

“Exploring the Impact of Instagram on Perceived Body Image and Mental Health”

[1384 Words]

INTRODUCTION

In the era of pervasive social media usage, Instagram has emerged as a powerful platform shaping societal norms, particularly in the realm of body image perceptions among young adults. The ubiquitous presence of influencers, individuals who amass significant follower bases and curate content reflective of their lifestyles, has become a central facet of Instagram's cultural landscape. The question of how these influencers contribute to the formation and reinforcement of body image ideals has garnered increasing attention due to its potential implications on the mental health of young adults. This research seeks to delve into the impact of Instagram influencers on perceived body image and mental health, exploring a relatively uncharted domain that has gained prominence as online platforms continue to evolve.

Several relevant studies have laid the groundwork for understanding the intricate relationship between social media, body image, and mental health. Notably, Fardouly et al. (2015) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the impact of exposure to appearance-related comments on Instagram on body image concerns among adolescent girls. Their findings highlighted the susceptibility of young individuals to internalize appearance-related commentary, underscoring the need to scrutinize the role of Instagram influencers in shaping body image ideals. Additionally, Perloff, Myslin, and Rosenbaum (2016) explored the psychological implications of social media use, including Instagram, on body image dissatisfaction among college students. These studies provide crucial insights into the potential influence of social media platforms on body image, forming a foundation for our exploration of Instagram influencers' specific role in this intricate interplay.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do Instagram influencers contribute to shaping body image perceptions among young adults, and what is the probable impact on mental health?

METHOD

To interpret our findings, we used the quantitative content analysis approach method, and developed a codebook to properly decipher and analyse the collected data.

SAMPLE DATA & COLLECTION

This study aimed to look closely at how fitness influencers operate on social media. We chose a mix of popular and not-so-popular influencers based on how many followers they have and how engaged their audience is. The influencers in focus were swollenormous, emilyskyefit, darrinrobson_fitover40life, and emilyrobson.fit. We picked them because they cover different topics like diets, workouts, and motivation.

The data was collected from the beginning of 2024 to 5th February, a time when many people decide to start going to the gym as a New Year Resolution. We used Excel to organize our findings. To keep things fair, we randomly selected 20 posts from each influencer, giving us a total of 80 posts to study.

Our main interest was in the content of each post – what the influencers were talking about or sharing. We watched their Instagram reels to get the gist of it. We also noted how many people liked and commented on each post. This method helps us understand what kind of content these influencers are putting out and how their audience responds to it.

ANALYSIS

In this detailed exploration of content variations among fitness influencers, our focus encompassed four primary categories: diet recommendations, workout plans, motivational content, and content featuring poor language or hate. The influencers under scrutiny exhibited noteworthy distinctions in their approach.

Swolenormous emerged as a standout influencer with a predominantly negative sentiment, marked by derogatory language and insults directed towards individuals he deems as not good looking. His follower base predominantly comprises hardcore gym enthusiasts, and he is notorious for publicly shaming those perceived as lazy. Additionally, Swolenormous commands a significant following of 1.2 million.

In contrast, Emilyskyefit consistently delivers positive content, emanating positive vibes and serving as a genuine inspiration for individuals entering the realm of weight lifting. Her resilience during pregnancy and the provision of proper workout content have contributed to her substantial following of 2.7 million, making her one of the most followed fitness influencers.

Darrinrobinson_fitover40life takes a more neutral approach, focusing on attaining personal clients and showcasing their progress. Notably, he incorporates unique features such as reviews on actors and discussions on their natural (natty) status. With a follower count of 320,000, Darrinrobinson_fit engages a dedicated but comparatively smaller audience.

Emilyrobinson.fit actively engages followers with insightful workout content targeting specific muscle groups. In addition to promoting proteins and creatine, she encourages direct communication through her DMs, attempting to sell her book. With a substantial follower count of 624,000, she follows a safe approach, with the majority of her posts being neutral.

