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## **The Influence of Instagram and Depression Amongst College-Aged Individuals**

Ariana Soylemezoglu

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Depression and Instagram

**The Influence of Instagram and Depression Amongst College-Aged Individuals**

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C.W. Post Campus

### **Abstract**

Social media has impacted the lives of many young adults within today's society. While social media has connected individuals from around the world, it has also blurred the truth from reality. Quite often, social media users will give a glimpse into their life where judgements are free to be made by their audience. Instagram is a noteworthy platform that is highly utilized, but also highly critical to one's mental health. Previous research has explored the significance between mental health and social media; however, the aim of this current study is to carefully examine the connection between depression and Instagram usage amongst college-aged individuals. The present study used a mixed-methods research in which data was collected from students attending Long Island University's Post Campus. Participants were asked to complete an anonymous survey that was distributed via email link. Results indicated that Instagram usage does not influence depression amongst college-aged individuals.

*Keywords:* depression, Instagram, social media, young adults

### **Acknowledgments**

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Lastly, it is essential that I voice my gratitude for the MSW cohort of 2022. Together we have supported one another through unprecedented times and yet made it to graduation. Despite my physical absence from the classroom, I have never gone a day feeling unseen. There is no doubt in my mind that the individuals that I have had the pleasure in getting to know over the last two years will touch the lives of many and make this world a little brighter.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **The Influence of Instagram and Depression Amongst College-Aged Individuals**

Depression rates have risen over the last several years with an alarming increase primarily in young adults. Previous research has been conducted to make sense of the rising depression rates amongst this population, however, there is currently a lack of evidence to support how social media may have an influence despite its impactful presence in young adult's daily lives. The purpose of this thesis paper is to explore the correlation between Instagram usage and depression amongst college-aged individuals.

#### **Background**

Social media has forever changed the way in which society functions, allowing individuals to connect with their loved ones near and far with just the simple touch of their fingertips. Social media platforms have established a space for people to display the highlights of their life, while also being an outlet for creative expression. Instagram is a famed social media platform that is highly utilized by young adults today for various reasons. Quite often, Instagram users purposely choose to share a picture-perfect moment with their audience that may lead to a false narrative of what their life actually might be like. What is not always seen through Instagram and several other social media sites is the vulnerability and struggles that people face on a daily basis.

Chelsie Kryst, formerly known as Miss USA, tragically passed away at just 30 years old on January 30th, 2022, to suicide. Her death came as a shock to many individuals who knew and loved her. From the outside looking in, Chelsie Kryst appeared to be someone who did not battle with mental health struggles. Her infectious smile was seen and felt across her Instagram page where she exhibited happiness and creativity as she fashionably modeled clothing. Behind the

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bright smile was a young woman who faced loud, dark thoughts that could not be quieted. Chelsie Kryst's mother released a statement following her daughter's passing that "Cheslie led both a public and a private life. In her private life, she was dealing with high-functioning depression which she hid from everyone — including me, her closest confidant — until very shortly before her death" (Vivinetto, 2022). This statement explicitly exemplifies how social media is not always a clear measure of what someone might be going through. With Chelsie Kryst's life on full display, those that closely followed her on Instagram struggled to make sense of why she would end her own life due to the way she presented herself. Many of her loyal followers even speculated whether or not her death was truly a suicide; however, an autopsy confirmed the devastating loss (Kieran Press-Reynolds, 2022).

