

Why Instagram Is the Worst Social Media platform?

A survey study of Instagram users in Arab world

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Received: 21.01.2025 ; Accepted: 26.03.2025 ; Published: 25.04.2025
doi: 10.56334/sei/8.3.74.

Abstract

This article aims to explore the reasons why Instagram has been ranked as the worst social media platform. The study involved 500 users from 16 Arabic countries, who were randomly selected and evaluated through a questionnaire developed by the researchers, the results provide important insights: 65.2% of respondents use nicknames on Instagram, 41.4% have more than one Instagram account, and 52.4% believe that Instagram has negatively affected their behavior. The most notable negative effects of Instagram on the well-being of respondents include internet addiction, time wastage, cyberbullying victimization, and mental health issues. Additionally, respondents reported that their mental health is impacted by dissatisfaction with their quality of life, anxiety, and comparing their lives with others.

Keywords: Internet use, Communication, Instagram, Effect, Social Media

Introduction

As new media continues to rise, Van Dijk describes the 21st century as the age of networks, likening these networks to the nervous system of society. He highlights the potential risks to certain values due to the pervasive use of new media (ÜNAL, 2024). Additionally, developments in communication have radically changed individuals' mobile phone usage and social interaction patterns

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Citation. Hayet H., Brahim R., Mohammed E. B.. (2025). Why Instagram Is the Worst Social Media platform? A survey study of Instagram users in Arab world. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(3), 1213-1226. doi: 10.56352/sei/8.3.74. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/358-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-3-volviii-2025.html>

in various ways (Barış Çağırkan, 2022) . In today's fast-changing world, the widespread presence of new media has profoundly reshaped our lives and behaviors. Therefore, it is essential to analyze and assess this intricate landscape from multiple perspectives to better understand its effects on daily life. With the growing number of social media users and fast browsing habits, individuals share numerous thoughts and behaviors online, making them subject to analysis in electronic media.

According to global statistics, by early 2019, 3.5 billion people, representing 58% of the world's population aged 13 and above, were active users of online social networks. The number of users doubled between 2014 and 2019, highlighting the rising demand for virtual connections. Additionally, the daily time spent on social media increased steadily during this period (Kemp, 2019), In the Arab world, the number of social media users in 2024 has reached approximately 274 million, accounting for 66% of the total population. More specifically, Instagram statistics indicate that in 2024, the platform has 44 million users, a number expected to continue rising due to increasing internet dependence and the widespread adoption of smartphones and social media applications (Admin, 2024) , Focusing on Instagram, which is central to our study, recent research highlights both the positive and negative impacts of the platform on users' behavior and mental health. On one hand, online social networks partially fulfill the need for social connection by fostering a sense of belonging within a community. On the other hand, the virtual environment can also be a source of distress, encouraging social comparison and influencing individuals' self-perception.

With the growing prevalence of virtual connectivity, it is crucial to investigate how Instagram usage influences social comparison and personality traits, particularly in relation to internet addiction, cyberbullying, and self-esteem. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to conduct an in-depth analysis of Instagram users in the Arab world.

- With whom do Arab users engage and communicate on Instagram?
- Does using Instagram negatively affect on user's behavior ?
- How does Instagram influence the well-being of its users ?
- What are the effects of Instagram usage on mental health ?

Literature Review

Social Media

In recent years, online social networks have gained widespread popularity worldwide for socializing and entertainment purposes (Andreassen, 2017) And defined as a web-based platform for human interaction, social media enables sharing and discussion without the limitations of time or space (Vural, 2010) , Although initially aimed at younger audiences it has transformed over time into a space that includes people of all age groups. Today individuals from every generation express their thoughts and emotions on social media platforms through photos, videos, and other forms of

content (Harmanci, 2020). Likewise (Preeti, 2009) social media refers to online platforms that allow individuals to create personal profiles generate and share content and build virtual communities by interacting with other users leveraging Web 2.0 technology and the internet also have evolved into a significant industry these large companies primarily focus on cultivating user habits to effectively market their products and services the time users spend on these platforms and the experiences they have serve as vital data sources many products and services are specifically designed to foster habitual use to maintain a competitive edge, In today's market companies strive not only to attract users but also to build loyalty, ensuring that users consistently choose their offerings this loyalty is essential as their economic success depends on the habits they instill, and has become an integral part of modern life, widely utilized by individuals activists government bodies businesses, civil society groups, and communication organizations research findings on the consequences of social media use have been varied, with some studies yielding contradictory results, some studies have revealed both positive and negative effects of social media use. On the positive side, research highlights its role in enhancing social connectivity, knowledge sharing, and civic engagement, a study by (Soroush Vosoughi, 2018) found that social media facilitates rapid information dissemination, fostering awareness and collective action. However, negative consequences have also been documented, including increased anxiety, depression, and misinformation spread (Jean M Twenge, 2019) reported a correlation between excessive social media use and declining mental well-being among adolescents. These findings emphasize the need for a balanced approach to social media engagement to maximize benefits while minimizing risks.