To attain the results somewhere in the form of percentages we used a social media-based BERT pretrained sentiment architecture to attain individual posts sentiments which will help in advancing with the Qualitative posts analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS RESULTS

USERNAME	FOLLOWER COUNT	AVG. LIKES	AVG. NO. OF COMMENTS	POSITIVE SENTIMENT %	NEGATIVE SENTIMENT %	NEUTRAL SENTIMENT %
SWOLENORMOUS	1,200,000	6120.65	154.15	15%	55%	30%
EMILYSKYEFIT	2,700,000	16054.2	298.15	50%	20%	30%
DARRINROBINSON_FITOVER40LIFE	327,000	641.35	83.45	25%	15%	60%
EMILYROBINSON.FIT	624,000	4857.4	191.45	15%	30%	55%

The study reveals key insights into Instagram dynamics, emphasizing the impact of content sentiment on audience engagement. "emilyskyefit" exemplifies the positive correlation between positive content and high engagement, attracting a broad and active follower base. Surprisingly, "swolenormous" maintains significant engagement despite a higher negative sentiment, suggesting a deliberate use of controversy in their strategy. For "darrinrobinson_fitover40life" and "emilyrobinson.fit," neutral content aligns with a potentially more passive audience. These findings stress the need for influencers to tailor content based on audience preferences, with further research exploring specific content themes for a deeper understanding of engagement dynamics on Instagram.