Emerging adulthood is an exciting, yet also tricky time in an individual's life. Newly discovered independence is gained as individuals move beyond their structured childhood and enter into the real world on their own. This is also a pivotal time in a person's life when they begin to form their own sense of self outside of their usual surroundings. Daniel Levinson, a prominent psychologist who studied human development, outlined the different stages that an individual goes through in adulthood (Ashford et al., 2017). Levinson perceived the time from when a person is 17 to 22 as a preparation period for adulthood, whereas a person ranging from 22 to 28 years of age begins to make more earnest decisions based around their lifestyle (Ashford et al., 2017). According to Levinson, once a person falls in the range of 28 to 33 years of age, profound changes begin to occur that are more impactful to one's life (Ashford et al., 2017). Nonetheless, Levinson understood that young adulthood is a vulnerable time, which is further supported by the rising depression rates of this population (Bettmann et al., 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the last several years, concerns have been raised over the state of young adults' mental health. Depression and anxiety rates have steadily increased for individuals currently in college. Counseling centers on college campuses within the United States have seen a significant surge in students' utilization of services and treatments (Bettmann et al., 2020). According to Bettmann et al. (2020), 40% of participating college-aged students stated that their depression is so severe that it handicaps them from functioning with society and their peers. Researchers have begun to analyze the triggers for the debilitating depression that so many young adults across the country face and have considered the excessive use of social media, specifically Instagram, to be one of the leading factors. Social media has enabled persons of all appropriate ages to connect with loved ones and the world in order to maintain relationships and display highlights of their life. While there are numerous positive attributes of the usage of Instagram, there are also various negative and impactful consequences.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to showcase the diverse ways in which Instagram impacts young adults, specifically college-aged individuals. Through the exploration of previous research, it was revealed that the ways in which one utilizes Instagram will have a significant effect on their mental health (Bettmann et al., 2020b). Researchers of several studies explored in this literature review highlighted the ways in which young adults' mental health is affected by the usage of social media. The relationship between social media and body image, as well as the influence of fitness bloggers hold over young adult females will also be analyzed (Reade, 2020). This literature review aims to investigate the present research to further understand how such variables could hold influence over one's mental health.

### **Utilization of Instagram**

Instagram is a notoriously known social media platform that attracts diverse individuals from all around the world. As of 2020, 90% of young adults utilized some form of social media, whereas in 2005, only 12.5% of young adults took part in social media platforms (Bettmann et al., 2020). Evidently, social media has become an increasingly normal part of one's life where people can display the highlights of their lives. Researchers have become increasingly curious as to the role social media plays in people's daily lives and why they use it.

In one study done by Bettmann et al. (2020), researchers found that most individuals use social media as a means to maintain relationships, pass time, as a source of entertainment, and uniquely a way to manage social anxiety. Bettmann et al. (2020) also found that when people spend more time socializing with individuals via technology instead of face-to-face, the quality of relationships dwindles resulting in feelings of isolation. In a case study completed by Bettman et al. (2020), a 24-year-old female college student was analyzed after requesting counseling for

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anxious and depressive symptoms. The participant revealed that while she often uses social media as a means to escape her stressful reality from school and daily life, she however feels that social media has caused a sense of dysphoria (Bettmann et al., 2020). The participant further explained that she feels conflicted between who she really is to her peers from diverse communities and that it often makes her feel stressed (Bettmann et al., 2020).

In another study conducted by Holmgren and Coyne (2017), the damaging effects of excessive usage of Instagram was examined. According to the researchers, individuals may experience an increase in depression-like symptoms, poor quality of sleep, heightened anxiety, lack of self-esteem and hostility within relationships as a result of using Instagram (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Furthermore, there are even more negative repercussions when utilizing Instagram in a “pathological” manner, that is, with addictive-like behaviors such as utilizing Instagram as a means to forget about reality, which can then result in feelings of withdrawal when unable to access it (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Holmgren and Coyne (2017) specifically focused their study on the effects of self-regulation and pathological Instagram use, as well as whether or not there was a correlation to depression. Four hundred and forty-two young adults (51.6% female, 48.4% male) participated in this study and were asked questions based on pathological social media use, self-regulation, and depression (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Results of this study revealed that of the 442 participants, most did not have a pathological relationship to social media (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Additionally, results indicated that the damaging effects (i.e., depression) of utilizing Instagram, may be due to the individual comparing themselves to other users rather than excessive usage (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017).

The presented findings from these articles indicate that while there are positive attributes to the utilization of social media, there are also negative aspects to the misuse of social media. It

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is routine for young adults to incorporate social media into their daily lives and to document the favorable moments while also defining who they are in the world; however, there is an opportunity for damage to occur when it is misused or overused.

