Instagram Went Down, And It Might Have Been Justin Bieber's Fault

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Instagram's ① app has been down or suffering extremely long loading times for some over the last 50 minutes. Many suspect the reason is that Justin Bieber posted a photo of his ex-girlfriend Selena Gomez at an Oscars party (seen above) to his 14 million followers. The post sent his fandom into a frenzy of rumors that they might get back together, which may have caused an outage-inducing traffic spike. [Update: But Instagram denies this.]

When I say the downtime could be Bieber's "fault", what I really mean is that his fans are so loyal and engaged, they create unpredictable floods of attention that can cripple web services. In that way, it's kind of a compliment. Note that Bieber contributing to the Instagram issues is still unconfirmed speculation.

[Update 9:35am PST: Instagram confirms the outage affected some users, but said it didn't appear that Bieber was responsible. No other reason was given, though, and I suspect the company wouldn't want to publicly blame the pop star.

In a statement to TechCrunch, an Instagram spokesperson said "As much as we hope for a blissful reunion between two of America's sweethearts, we have no reason to believe that Justin Bieber's recent Instagram post caused the site to slow down this morning. However, a small number of people were affected and we apologize for the inconvenience."

The outage comes just a week after Facebook's other big acquisition WhatsApp experienced multiple hours of downtime caused by "server issues". There's been no official announcement posted by Instagram's blog, Facebook, or Twitter today, though.

However, people began tweeting "Is Instagram Down?" starting around 7:54am PST.

Some users said they were getting service back around 8:15am but others continue report they can't upload photos or load their feed.

If Bieber was in part responsible (though Instagram says he wasn't), it would highlight just how much sway big public figures have over web traffic. Once upon a time, it was record labels and movie studios that could say "Hey kid, want to be famous?" But now, social platforms can allow anyone with powerful content, even if it only appeals to a certain demographic, to gain tens of millions of followers and impact the Internet landscape.