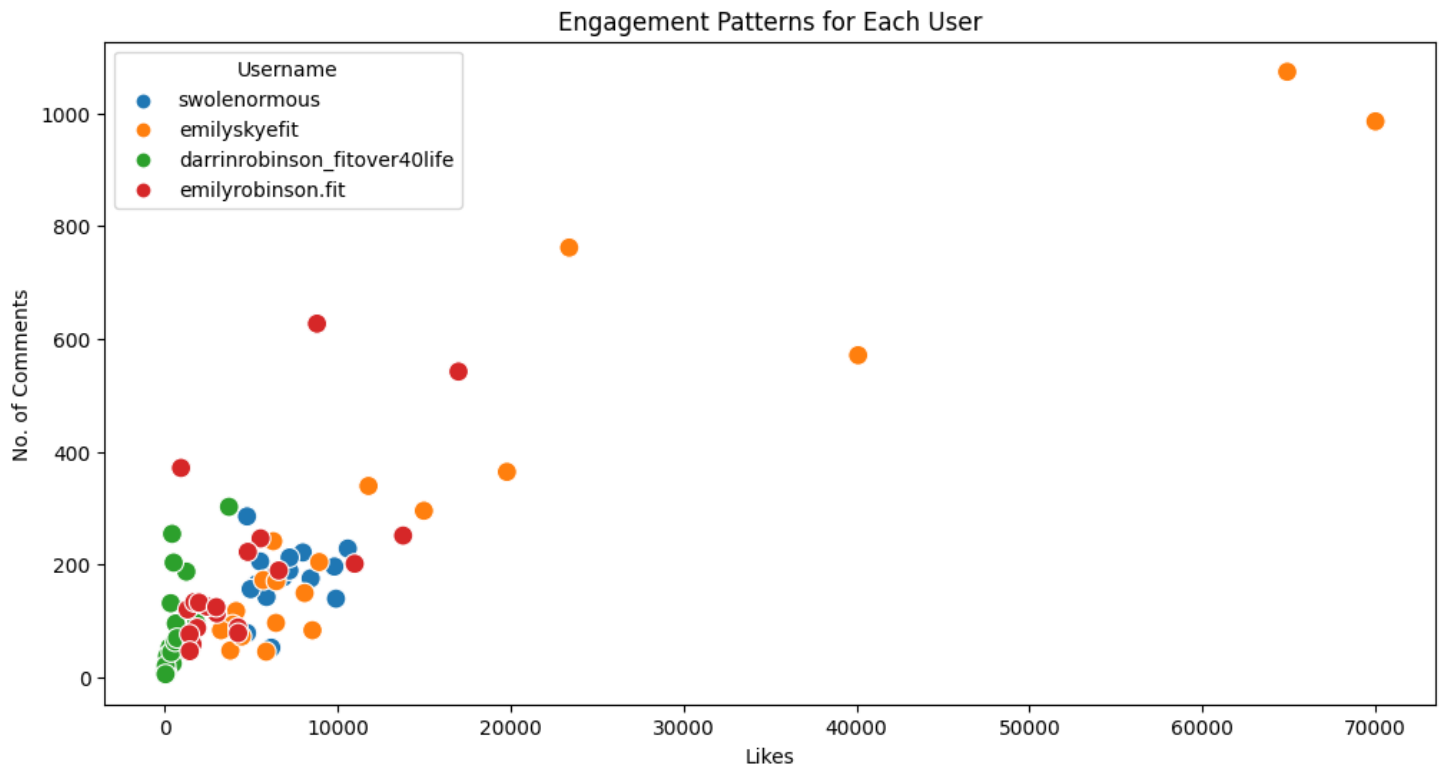


Figure 1: Engagement Patterns for Individual Users

Figure 1 reveals significant insights into influencers' engagement patterns on Instagram, highlighting the impact of content strategies. "emilyrobinson.fit" stands out with the highest engagement, showcasing an active follower base. On the other hand, "swollenormous" displays diverse engagement, suggesting the effectiveness of a non-mainstream, varied content approach. "emilyskyefit" and "darrinrobinson_fitover40life" demonstrate intermediate engagement, with the latter possibly sparking more discussions. These findings underscore the importance of avoiding a strictly neutral, mainstream approach, as influencers taking some risks can attract a broader audience. This information is vital for influencers and content creators seeking to enhance their engagement strategies on Instagram.



Figure 2: Word Clouds for Individual Users

Figure 2 presents word clouds for four Instagram users, highlighting the most frequently used words in their posts. The words reflect each user's content focus and tone, providing insights into their social media strategies on Instagram.

LIMITATIONS

1. **Manual Data Collection:** The study's reliance on manual data collection through observational methods introduces a potential source of limitation. Human subjectivity and the possibility of error in recording observations may impact the precision and reliability of the study's results.
2. **Limited Post Selection:** An acknowledged limitation lies in the method of post selection, where 20 posts were randomly chosen for analysis per influencer. This approach, while attempting to maintain fairness, may not fully encapsulate the entirety of content diversity, potentially overlooking important themes or patterns.

3. **Dynamic Nature of Social Media:** The study's temporal constraint, focusing on a specific timeframe in 2024, acknowledges the dynamic nature of social media. Rapid shifts in social media trends and influencer strategies post-data collection may impact the continued relevance and applicability of the findings.
4. **Content Analysis Challenges:** The categorization of content into predefined themes involves a degree of subjectivity. This poses a potential challenge in maintaining consistency across categorizations, as interpretations of content nuances may vary among different researchers, impacting the robustness of the analysis.

CONCLUSION

Despite the potential Limitations, Our study on Instagram and its effect on how people see their bodies and feel mentally has uncovered interesting insights. For instance, positive posts, like those from "emilyskyefit," tend to get a lot of engagement, challenging what we might have thought about what works best. Even "swolenormous," who uses more negative content, still keeps a lot of people interested, suggesting they intentionally stir up some controversy.

Our findings connect with recent research showing that using social media less can actually make people feel better about their bodies, as shown by Goldfield's study. Other research by Jiotsa and Perloff also helps us see that how much we compare ourselves to others on social media can affect how we feel about our bodies.

In answering our main question, we found that fitness influencers on Instagram do play a big role in shaping how people think about their bodies. This, in turn, affects their mental well-being, depending on the kind of content influencers share and how people engage with it. As influencers have a big impact, it is crucial for them to be responsible in what they share to create a positive online environment.

In summary, our study emphasizes the need for influencers to use their influence responsibly and create a positive online space. Our findings, combined with recent research, show there is still more to explore in this area. This research lays the groundwork for future studies on how social media affects mental health, especially through influencers.

REFERENCES

1. Goldfield, G. (2023, February 23). *Reducing social media use significantly improves body image in teens, young adults*. American Psychological Association.
2. Jiotsa, B., Naccache, B., Duval, M., Rocher, B., & Grall-Bronnec, M. (2021). Social media use and body image disorders: Association between frequency of comparing one's own physical appearance to that of people being followed on social media and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(6).
3. Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social Media Effects on Young Women's Body Image Concerns: Theoretical Perspectives and an Agenda for Research. *Sex Roles*, 71(11-12), 363–377.
4. Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015). Social comparisons on social media: the impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. *Body Image*, 13, 38-45.
5. Perloff, R. M., Myslin, M., & Rosenbaum, A. (2016). Mood regulation and selective exposure: the impact of melancholy on political and non-political online information seeking. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19(2), 112-117.