### **Social Media and Mental Health**

People often assess their self-worth on several factors including feeling loved, powerful, wanted, attractive, competent, and virtuous (Sabik et al., 2019). When these factors are jeopardized in any way, one naturally feels setback. Sabik et al. (2019) found that there are several individuals who define their worth through feedback on social media platforms (Sabik et al., 2019b). If an individual does not receive the anticipated positive feedback initially hoped for, Sabik et al. found that negative feelings towards oneself typically occur which can manifest into depression. A study done by Sabik et al. (2019) examined the ways in which women (n=160) between the ages of 18 to 33 years old associated their sense of worth through the usage of social media, such as Instagram. Sabik et al. (2019) found that women who based their worth on feedback from social media interactions were likely to feel depressive symptoms when they did not receive the feedback that they had hoped for. Individuals who determine their own self-worth through social media feedback may be more vulnerable to social comparison, which may negatively impact mental health (Sabik et al., 2019). Therefore, further research about the implications of social media is crucial.

In another case study completed by Lamp et. al (2019), female college students (n=164) in the United States completed an online survey examining how social media practices influence self-objectification and depression. Social media practices such as taking selfies and editing them were shown to be associated with higher levels of depression-like symptoms due to the significant pressure to appear flawless (Lamp et al., 2019). The researchers also found that when

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females take selfies, edit them and do not receive the anticipated feedback, unsettling feelings arise (Lamp et al., 2019). Lamp et al. (2019) also found through this study that females who already feel self-objectified are more likely to extensively edit their photos while being aware that they are portraying a false sense of self, further leading to depressive-like symptoms.

Bettmann et al. (2020) considered the link between social media and depression and found that the number of platforms utilized also plays a role in one's mental health. The researchers found that this is largely due to the increased social isolation that results from spending so much time on the phone instead of interacting in-person (Bettmann et al., 2020). Additionally, by spending so much time on social media sites such as Instagram, Bettmann et al. (2020) found that individuals decreased the amount of time spent physically exercising, which can also disrupt sleep patterns. With a lack of sleep and self-regulation, depression-like symptoms can occur. Bettmann et al. (2020) observed that college students are at an increased risk for depression when they experience FOMO, the fear of missing out. Platforms such as Instagram allow users to witness live updates on outings, which if a person is not included in that outing, they may feel down. Further, Bettman et al. (2020) found that FOMO is related to a heightened sensitivity to rejection that can provoke depressive-like symptoms.

## **Social Media and Influencers**

Social media influencers have a significant role within society today; spreading messages to their audience that are meant to be inspiring and motivational. The relationship social media users have with influencers can be detrimental if the content is perceived in a negative light. Josie Reade (2020) conducted a study in Australia observing 21 female Instagram users and how they interact with fitness influencers. Reade (2020) assessed how fitness media influencers impact their audience. Participants appreciated when influencers portrayed 'raw' footage of their

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daily lives because it made them more relatable (Reade, 2020). While participants enjoyed influential content overall, when influencers were too negative, participants found it hard to enjoy the content because of the lack of inspiration (Reade, 2020).

### **Social Media and Body Image**

Social media influences young adults for several reasons. For females, social media is often used as a source of inspiration for lifestyle and beauty practices. Over the last few years, many young women have come to use social media, such as Instagram, as a means to define their beauty by comparing and contrasting themselves to others (Perloff, 2014). Perloff (2014) examined the ways in which social media influences body image concerns amongst young adult females. Social media influences are complex, yet it is not the sole reason why young females suffer from body image issues (Perloff, 2014). In fact, Perloff (2014) found that females may already possess body image issues and social media may exacerbate it.

In a study completed by Rodgers et al. (2020), individuals from Australia ( $n=681$ ) were evaluated to assess the impact of social media upon one's self-esteem and body image. All 681 participants completed surveys which asked them to disclose the ways in which social media influences their lives. It was reported that those with lower self-esteem were likely to feel depressed when reflecting on body image satisfaction (Rodgers et al., 2020). Rodgers et al. (2020) also found that self-esteem and depressive-like symptoms were in fact related to social media-ideal internalization.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Based on the current of research, the following study examines the research question, does the usage of Instagram correlate with depression amongst college-aged individuals? The following hypotheses are investigated:



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H1: The more screentime college-aged individuals spend on Instagram, the higher their levels of depression.

H2: There will be a difference amongst white and black college students utilizing Instagram.

H3: Female respondents will have higher Instagram screentime than male respondents.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social media and mental health. The research question for this study challenges, does the usage of Instagram correlate with depression amongst college-aged individuals? The independent variable of this study is Instagram usage, while the dependent variable of this study is depression. The mental health of young adults is currently jeopardized, therefore presenting a profound need to explore this topic.

