Causes for Editing on Instagram and its Relation to Perfection and Peer Comparison

Alexandra Wiegand, Katie Kirkland, & Latoya Tisdale
Department of Communication Arts, Pavica Sheldon, Department of Communication Arts

Introduction

Instagram has proven to be a popular platform for users to share visual content amongst an online audience. These images and videos are created on the base of the identities users find to be acceptable through peer comparison and the symbolic interactionism and convergence theories. For those that have perfectionist personalities, the upkeep of these identities is found to be stressful and possibly devastating in terms of the user’s health. The effects of online identities and how users handle them are getting more intense and dangerous due to the ability to alter and perfect posts that is becoming more convenient for users to do. This is a continuation of a study done where editing was found to have a negative relationship with perfectionism and peer comparison.

Key Findings

This experiment found that the main purpose of Instagram is documentation and sharing your lifestyle. Age is positively correlated to Perfectionism; the older you are, the more of a perfectionist you are. Only subtle lighting and filters are acceptable on an Instagram photo, all other editing is viewed as “too heavy” and “fake”. Comparison to peers appearance and happiness occurs the most often on Instagram, and this comparison to peers appearance is most strongly correlated to popularity. Lastly, time of day is the biggest influence when posting an Instagram photo.

Method

29 undergraduate women were surveyed and participated in focus groups. These groups were made through friendships or organization ties (i.e. sororities, teams, etc.). Majority (66%) of these women were Caucasian. They were recruited through a volunteer sample method at UAH. The survey contained measurements surrounding peer comparison and perfection; the focus group expanded on these variables and included editing (Gamer, Olmsted, & Polivy, 1983; Strownman, 1996; Goodman, 1997).

Impact of the Study

This information is necessary to elaborate on because as the world becomes more technology-based, distortion and augmentation of reality spread and evolve. While this occurs, the majority of the content shared and used to communicate will be visual content; these pictures and videos will speak for the culture and the values that it prioritizes. These theories justify that the consequences of self-criticizing from a perfectionist standpoint are so negative and unhealthy. Discovering one’s self through social media can result in emotional and psychological consequences. Perfectionist attitudes and these consequences will increase as more and more online and media content is chosen to be altered since it causes social comparisons to become skewed.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank David Cook - for constructing Research Horizons Day 2018 and accepting our research. We would also like to thank the UAH Department of Communication Arts.