Considering previous research findings for a better understanding of the processes that are at work, this study will focus on Instagram use in specific and its relation to the user's well-being and mental health.

Instagram

With the advancement of Internet technology, social media has experienced rapid growth, fostering the development of a complex social network ecosystem. It is anticipated that in the near future, social media will transform the way people communicate and, consequently, their lifestyles. Among these platforms, Instagram stands out as a social networking mobile application that attracts a vast number of loyal users through precise audience targeting, comprehensive features, and a user-friendly interface (Yang, 2021) As well as online social networks vary significantly in their intended purposes and primary modes of communication, what sets Instagram apart from other platforms is its unique emphasis on sharing photos and videos, often paired with brief textual descriptions known as captions, users can also enhance their images with various "filters," which alter colors and can make the visuals appear quite different from reality (Vries, 2017), Instagram is a mobile app that allows users to share photos and videos along with captions In turn, other users

can like, comment, and interact with the posts as mentioned, Instagram is among the fastest-growing social media platforms (Monica Anderson, 2018) This mobile app was officially released on the Apple App Store in October 2010 Its user base quickly expanded after the launch, reaching over 100,000 registrations within just one week Instagram then captured widespread attention on April 10, 2012, when Facebook acquired the company, which had only been around for 551 days and employed 13 people, for \$1 billion in cash and stock Today, Instagram's user count has surpassed billions (Josh Constine, 2018) Furthermore Instagram is a social networking platform designed to facilitate user engagement through intuitive interactions, primarily centered around visual content such as photos and videos (Silva, 2018). It allows users to communicate through various features, including liking, sharing, commenting, and advanced content editing. At a basic level, users can capture or upload an image and publish it, which serves as an initial step for newcomers, Moreover is defined as an SNS that allows its users to post photos, videos and share stories (S.C. Dhoenmoen, 2021)

Over time, this evolves into more refined content creation, incorporating intricate edits, popular soundtracks, and compelling captions or philosophical reflections intended for broader audience engagement , Moreover defined as a digital platform that facilitates users to socialize with each other, either by communicating or by expressing users through photos, videos, blogs, or other content, a study conducted by Huang and Su (2018) among 307 university students found that participants primarily used Instagram to view posts from other users, particularly entertainment-related content and opportunities for social interaction, the findings also indicated that gender and professional background played a role in shaping their motivations for using the platform. For instance, students in design-related fields engaged with social networks for inspiration and to explore creative works, whereas engineering students primarily used them to stay updated on their friends' activities. Furthermore, the study revealed that Instagram users frequently share photos to receive likes and comments, driven by a desire for social validation (Telma Pereira, 2024) It can be said that globally, Instagram is the most successful social media among the younger generations and has even been voted a favourite .

Scientific research method

Participants

The participants were 500 Instagram users from 16 Arab countries which are : Algeria 19 % (n = 95) ; Iraq 4.6 % (n = 23) ; Lebanon 1.8% (n = 9); Amman 9.8 % (n= 49) ; Qatar 10.8 % (n= 53) ; Morocco 3.6 % (n= 18) ;Uae 3.4 % (n= 17) ; Tunisia 2% (n= 10) ; Syria 7.4% (n = 37); Saudi Arabia 8.6% (n= 43) ; Jordan 6.4% (n= 32); Palestine 2.2% (n= 11) ; Egypt 9% (n= 45); Kuwait 6% (n = 30); Libya 2.2 % (n= 11); Yamen 3.4% (n=17).

58.2% of them (n= 426) were female and 14.8 %of them (n= 74) male, as for age distribution 16 % of them were under 18 years old, and 81 % (n= 415) from 18 to 39 years old and the rest 1% (n= 5) more than 39 years old.

Furthermore The distribution of usernames indicates that 34.8% (n = 174) of users utilize their real names, whereas 65.2% (n=326) employ nicknames, reflecting a preference for pseudonymity among the majority of users. Additionally a significant proportion of respondents (61%, n = 305) indicated that they have been using Instagram for more than five years.

