

FINAL SYNOPSIS

Sille Nygaard Kock



For my exam paper I want to investigate how 'likes' on social medias affect the users. I will focus on the social media Instagram where people post pictures for others to like or comment on. Instagram uses a simple heart to symbolize 'like' whereas Facebook uses the thumbs up sign for the exact same. The connotations of these symbols might not be same, however the desire for gaining more and more likes on either social network seems to be inevitable in today's society. This has come to impact our perception of ourselves and our worth that are likely to be based on how many likes or followers we have on our favorite social media.

What I find particularly interesting about Instagram is the fact that it is a visual representation of your life through pictures. In that way, you can decide what you want to show from your life and make it seem 'picture perfect'. For some reason, perfection seems to be what attracts most likes and followers. The need for more likes makes especially young adults post things only to gain likes, since likes constitute a feeling of being socially successful. Especially young women suffer from insecurities due to the pressure of having the perfect Instagram account with the right amount of likes and followers. There seems to be a tendency that we measure our self-confidence from the metrics shown on our Instagram accounts. A software has taken up so much of our attention that it somehow has become an extension of our personality.

The problem I want to address:

How can the number of likes we receive on Instagram affect our personal worth and perception of ourselves?

- What was the intention of the like button when first introduced?
- Are we willing to promote a different personality online, so that we are more 'likeable' in the eyes of others?
- Why does the heart shaped like button on Instagram make many young people feel insecure?

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References

I'm planning to at least use the following sources to answer the questions listed above. Besides these, I will find some additional sources with more direct focus on Instagram.

'The like economy: Social buttons and the data-intensive web' by Carolin Gerlitz and Anne Helmond, 2013

The text is useful in terms of looking into the origin of the 'like button'. I will need more sources to cover this and one where Instagram is mentioned. The text is about Facebook, but since Facebook introduced their 'thumbs up' like button before Instagram, I find the text relevant: "In 2009 liking and the accompanying Like button were introduced and presented as a shortcut to commenting in order to replace short affective statements like 'Awesome' and 'Congrats!'" (p. 1352)

'What Do Metrics Want? How Quantification Prescribes Social Interaction on Facebook' by Benjamin Grosser, 2014

Benjamin Grosser focuses on Facebook in the text, but this can easily be transferred to Instagram since many of the same functions and metrics appear. Especially the part about how likes are a form of social capital:

"Thus, within our system of capital, quantification becomes the way we evaluate whether our desire for more is being fulfilled. If our numbers are rising, our desire is met; if not, it remains unmet. Personal worth becomes synonymous with quantity. Further, through strategies like the audit, the pursuit of capital establishes a desire to impress others through quantification that also plays into Bourdieu's ideas of symbolic and social capital. We want to "win" the confidence of our friends, to accumulate a capital of "social connections, honourability and respectability" that can be exchanged later within our social system" (p. 2)

'De perfekte piger' (Translation: 'The perfect girls') by DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation), 2018

The Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) has made a documentary based on the challenges 4 young Danish girls experience in their everyday life. Especially one of the girls, Amalie, talks a lot about being insecure due to Instagram. She has more followers than the average 21-year-old, and she feels like she has to post certain things to maintain her 'image' that includes getting a lot of likes and increasing her number of followers. In one of the episodes she describes how losing a

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follower actually really upsets her because it makes her feel like she is not good enough and that her posts are not what others expect from her. Therefore, she wears clothes that she thinks her followers want to see and keeps striving for the perfect. During the 6 episodes she realizes that the person in the pictures of her Instagram profile is really just a persona and not her true self.

The Philosophy of Software by David M. Berry

The section about 'Real-time streams' on page 142-171 could be interesting as well. It would provide another perspective in terms of looking at what we expect from web-applications and perhaps why we have high expectations towards ourselves on social media - we want everything to move fast.

Subjects for discussion

How can we solve the problem that likes has come to impact a lot of people's lives in a negative way? Could we find a solution through software? The 'Facebook Demetricator' could be interesting to look at and discuss whether or not it is a solution to hide the metrics. Do we need to separate ourselves from social media to get rid of the insecurities and the pressure of being perfect?