#### **Research Design**

The design of this research study was a cross-sectional study. Online anonymous surveys were distributed via email to college-aged students attending Long Island University. The survey examined information about motivations for Instagram usage and the ways in which Instagram impacts college-aged females lives.

#### **Population**

The population of this study was college-aged students attending Long Island University's Post campus on Long Island, New York.

#### **Sample**

The type of sampling that was utilized in this research study was non-probability purposive sampling. The participants of this study were purposefully chosen to better understand how Instagram usage affected their mental health and whether it influenced feelings of depression. The researcher worked with Long Island University Campus Labs to coordinate the survey to be distributed electronically and anonymously to students attending Long Island University Post campus. To be considered eligible to complete this survey, one had to be a college-aged student who is or was older than 18 years of age and who has had an Instagram account for more than one year.

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### **Measures**

A self-constructed survey was distributed that examined the demographics of participants, time spent on Instagram, and a standardized assessment of depression using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9; Kroenke, et al., 2001).

### ***Independent Usage***

Instagram usage was measured through Instagram's screen time calculator. The screen time calculator is provided via the Instagram app in the settings section. The frequency in which an individual spends on Instagram is then measured by hour(s), minute(s), and second(s)--if applicable.

### ***Dependent Variable***

Depression was measured through a standardized depression inventory using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9; Kroenke, et al., 2001). Nine questions were provided which asked participants to describe the prevalence of their depression symptoms using a likert scale from 0-3 (0=not at all; 3=nearly every day) which was then scored by adding each column. After these scores were summarized, they were put on a likert scale of 1-27 (1-4=minimal depression; 5-9=mild; 10-14=moderate; 15-19=moderately severe; 20-27=severe depression; Kroenke, et al., 2001).

### ***Demographics***

Participants of this study were asked a total of four demographic questions. The questions focused on age, gender, education status to confirm they are college students, and ethnicity.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

The measure of Instagram Usage was assessed through the Instagram app screentime calculator which should be reliable. Depression was measured through the Patient-Health

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Questionnaire depression model (PHQ-9; Kroenke, et al., 2001). According to Kroenke et al. (2001), the PHQ-9 score is a reliable and valid standard of measurement for the severity of depression. Further, Kroenke et al. (2001), noted that there was excellent internal consistency of the PHQ-9 based on two studies: one on PHQ Primary Care study and one on PHQ Ob-Gyn Study with Cronbach's Alpha of .89 and .86, respectively. The Cronbach's Alpha was run on this sample with a strong internal consistency of .89 (Kroenke, et al., 2001).

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Students attending Long Island University's Post campus were given anonymous, electronic surveys to be completed voluntarily. Below is a discussion on the methods of data collection and the ways in which data was analyzed.

#### ***Data Collection***

Data was collected through anonymous surveys that were distributed via email through Long Island University Campus Labs. Prior to the completion of the survey, participants were required to provide consent. Participants were then prompted to complete a brief demographic questionnaire before completing the rest of the survey. As part of the survey, a depression scale (PHQ9; Kroenke, et al., 2001) was also provided in which participants were then able to indicate the ways in which they felt depressed and the severity of their depression, if present. The survey also examined the ways in which participants utilized Instagram and the role it has on their lives. The survey was distributed via Long Island University Campus Labs and was available to complete for one month. The survey itself took 10-minutes to complete.

#### ***Data Analysis***

SPSS Statistic software was utilized to inspect bivariate data provided from completed surveys following the one month of distribution and access across Long Island University's Post

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campus. Bivariate analysis provided support to showcase the impact Instagram has upon college-aged students' mental health.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical standards of practice are critical when conducting research. Below is an explanation of the ways in which the researcher ensured ethical research was completed.

#### ***Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent***

The participants of this study were emailed prior to the completion of the survey. The email provided background information and indicated that this survey was voluntary. The email also provided consent by stating "participants are consenting by clicking this link".

#### ***Confidentiality and Anonymity***

Participants that completed this study had all information provided kept confidential. The identity of participants was not available on surveys. Instead, participants were each given a number to replace their identity, which was only accessible to the researcher.

