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UWP1 Research Article

## **Self Esteem, Instagram Addiction, and Academic Performance in UC Davis Undergraduates**

### **Introduction**

Have you ever looked at a post on instagram and thought to yourself, “I really wish I looked like that”? If your answer is yes, do not worry because you are definitely not the only one who has thought this way. The act of spending hours upon hours scrolling through instagram whether it is for recreational purposes, out of boredom, or to procrastinate is extremely normalized in this generation. In this paper, I question the relationship between academic performance, self-esteem, and instagram usage. I take this question a step further into a community that I identify with, UC Davis undergraduates, and inquire about how instagram usage and self-esteem levels affect academic performance.

### **Research Question**

How does self-esteem and social media use (specifically instagram) affect the academic performance of the UC Davis undergraduate community?

### **Literature Review**

To initiate this discussion, it may be prudent to note the difference between normal instagram use and social media addiction. Social media addiction, specifically to instagram, could possibly be described as the need to spend more than two hours a day scrolling through instagram. According to Hawi and Samaha, addiction to social media may be described as “...the

compulsive use of social media sites that manifests itself in behavioral addiction symptoms,” like scrolling through instagram for hours on end (Hawi & Samaha 577). Individuals who are addicted to using social media may feel rewarded by likes and direct messages, which encourages them to continue to scroll through instagram and have withdrawal symptoms when they cannot use social media. Therefore, one of the elemental differences in social media addiction and normal usage is the urge to be on instagram constantly.

It may also be argued that this issue has become more salient in recent years, given the current state of the world. Many would agree that the worldwide lockdowns due to the emergence of COVID-19 has destroyed lives in many aspects. Ballarotto et al. explored this preceding statement in terms of instagram addiction in relation to the psychological distress in the rising generation in Italy due to the pandemic and lockdowns. They found that, during the time of lockdowns, “the social isolation due to the COVID-19-related restrictions” led to higher use of social media “as a strategy for coping with feelings of loneliness and associated psychological distress” (Ballarotto et al. 11.) Due to the lack of face to face social interactions outside of the home, it was found that emerging Italian adults attempted to replace their lack of interactions, social cues, and outside stimulation with social media usage. Due to feelings of loneliness and distress, social media usage averages rose greatly during this time, especially among male participants.

Some causes of the addiction to compulsory instagram usage may be that some individuals may find comfort in the mind-numbing activity of scrolling and liking, while others may chase likes and followers in order to create a specific image of how they want others to perceive them. But how does this addiction affect their self-esteem? According to the findings of Dumas et al., “only low self-esteem youth were susceptible to the effects of perceived peer

norm,” meaning that the youth with low levels of self-esteem cared more about what their peers thought of them (Dumas et al. 1). Although this study was conducted with youth, it could be argued that this same concept may be applicable to older individuals who have low levels of self-esteem, and would like to be viewed positively by other people.

How does instagram addiction affect the academic performance of students? I originally hypothesized that self esteem has a positive correlation with academic performance, while high instagram usage is negatively correlated with academic performance, and self esteem is negatively correlated with high instagram usage. According to Alzougool and Wishah, “41.6% of students often neglected their schoolwork because...” of their social media addictions, which included the use of instagram ( 4). Alzougool and Wishah conducted a study of social media addiction behaviors among university students in Jordan, as well as answered the question of how these addictions affected their academic performance. While this sample size is limited to Jordan only, correlation between many of the findings that have been previously listed in this paper may show evidence that results may be the same in the UC Davis undergraduate community. This carries significance as the results of a survey conducted on the UC Davis undergraduate community may allow students to realize an influencer of their academic satisfaction.

In recent years it seems as though many researchers have developed interests in studying the effects of social media, especially on young people. Furthermore, seeing as these young people are constituted greatly by students, researchers have shown interest in studying the effects of social media usage on academic performance. It should also be mentioned that cell-phones and social media are not inherently malicious. Humans simply have the tendency to submit to addictive behaviors due to the reward systems in our brains. Researchers Arooba Azam Khan,

Asma Khalid, and Rimsha Iqbal acknowledge this fact. They conducted a study on university students in Pakistan, in attempts to further elaborate on the relationship between social media addiction in university students and their academic performance (measured through grade point averages and time management skills), found that social media addiction had “significant correlation with GPA’s” for students with poor time management skills (Khan et al. 79). As was previously stated, these researchers acknowledge that social networking sites may be useful, and are part of our daily lives. This statement is especially true for students who use social media sites to continue to learn and gain knowledge. However, Khan et al. also found that students with poorer time management skills had a negative correlation with grade point averages, as well as positive correlations with social media addiction.