The language distribution used for communication in the study reveals varied preferences. the most commonly used language is Slang, accounting for 44.4% of communication. Arabic and English are the second most frequent combination, representing 14.6% of the responses, followed by a mixed usage of Arabic, English, and French at 18.2%. English alone is used by 7% of the participants, while French is utilized by 8%. The least frequent combination is Arabic and French, which makes up only 3.4% of the communication , These findings highlight the diverse linguistic landscape of communication among the participants, with a noticeable prevalence of Slang in daily interactions.

The preferred communication methods among participants were as follows: 25.4% (n= 127) favored writing, while 38% (n= 190) preferred a combination of all forms also video calls and the combination of voice and writing were each preferred by 10.8%, and 12.4% preferred a mix of emoji and writing. Only 2.8% (n = 14) selected voice as their preferred method, these findings indicate a clear preference for written communication and a tendency toward utilizing multiple forms simultaneously.

Instruments

An online questionnaire was used for data collection, accessible via a designated internet link. The questionnaire included sociodemographic questions (e.g., gender, age, and place of residence) and Instagram usage-related questions (e.g., username, number of accounts owned, frequency of access per day, preferred communication language, and modes of interaction) In addition the questionnaire contained questions about nature of interaction with Instagram content and its impact on their behavior and mental health, for example (Who do you interact with on Instagram? Do you think that your use of Instagram has affected your behavior? Has using Instagram made you develop negative behaviors? What are these behaviors ?)

Besides the items on the questionnaire control items were included in which the participant was asked to respond in a specific way (e.g., please your email to start) in order to ensure that everybody can answer once.

For data collection it was performed through an online questionnaire available on online social networks specifically, we used influencers on Instagram in this regard as the survey link was

published on their stories, by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program, or what is known as SPSS we calculated the number of repetitions and percentages of answers.

Empirical results

Table 1 : Interaction partners on instagram

	N	%
Family	38	7.6
Friends	138	27.6
Commercial pages	111	22.2
Celebrities and influencers	192	38.4
All	21	4.2
Total	500	100

The results in the table 1 show that the predominant interaction category involved celebrities and influencers, accounting for 192 users (38.4%) this followed by interactions with friends, representing 138 users (27.6%), and engagement with commercial pages, which comprised 111 users (22.2%), As well as a smaller proportion of users engaged with family members, totaling 38 users (7.6%), whereas 21 users (4.2%) demonstrated interaction across all categories , these results suggest that parasocial interactions with public figures surpass interpersonal and commercial interactions on the platform, highlighting the prominence of influencer culture in digital communication

Table 2 : Impact of instagram use on negative behavior

	N	%
yes	262	52.4
No	238	47.6
Total	500	100

Regarding the impact of Instagram use on negative behavior, Table 2 shows that 52.4% (262) of respondents reported experiencing negative behavior due to Instagram use, while 47.6% (238) did not.

Table 3 : The negative effects of Instagram on well being

	N	%
Lack of communication with your family and friends	74	14.8
wasting time	102	20.4
Neglect religious obligations	25	5
Victim of Bullying	85	17
Neglecting study	43	8.6
internet addiction	171	34.2
Total	500	100

for the negative effects of Instagram on well-being as shown in table 3 the most commonly reported issue was internet addiction (34.2%, 171), followed by wasting time (20.4%, 102) and experiencing bullying (17%, 85). Other negative effects included lack of communication with family and friends (14.8%, 74), neglecting studies (8.6%, 43), dissatisfaction with body image (8.4%, 42), and neglecting religious obligations (5%, 25).

Table 4 : The impact of instagram use on mental health

	N	%
Anxiety	103	20.6
Low self-esteem	43	8.6
Dissatisfaction with the shape of your body or face	42	8.4
Depression	37	7.4

Dissatisfaction with the quality of life	78	15.6
Jealousy	45	9
Laziness	99	19.8
Comparing your life with others	53	10.6
Total	500	100

as can be seen in (table 4) the most frequently reported issues were anxiety (20.6%, 103) and laziness (19.8%, 99), followed by dissatisfaction with quality of life (15.6%, 78) and comparing one's life with others (10.6%, 53). Low self-esteem (8.6%, 43), dissatisfaction with body image (8.4%, 42), depression (7.4%, 37), and jealousy (9%, 45) were also noted as concerns ,these findings suggest that while Instagram serves as a major social platform, its usage is associated with significant risks to well-being and mental health, including internet addiction, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with life quality .