## Chapter 4: Findings

College students attending Long Island University's Post campus were given an anonymous, electronic survey in relation to the impact of social media and mental health. The following chapter will examine univariate statistics including descriptive information on the sample and bivariate analyses were run on the three hypotheses.

### Missing Data

In total, there were N=36 respondents. Of these respondents, N=33 (91.67%) completed the survey in its entirety. Questions excluded by the three respondents included, "how many hours a day do you use Instagram according to Instagram's screen time calculator? Fill in your time on Instagram" and "what best describes how Instagram has impacted your social life? (Check all that apply)". Additionally, three respondents neglected to complete questions 1-9 of the PHQ-9 depression scale. The sample was made up of students attending Long Island University, Post campus.

### Descriptive Data

Table 1 highlights the demographic characteristics of the 36 survey respondents. As seen below, more than half of the respondents identified as White or European at 61.1%. The second largest category of respondents were individuals who identified as African American or Black at 22.2%. Only 11.1% identified as Hispanic or Latina/e/o/x and 5.6% as Asian or Asian American.

Table 1 also indicated that female respondents made up most of the sample at 77.8%. Male respondents made up 22.2% of the sample size.

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Table 1. Descriptive Data of Survey Respondents

Variables		<i>N</i>	<i>N %</i>
Race	African American or Black	8	22.2%
	Asian or Asian American	2	5.6%
	Hispanic or Latina/e/o/x	4	11.1%
	White or European American	22	61.1%
	Total	36	100.0%
Gender	Female	28	77.8%
	Male	8	22.2%
	Total	36	100.0%

### Dependent and Independent Variables

The descriptive and univariate information on the independent variable of Instagram Usage in Minutes and dependent variable of the PHQ-9 depression scores is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Instagram Usage and Depression Variables

Variables	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Range		Skewness
				Min	Max	
Instagram Usage Minutes	33	71.44	64.08	.00	270.00	1.604
Depression Score (PHQ-9)	33	8.88	6.75	.00	24.00	.552

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the predictor variable Minutes in Instagram Usage and the dependent variable Depression Score. Instagram Usage was not normally distributed since the skewness was positive with a score 1.604. There were outliers for Instagram Usage in Minutes because the last two scores were over 200 minutes in comparison to everyone else. The mean score of Instagram Usage in Minutes in the  $N = 33$  sample was about 71 minutes, with a standard deviation of 64.08 minutes. Depression Scores were normally distributed

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(skewness .552), with a mean score of 8.88 which indicates a mild level of depression according to Kroenke et al. (2001), with a standard deviation of 6.75 in the sample  $N = 33$ .

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

This study examined the research question, does the usage of Instagram correlate with depression amongst college-aged individuals? The outcomes of the hypotheses are outlined below.

#### ***Hypothesis 1***

The more screentime college-aged individuals spend on Instagram, the higher their levels of depression.

A simple linear regression was run to examine the relationship between Instagram usage and depression. The results of the regression showed that Instagram usage explained only 3.3% of the variance in depression,  $R^2 = .033$ ,  $F(1,31) = 1.05$ ,  $p = .313$ . Given the results of this regression, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. There is no relationship between Instagram usage and depression.

