducted about how gender and age impact how people portray themselves on these sites, my research focuses directly on the social media app Instagram, which has not had a lot of research done. Instagram, unlike Facebook, has not been around for a long time, so my data presents some information on a more recent technology. After looking back at what I have found, it would be interesting to see specifically how media impacts what users post. Although when searching for sources I did come across many interesting articles about media impact, I choose to focus more on the impact gender and age have on usage. It would be both beneficial and intriguing to take a look at current media consumption and how the

images consumers see everyday impact how they present themselves to others on these social media sites. Another interesting thing to look at would be audience impact. Like I stated above, my data presented a contradiction to what most past studies have found in relation to audience impact in the younger generations. It would be beneficial to take a closer look at audience impact to explore why some feel their audience has a huge impact on what they post and why some feel as if they could not care less what their audience thinks. Overall, my research portrays how both gender and age impact how users attempt to present themselves to their followers on Instagram, and my findings point to what previous studies have found, but it also presented some interesting yet unexpected contradictions which should be further looked at.

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