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to explore the reasons why Instagram is ranked as the worst social media platform. The findings revealed key insights: 65.2% of participants use nicknames on Instagram, and 41.4% have multiple accounts. Additionally, 52.4% reported that Instagram has negatively impacted their behavior, the most significant negative effects on users' well-being included internet addiction, time wastage, cyberbullying victimization, and mental health issues such as dissatisfaction with life quality, anxiety, and the tendency to compare their lives with others. Based on previous empirical results, these findings provide a compelling reflection of the evolving landscape of digital communication, where parasocial interactions with public figures—particularly celebrities and influencers—dominate user engagement patterns,with 38.4% of users engaging predominantly with influencers, this finding echoes the observations made by researchers such as (Horton Donald, 2006) who coined the term "parasocial interaction" to describe one-sided relationships that individuals develop with media figures. This suggests that social media platforms are increasingly becoming spaces where users form quasi-social relationships with these figures, whose influence appears to transcend traditional interpersonal interactions.

Indeed, engagement with friends—representing 27.6% of users—though significant, is less dominant, signaling a shift away from intimate, face-to-face communication toward mediated interactions, the engagement with commercial pages, which comprises 22.2% of interactions, further emphasizes the growing intersection between social relationships and commercial interests—a phenomenon increasingly recognized in contemporary digital communication studies. This reflects the commercialization of social media platforms, where users not only connect with influencers but also with brands, highlighting the dual-purpose use of digital spaces for both social and consumer engagement.

The smaller proportions of family interactions (7.6%) and users interacting across all categories (4.2%) suggest that while influencer culture predominates, there are still niches where broader interpersonal dynamics remain relevant, albeit less frequent.

These findings align with the notion that digital communication has undergone a paradigm shift—from being primarily a tool for personal connection to becoming a space where influencer culture and commercial interests thrive. The prominence of influencer-driven engagement underscores the theoretical perspectives of media scholars such as (Jenkins, 2006) who suggests that the boundaries between media producers and consumers have increasingly blurred, giving rise to a new form of participatory culture. In this culture, celebrities are not just distant figures but also key players in shaping user identity and engagement online.

This shift is further supported by (Abidin, 2018) who explores how influencers cultivate and maintain affective ties with their audiences, reinforcing digital intimacy and trust. Similarly (Marwick, 2011) argued that social media fosters a dynamic where authenticity is strategically performed, enhancing the persuasive power of influencers. Thus, the data highlights a broader transformation in how digital platforms are used, with parasocial relationships with influencers playing a central role in shaping online interactions. This trend is also evidenced in recent studies on digital labor and the commodification of online presence (Duffy, 2019).

The data from Table 2 indicates that 52.4% of respondents reported experiencing negative behaviors due to Instagram use, while 47.6% did not, this suggests that Instagram can significantly influence user behavior, reinforcing findings from previous studies that highlight the platform's role in fostering procrastination, compulsive scrolling, and reduced real-life interactions, research has shown that excessive social media use can lead to difficulties in self-regulation, making individuals more prone to distractions and impulsive behaviors (Twenge, 2018) More recent studies have expanded on this, with (Valkenburg, 2022) emphasizing how algorithm-driven content personalizes engagement in ways that heighten compulsive use. Similarly, (Montag, 2021) discusses how Instagram's design—such as infinite scrolling and engagement-driven notifications—contributes to

digital addiction and cognitive overload, the nearly even split in responses also implies that individual differences, such as self-control, digital literacy, and purpose of use, may determine whether Instagram affects users negatively. This is supported by research on digital well-being and self-regulation strategies (Amy Orben, 2023).

Notably, researchers have indicated that Instagram's influence on well-being manifests in several ways, particularly through habits that disrupt daily life and social relationships. Many users find themselves excessively engaged with the platform, leading to decreased communication with family and friends. This aligns with concerns that social media can replace face-to-face interactions, weakening real-life relationships. Additionally, Instagram's highly engaging and visually stimulating nature often results in excessive time spent scrolling, which can lead to procrastination and a sense of wasted time. Some individuals also experience online harassment or bullying, which can have long-term emotional and psychological effects.

The platform's emphasis on curated, idealized lifestyles may contribute to feelings of inadequacy, pushing users toward unhealthy comparisons that affect self-esteem and personal satisfaction. Moreover, excessive Instagram use has been associated with compulsive behaviors, making it difficult for users to disengage, which can contribute to internet addiction. The constant exposure to digital distractions also affects focus and productivity, potentially leading to the neglect of academic, professional, or personal responsibilities; these factors suggest that while Instagram can be a source of entertainment and connection, it also has the potential to disrupt users' well-being in significant ways.