## **Methods**

I also conducted my own study in attempts to gain more information about the relationship between self-esteem, instagram addiction, and grade point averages in the UC Davis undergraduate. This survey was created through qualtrics and distributed through instagram. Although my small sample size only consisted of 49 undergraduate students, my findings are still quite interesting. I hypothesized that self-esteem would have a positive correlation with grade point averages, while having a negative correlation with high instagram usage. Along with this I also hypothesized that high instagram usage was negatively correlated with grade point averages. According to my findings, 40.82% of students use social media sites (including instagram) for 7-14 hours a week on average, 51.02% of students maintain a grade point average between 3.5-4.0, and 51.7% of students showed signs of positive self-esteem. It was also found that 28.57% of students use social networking sites 21+ hours a week on average, and the second

most common GPA falling between 2.5-3.0. From this information it may be concluded that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and high grade point averages, while there seems to be no correlation between social media addiction and grade point averages.

## **Discussion**

Another reason why instagram and social media use may be so addicting might be explained by the Computer Mediated Communication theory by Joseph Walther. In short terms, the Computer Mediated Communication theory is a broad theory (with subtheories) which asserts that any communication which is sent and received through any electronic medium falls under the umbrella of Computer Mediated Communication. A specific subtheory also developed by Walther in 1996 (and further elaborated in 2011) is the Hyperpersonal Theory. A key assumption used to develop the rest of theory was that there is more potential for emotional and relational closeness for relationships developed online compared to relationships developed face to face. Walther claimed that there are four reasons explaining this: selective self-presentation, overattribution of similarity, asynchronicity, and self-fulfilling prophecy (Brunner). This means that users of Computer Mediated Communication strategize on instagram to highlight the best parts of themselves, while their audiences mistake the user for being more similar to themselves than they actually are. Of course, it is a given that this phenomenon can occur at any given time, and finally, both users and senders behave in ways that confirms the others' expectations. This idea of fast-developing intimacy in relationships may also be a reason why students my age become so engrossed in instagram use, as well as why instagram and social media usage rose during the time of the lockdown (as this was used as a replacement for many face to face interactions.)

Furthermore, it has been found by communication scholars that everyone has face values and that everyone possesses two types of face: negative face and positive face. According to Brown and Levinson, positive face refers to the desire to be liked and praised by others (Brunner). Although the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson majorly addresses the interpersonal reactions when making requests, knowing the definition of positive face, as well as its functions may be very applicable to further understanding addictions to instagram. As was stated previously, low levels of self-esteem drive individuals to redress their positive faces, leading others to view them in a better light. Brown and Levinson also stated that as individuals, we will do everything in our power to boost the positive face of others, and that they are likely to reciprocate, given that everyone has a desire to be viewed positively by others (Brunner). This statement reinforces the compulsive drive behind staying on instagram for many hours, as low self esteem individuals spend time building their self image, while also bowing to the self image of others, in hopes of reciprocity (Brunner).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper explained how self-esteem and social media use affects academic performance, measured through grade point averages. I conducted a study using a survey utilized through qualtrics, distributed through instagram. I found that one part of my hypothesis was proven to be true: there was a positive correlation between self esteem and high grade point averages and no statistically significant correlation between social media addiction and grade point averages in the UC Davis undergraduate community. Preceding my findings, a various array of research articles were reviewed and discussed to further contextualize my research. These articles were used also to discover how instagram addiction and self esteem

affect grade point averages on a global scale, before diving specifically into how these variables affect the UC Davis undergraduate community. Specific communications theories were also applied in attempts to uncover some hypothetical explanations as to why social media, such as instagram, are so addictive. Overall, the mental health of the 49 students I was able to reach with my survey this quarter seem to be in good mental health, as well as in good academic standing.

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