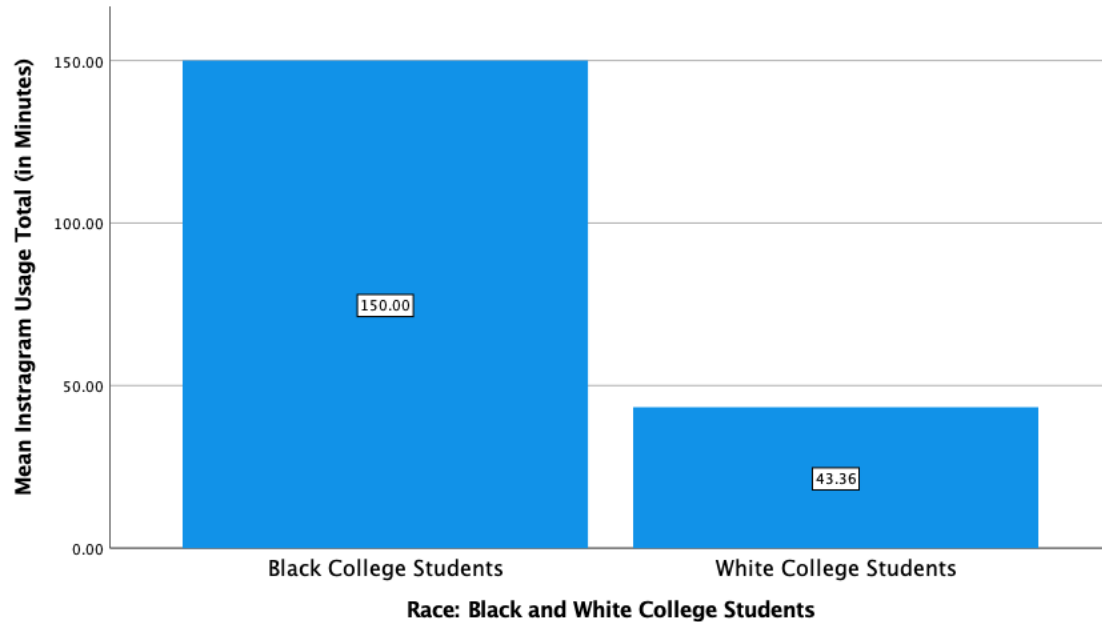
#### ***Hypothesis 2***

There will be a difference amongst White and Black college students utilizing Instagram.

An independent t-test was run to examine if White college students utilized Instagram more than Black college students. Levine's Test of Equality of Variances indicated that the two groups were significantly not equivalent (equal variances not assumed). As noted in Figure 1, results indicated that Black college students had statistical significantly more Instagram Usage minutes than White college students,  $t(7.81) = 3.64$ ,  $p = .003$ . Although this was significant, this was not in the predicted direction. Cohen's  $d$  indicated a very strong effect at 49.54.



Figure 1. Simple Bar Chart Comparing Race and Instagram Usage



### ***Hypothesis 3***

Female respondents will have higher Instagram screentime than male respondents.

An independent t-test was run to find out if female respondents had a higher Instagram screentime than male respondents. Tests of normality were run and met levels of acceptability. According to Levine's Test of Equality of Variances, there were non-significant differences among the group variances. The Independent Samples t-test showed a non-significant difference between female respondents and male respondents,  $t(8.36) = 1.51$ ,  $p = .084$ . Given the results of the Independent Samples t-test, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

### **Summary**

Data that was collected from college-aged individuals attending Long Island University Post campus indicated that there was no significant relationship between Instagram usage and depression despite H1 speculating there would be. On the other hand, findings for H2 were significant in which there was a difference amongst White college students versus Black college

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students utilization of Instagram. There were no significant differences between screentime of female respondents and male respondents as H3 presumed.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The focus of this study was to determine the correlation between Instagram usage and depression amongst college-aged individuals. This topic was crucial to research because of the importance of social media in college students' daily lives. The implications of the findings, as well as the study's strengths and weaknesses will be discussed in this chapter. Further, recommendations for future researchers looking into this important topic will be given.

### **Implications**

Following the completion of this study, results indicated the weak correlation between Instagram usage and mental health amongst college-aged individuals. Below is a closer examination of these results.

### ***Implications for Hypothesis 1 Findings***

The first hypothesis stated, "the more screentime college-aged individuals spend on Instagram, the higher their levels of depression." Despite the prevalence of social media use in young adult's daily lives, this study found no correlation between Instagram usage and depression amongst college-aged individuals. As Bettmann et al. (2020) noted, the ways in which an individual uses social media will ultimately determine the outcomes of their relationship with it. Detailed questions discussing one's habitual behaviors associated with Instagram usage could have been included and may have shown the emotional impact Instagram has upon college-aged individuals.

Although questions were asked in this study about the reasons for utilizing Instagram, perhaps there should have been direct questions regarding Instagram and mental health. This could have allowed the researcher to better understand the respondent's relationship with social media use and mental health as opposed to the standard questionnaire of depression scores.

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Additionally, the small sample size could have had an influence over the statistical analysis findings.

### ***Implications for Hypothesis 2 Findings***

The second hypothesis of this study proposed, “there will be a difference amongst White and Black College students utilizing Instagram.” Findings of this study confirmed that Black college students spent more time in minutes using Instagram than White college students. Although these findings were significant, this was not the predicted relationship; the prediction was that White college students would have higher Instagram usage time than Black college students. The study’s small sample size may have influenced the findings; if the sample size had been larger, the predicted association may have been discovered.

