

The Impact of Instagram

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Nowadays, it is impossible to imagine life without social networking sites. Every person, from teenagers to adults reaching middle-age, is or has been registered on one or more web platforms used for communication. Recently, socialization process has shifted from face-to-face communication to chats and texting, as well as the exchange of visual data. Originally created as an application for sharing visual content, Instagram has become the most powerful social network in terms of its influence on society. The permanent flow of photos of various people, places, food and clothes is shaping the modern understanding of the standards of beauty, dictating leisure activities and general lifestyle. This essay therefore demonstrates that Instagram is considerably affecting many spheres of people's lives as it acts as a tool of self-expression, surveillance, and promotion of specific trends and brands.

The increase of Instagram users has influenced the way people communicate. Launched in 2010, today it represents the biggest social network that is focused on sharing visual content. People post everything, starting from pictures of freshly baked muffins to a bunch of friends at a birthday party. While some images are harmless and do not carry any strong context, others have considerable impact on society in general and each individual in particular. The influence on personality is first of all related to the phenomenon of selfie and excessive admiration of oneself. Apart from simple picture taking and posting, Instagram enables users to express their attitude towards images. The number of likes or positive comments determines social recognition and may result in obsession with oneself (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). One of the studies on that topic had analyzed data of more than 200 college students and had concluded that the students with higher levels of Instagram activity have more diverse social lives and are better at interpersonal

communication. Moreover, it was observed that there exists a “positive relationship between high levels of social activity (traveling, going to sporting events, visiting friends, etc.) and being motivated to use Instagram as a means of documentation” (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

The application has certain psychological impacts on society as the posting of images is oriented on the acceptance of the audience (Boyd, 2014). It takes a long time to select the right picture and even longer to check the like rate and reply to the comments. Self-obsession manifests in perfect images that are far-off representations of reality. Regularly a user expects their photos to be liked. That brings a feeling of content and influences self-esteem. It contributes to the acknowledgement of popularity, actual as well as the imaginary (Ferrara, Interdonato, & Tagarelli, 2014). A great number of profiles are created in order to promote certain ways of life to the audience. This is especially typical of advertising the healthy way of life. Another research, dedicated to the athlete self-presentation, states that images of these sportsmen on Instagram are distinguished by mediocrity (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). The majority of pictures depicted the entire body of athletes dressed in casual clothes that did not aim at emphasizing perfect body shape. The sportsmen present themselves as ordinary people and in that way make the followers believe that everything is possible.

Being focused on visual information, Instagram has recently become a major tool for establishing fashion trends. Nowadays, people can forget about fashion weeks and magazines. It's the social media that dictates the style. If your new dress gets more likes than the one that your friend is wearing you can consider yourself to be more stylish. The application is perceived as the one providing aesthetic etalons of the outlook (Hellberg, 2015). In addition to personal style it provides access to the newest fashionable products.

Instagram has had a considerable influence on the development of business, especially the areas related to shopping. Enabling sellers to post images of their goods and share them with other users turned this application into a powerful advertising tool. Advancements in social media technology have led to the establishment of consumer communities that have redefined the way companies and consumers interact and share information about brands (Hellberg, 2015). Instagram made it possible to post new products and, by using hashtags, consumers can easily find the right thing. Moreover, in social media environment, consumers supply online feedback on various products. What distinguishes this platform from traditional platforms is that feedback is often visible to other agents or users, such as other consumers, investors, and competitors. In addition, there is an intrinsic variety with respect to the manner feedback is given, such as through reviews and product ratings. However, it is important to remember that the extent of social media influence on shopping decisions is closely correlated with age.

The sphere of marketing achieved great benefits with the recent renovations of the application. Lately, Instagram incorporated video to the photo-sharing app. Brands can share video clips up to fifteen minutes long, with the added advantages of the service's filters and image stabilizing capability for low fidelity videos captured using smartphones. Instagram offers an opportunity to advertise through video, which can enable brands to maximize reach and attract more potential customers.

Apart from fashion trends and business, the development of Instagram is responsible for changes in the concept of photography and the rise of selfies. This significant trend in the art of photography has emerged with the spread of self-portraits via the Instagram app. The primary function of taking and posting photographs has influenced users. The rapid popularity of Instagram is explained by the fact that this image-sharing program can take, edit and publish

photos in just a few seconds (Wendt, 2014). People always wanted to picture and share every interesting moment of their lives, however the traditional way of taking photos requires the presence of at least two participants, one of whom is the photographer, which is not always possible. Selfie has solved this problem. This term commonly refers to a picture that represents an ambiguous image of a person or a group of people taken from the distance of a stretched hand. People no longer wait or ask someone to take their photos. They just use front cameras of their smartphones and in just a few seconds the world knows about their new makeup, haircut or t-shirt. The possibility of usage of various filters makes people feel that they are real photographers (Wendt, 2014). Apart from the phenomenon of selfie, a shift to focusing on shooting close objects has been observed. Every day Instagram is enriched with photos of food, drinks, received flowers and gifts, pets, etc., taken at a close distance.

In conclusion, due to numerous social media applications, the growing popularity of sharing online visual content has significantly influenced various spheres of people's lives. Social networking sites are places where people spend time online sharing pictures that represent their lives as well as looking at other images. The application has changed the way of communication by bringing the focus to visual images. Visualization establishes modern trends that are followed by users. No social media site comes close to Instagram in terms of attracting new audiences. Having access to video and photo advertising, many companies conduct their commercial promotion by means of this application.