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Instagram

Finstas, foodies, fitness and more: the social media juggernaut with over 800 million users is a fact of life for the modern college student

What type of Instagram account SHOULD YOU START?

1. The perfect gift for you would be…
A) A one-way plane ticket to a new country.
B) A gift certificate to Ulta, please.
C) Another cat. You can't have too many cats.
D) Just food.
E) A book of really, really, really deep poetry.

2. Where would you like to live?
A) Nah man, I'm more of a nomad.
B) London or Paris.
C) Anywhere that allows pets.
D) Italy or Japan.
E) Somewhere secluded.

3. What's your ideal vacation?
A) Skydiving, white water rafting, concerts.
B) A spa day or something active like a hike.
C) A cat cafe or a swim with some dolphins.
D) A food tour.
E) Museum hopping.

4. What do you do to relax?
A) Go to a concert.
B) Hit the gym or go for a run.
C) Snuggle up with my pet.
D) Eat everything in my fridge.
E) Curl up with a book and some tea.

5. What's your dream job?
A) A blogger or photographer.
B) A fashion designer or fitness trainer.
C) A professional dog walker.
D) A food critic.
E) A writer.

6. What can't you live without?
A) My phone.
B) Makeup or gym membership.
C) My pet.
D) Food, like literally food.
E) Locally-owned, fair trade coffee shops.

7. What's your favorite non-Insta app?
A) Spotify.
B) YouTube.
C) Snapchat.
D) Google Maps.
E) Tumblr.

If you got mostly A's…
From capturing roaring musical festivals to documenting international travels no one can figure out how you pay for, you are **the adventurer**.

If you got mostly B's…
You share your workout goals, on-point makeup tips and fiery fashion choices and maybe bring down our self-esteem in the process. You are **the guru**.

If you got mostly C's…
Your feed is a hodge-podge of cute dogs, cats, ferrets and even foxes, but you know your pet is really the goodest boy. You are **the pet parent**.

If you got mostly D's…
You're that guy standing on chairs in restaurants to get the perfect angle. You're a perfectionist, hungry and devoted to your dinner. You are **the foodie.**

If you got mostly E's…
Books, tea, fireplaces and coffee shops fill your feed in your signature gray tones. Your captions often include the words "me time." You're **the "artiste."**

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTINE FERNANDO

Self-image in the age of Instagram

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David Foster Wallace said in his 1993 essay, "E Unibus Pluram," that something is malignantly addictive if it causes real problems for the addict and offers itself as relief from the very problems it causes.

Instagram is not an inherently malignant thing. The application has the ability to connect us with and share in the meaningful aspects of our friends' lives. It is also a great tool for promoting positive self-image. However, does Instagram have the potential to be malignantly addictive?

Try to delete Instagram from your phone right now with the intention to never use it again.

For some, this might be difficult because of the loss of the popular and enjoyable social sphere Instagram offers.

Like coffee, social media such as Instagram can transform into mostly practical addictions. The application allows the user to navigate the social world with greater ease. Because of its popularity, however, that ease has transformed into an invaluable dependency for keeping up with the influx of change in the world around us. What was once a fun luxury has become a social necessity. There is nothing inherently malignant about this.

How much of a person's social media presence is taken into account when someone judges their self-worth?

There are applications that allow users to beautify themselves — whiten teeth, filter photos, clear skin and so on. These abilities allow for aesthetically upgraded portraits, selfies and landscapes. This ability for beautification is not inherently malignant either.

If there is a threshold at which the desire to beautify one's image for the internet becomes malignant, it is when the user defines their self-image by that beautified Instagram persona and adheres to that personal expectation in other parts of life.

That is, when a user becomes addicted to their doctored and perfected Instagram self-image, they are destined to be disappointed by their reality.

This phenomenon of addiction and resulting disap-

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pointment is often subtle if not completely invisible. At the very least, it is not detectable as an "addiction." It can take form in a user's daily life in ostensibly innocuous actions and thoughts.

It can take form as unwillingness to post a photo without running it through the required cosmetic touches. Outside of Instagram, it can be anxiety over perceived judgment for wearing a piece of clothing one really wants to wear, or insecurity in public without a certain amount of beautification. Instagram users may not realize they are holding themselves to any higher expectations. Rather, they believe this high bar is the norm.

It is important to stress that beautification in real life or on Instagram is not, by itself, malignant. People enjoy beautification for its own sake. Many enhance their looks — online and in life — to feel confident or simply for their own contentment, as Adele Poudrier discussed in her fashion column last week. Those media posters do not take their online image seriously for any reason other than personal satisfaction.

Another subject to consider is Instagram's "like" function. Some users, when they post a photo to Instagram, know how many likes to expect on average by looking at the data from their previous posts. This expectation can result in disappointment and even tiny crises of self-worth if the photo in question does not receive a certain amount of social acclaim. Users might even delete a post if it does not meet a certain requirement.

Even if the expected amount is met, this empirical judgment of how "liked" a user's online appearance is presents potential issues. It perpetuates the need to be constantly beautiful and socially perfect because everyone they are connected with is actively judging them.

The passing of judgment is not just a novelty of Instagram, it is expected.

Instagram is not inherently malignant and does great things for self-image and socialization. It is important to recognize the potential pitfalls in a social system that revolves around the promotion of a beautified self and the empirical and expected judgment of that self. These pitfalls are subtle and can result in problematic self-perceptions and behavior long before it is easy to notice them.

Scroll through Insta-History

OCT. 6, 2010 - Instagram launches.

DEC. 12, 2010 - Instagram hits 1 million users.

MARCH 21, 2011 - The first world-wide InstaMeet takes place.

AUG. 3, 2011 - Instagram's 150 millionth photo was uploaded.

SEPT. 20, 2011 - Instagram introduces version 2.0 with four new filters.

SEPT. 26, 2011 - Instagram hits 10 million users.

DEC. 9, 2011 - Instagram becomes the "iPhone App of the Year."

APRIL 3, 2012 - Instagram launches on Android.

APRIL 9, 2012 - Facebook buys Instagram.

JUNE 28, 2012 - Instagram redesigns its photo pages and feeds.

SEPT. 13, 2012 - Instagram rolls out a new profile page design.

FEB. 26, 2013 - Instagram hits 100 million users.

MAY 2, 2013 - Instagram allows users to tag photos.

JUNE 20, 2013 - Instagram allows videos.

OCT. 24, 2013 - Instagram launches sponsored posts.

DEC. 12, 2013 - Instagram launches private messaging.

MARCH, 2016 - Instagram switches from oldest-to-newest feed to an algorithm-based feed.

MAY 11, 2016 - Instagram changed its design to a more modern, black-and-white look.

JULY 21, 2016 - Instagram hits 500 million users. It has over 800 million users today.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTINE FERNANDO

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