### ***Implications for Hypothesis 3 Findings***

The third hypothesis suggested female respondents will have higher Instagram screentime than male respondents. These results were found to be non-significant even though females made up a majority of the respondents at 77.8%. Only 33 out of a total of 36 survey respondents completed the entirety of the survey, in which 33 respondents provided information about their Instagram screentime. It is possible that had all participants completed the survey entirely, the results may have been different.

Further, this study was limited to Long Island University Post campus college students. Different findings may have been found if this survey had been offered to additional college campuses, which could have validated the original hypothesis. Additionally, if this study was distributed to college sports teams in order to ensure a larger sample size of both males and females, the results may have shown significance.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

This study revealed several advantages and disadvantages. The strengths of this study included the cross-sectional approach which is cost effective and easier to distribute to collect data. However, an experimental research design would have been more effective to determine the cause of media influence and mental health in young adults. A cross-sectional design only allows for an examination of correlational relationship between variables. Another strength of this study was that it focused on a topic that hasn't been thoroughly researched. Over the last few years, social media has become an integral part of people's lives, but especially for college-students who make use of platforms such as Instagram as an outlet for communication and self-identification signifying the importance of this topic.

In spite of the strengths of this study, there were weaknesses too. The small sample size of this research limited the possible outcomes, especially because not all participants completed the survey. Furthermore, the study was exclusive to Long Island University Post students only, which restricts the representation of college-aged individuals. Another weakness of this study is that it focused solely on Instagram. Today there are a variety of options of social media platforms available, each of which may hold a different impact upon a person's mental health. This may aid future researchers in better understanding the influence of social media on the mental health of young adults.

### **Recommendations**

Below are recommendations for practitioners and researchers in the field based on the results rendered from this study.

***Recommendations for Practice***

Although results of this specific study indicated that social media is not a cause for depression in college-aged individuals, it is imperative that professionals continue to evaluate the relationship one has with social media usage. Previous literature supports that this population of individuals are experiencing a mental health crisis (Bettmann et al., 2020). Mental health practitioners, such as social workers, should discuss with their clients about their use of Instagram and other social networking sites to determine if there is a correlation to poor mental health and their use of these platforms. If there is a connection, mental health professionals can help their clients understand their feelings regarding social media use and establish healthy coping strategies towards these negative feelings.

***Recommendations for Future Research***

As technology advances, it is vital that researchers keep up to date with these changes, especially as the usage of social media platforms grows in popularity. Researchers should perform qualitative studies to investigate different social media sites and their influence on the young adult population. Qualitative studies allow researchers to collect detailed input from individuals, which can lead to insightful findings that a cross-sectional study might not be able to provide. Although the survey of this study provided respondents the space to share detailed responses, it was not utilized.

Future researchers should also consider the sample size of their study. A larger sample size than the one of this present study would allow future researchers to explore several points of view, which in turn can provide more significant results. In order to understand the influence of Instagram and overall social media usage on college-aged students mental health, future

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researchers should investigate collecting information directly from individuals who identify as female or male to understand the differences between genders.

### **Conclusions**

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between Instagram usage and depression amongst college-aged individuals. Young adults' daily lives have become increasingly influenced by their use of social media. Social media has allowed this population to connect with friends and family both near and far, as well as being an outlet for creative expression. As David Levinson noted, young adulthood is a time of vulnerability and self-identification as individuals embark on their unique journey (Ashford et al., 2017).

The findings indicated that there is no correlation between Instagram usage and depression amongst college-aged individuals. Interestingly, despite the proposed hypothesis going in the opposite direction, results indicated that there were differences between White college students using Instagram versus Black college students. Black college students were found to have spent more time on Instagram than White college students. Moreover, the results also found no significance between opposite genders and Instagram usage.

Future researchers should continue to explore the impact of social media use on the mental health of young adults. Young adults are believed to be experiencing a mental health crisis, and it is critical that experts figure out what is causing it so that preventative measures may be implemented.

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## Appendix A

### LIU Spring 2022 Survey

#### The Influence of Instagram Usage Amongst College-Aged Individuals

This study is looking at the influence of Instagram usage amongst college-aged individuals. It will take approximately 5 - 10 minutes to take. Please answer as honestly as you can as there are no right or wrong answers.