Several studies examined the effects of Instagram on parts of one's psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, depression, anxiety, etc.) and showed that Instagram could positively and negatively affect well-being. (Samantha B. Mackson, 2019) aimed to focus on variables such as self-esteem and loneliness, which are associated with Instagram users' anxiety and depression; they found that it was harmful to their psychological well-being when Instagram users experienced changes in their self-esteem and loneliness, which aligns with findings from (Lup, 2015) who reported that negative social comparison on Instagram contributes to depressive symptoms. Additionally, (Sherlock, 2019) found that frequent exposure to idealized images on Instagram is linked to lower self-esteem and increased anxiety.

The findings in Table 4 demonstrate that anxiety (20.6%) and laziness (19.8%) are among the most common mental health consequences of Instagram use. The high levels of reported anxiety may be linked to the pressure of maintaining an online persona, fear of missing out (FOMO), and social comparison—common concerns highlighted in social media research (Fardouly, 2018). The 15.6% of respondents dissatisfied with their quality of life suggests that Instagram fosters unrealistic expectations, leading to lower life satisfaction (Alfasi, 2019). Additionally, low self-esteem

(8.6%) and dissatisfaction with body image (8.4%) align with prior studies showing that frequent exposure to filtered and idealized images negatively impacts self-perception, especially among young users (Perloff, 2014). The presence of depression (7.4%) further underscores the emotional toll Instagram can have, particularly for individuals who engage in constant social comparison. Overall, these findings suggest that while Instagram serves as a major platform for connection, its prolonged use can contribute to significant mental health challenges.

Generally speaking, studies examining the impact of Instagram on adolescent mental health have shown that users are more likely to engage in problematic behaviors, including higher levels of social comparison, stress, and dissatisfaction with life. Moreover, comparisons made on social networks extend beyond friends and acquaintances to include digital influencers and celebrities. In today's digital landscape, influencers have established a strong presence across various platforms, often turning social media into their primary profession. They share aspects of their daily lives—from fashion choices to travel destinations—while cultivating a curated online persona. Due to their high visibility and influence, these individuals tend to present an idealized version of their lives, emphasizing only positive aspects. As a result, they may create unrealistic standards of success and lifestyle, making it difficult for young audiences to distinguish between reality and carefully crafted online representations. (Jasmine Fardouly, 2020) found that users of visually-oriented social media platforms, like YouTube and Instagram, experienced higher levels of body image concerns compared to individuals who did not use social media.

This suggests that photo-based social media platforms may be more detrimental to users' mental well-being compared to text-based platforms due to factors such as body dissatisfaction, social comparison, the need for social acceptance, and the internalization of idealized standards. Frequent engagement with these platforms—often multiple times a day—reinforces these comparisons, potentially leading young users to develop issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and dissatisfaction with their own lives. Since social comparison plays a critical role in self-perception and self-evaluation, individuals with a positive self-image tend to have higher self-esteem, whereas those who engage in negative comparisons may experience a decline in self-worth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the significant negative impact of Instagram on users' well-being, particularly in the Arab world. The findings reveal that a large proportion of users prefer anonymity by using nicknames, while many manage multiple accounts, which may contribute to issues like identity fragmentation. Furthermore, the study confirms that Instagram negatively affects behavior, leading to internet addiction, time wastage, and increased exposure to cyberbullying. Additionally, Instagram usage contributes to mental health challenges, including dissatisfaction with life, anxiety, and harmful social comparisons. These results support growing concerns about Instagram's role in

digital well-being and its ranking as the most harmful social media platform , following this study, researchers are encouraged to provide specific recommendations based on the findings to contribute to future research in the field. To broaden the scope of research on the effects of new media on users, it is suggested to focus on specific subdomains of new media. This approach could lead to more targeted and insightful findings that may further advance the field. Some key areas of focus include:

Promoting Digital Well-being: Users should be encouraged to practice mindful social media consumption by setting screen time limits and engaging in offline activities to reduce excessive use.

Strengthening Cyberbullying Awareness and Prevention: Social media platforms should enhance their policies and tools to combat cyberbullying, while users should be educated on reporting and handling online harassment.

Encouraging Authentic Online Identities: Reducing anonymity and fake profiles could help build a more trustworthy and positive social media environment.

Enhancing Mental Health Support: Instagram and other platforms should integrate mental health resources and provide in-app guidance for users struggling with anxiety and self-comparison.

Further Research and Policy Development: Policymakers and researchers should continue studying the psychological and social effects of social media and work on regulations that promote a healthier digital space.

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