#### *Informed Consent*

All college-aged individuals are invited to participate in a research study about the usage of Instagram. The goal of this research study is to better understand the ways in which Instagram usage impacts everyday life.

**Participation in this study is voluntary.** The survey includes questions about Instagram usage. You can choose to stop at any point during the survey.

**Participating in this study may not benefit you directly,** but it will help us learn more about the influence of Instagram usage. You may find some questions are personal, but we expect that they would not be different from the kinds of things you discuss with family or friends.

**The information you will share with us if you participate in this study will be kept completely anonymous.** No one will be able to see your survey or know that you participated in this study.

**Please note: You must be 18 or older to participate in this study.**

**By continuing on to the survey, you are consenting to participate in this**

**study.**

#### **Survey questions:**

1. How do you identify?
  - . Male
  - a. Female
  - b. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Prefer not to disclose
2. How old were you at the date of your last birthday?  
\_\_\_\_\_

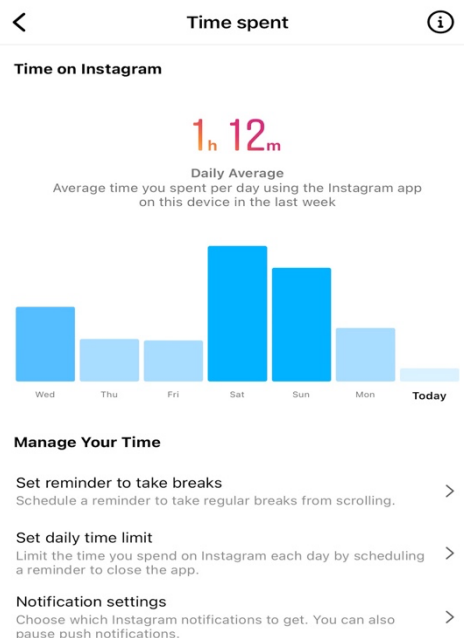
1. What is your race?
  - . White

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- a. Black
  - b. Latinx/Latino
  - c. Asian American
  - d. Pacific Islander
  - e. Native American
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Prefer not to disclose
2. Why do you use Instagram? (Check all that apply):
- . To stay in touch with friends and family \_\_\_\_
  - a. To meet new individuals \_\_\_\_
  - b. To follow celebrities and influencers \_\_\_\_
  - c. To stay informed with current events \_\_\_\_
  - d. To be entertained \_\_\_\_
  - e. To be educated on new topics \_\_\_\_
  - f. To be inspired creatively \_\_\_\_
  - g. To showcase creativity \_\_\_\_
  - h. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - j. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - k. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. DV: How many hours a day do you use Instagram according to Instagram's screen time calculator

(Instructions: *To locate your daily average time, open your Instagram app. On the bottom right corner, click on your profile. Now, click on the three lines located at the top right corner. Click on 'Your activity' to locate your daily average.* Example is shown below.



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Example: The example above would be entered as 1 hour and 12 minutes (no seconds)

Hour(s):	Minute(s):	Second(s) if available:
1	12	

Put Your time on Instagram below:

Hour(s):	Minute(s):	Second(s) if available:

1. What best describes how Instagram has impacted your social life? (Check all that apply):
- . Increased social interactions (e.g., connected with old friends; made new friends; maintained better connections;) \_\_\_\_
  - a. Decreased in-person social interactions \_\_\_\_
  - b. Increased FOMO (fear of missing out) \_\_\_\_
  - c. Other (please describe):  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Other (please describe):  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Other (please describe):  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Other (please describe):  
\_\_\_\_\_

The next 9 questions ask how often you have been bothered by any of the following problems over the last 2 weeks....

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
7. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
8. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
9. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3

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10. Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
11. Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling bad about yourself-or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
13. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
4. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
15. Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself	0	1	2	3

*Thank you for your time and participation! It is greatly appreciated. If you would like to know more about this research study you may contact Ariana Soylemezoglu at [ariana.soylemezoglu@liu.edu](mailto:ariana.soylemezoglu@liu.edu) or Dr. Maria Taylor at [maria.mays@liu.edu](mailto:maria.mays@liu.edu).*