

Instagram Is The Most Harmful App For Mental Health

By Allison Fox



It might be time to reconsider how often you scroll through curated photos. Instagram is the worst social media app for young people's mental health, according to a new report by the Royal Society for Public Health in the United Kingdom.

Researchers assessed 1,479 people ages 14 to 24 on how Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Snapchat made them feel in both a positive and negative way. Participants answered 14 questions in total about each social media platform, including whether or not they experienced feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness while using the apps.

The assessment also addressed how the platforms impacted body image, quality of sleep and bullying. Additionally, there were questions designed to determine the level of FOMO the users experienced after they looked at each social media feed. This all was to measure each social media site's impact on the users' overall wellbeing.

Instagram made the participants feel the worst in terms of wellbeing, followed closely by Snapchat, Facebook and then Twitter, according to the study. Only YouTube made participants feel slightly better. All five social media platforms were reportedly associated with a cycle of poor sleep and tiredness.

Research is building for developers to fix social media platforms so users engage with apps in a healthier way.

Part of the reason Instagram scored the worst in wellbeing is because of the app's reported effect on body image.

"Instagram easily makes girls and women feel as if their bodies aren't good enough as people add filters and edit their pictures in order for them to look 'perfect,'" one participant from Northern Ireland said in the study.

The practice of editing photos contributes to "a generation of young people with poor body image and body confidence," the authors explained.

In order to alleviate this effect, researchers recommend that social media platforms make it clear to users when a photo has been digitally manipulated. One idea is to provide a small icon or watermark at the bottom of a photoshopped or filtered photo.

The scientists also advise that social media platforms remind users when it's time to sign off. One suggestion is for app developers to track how much time users spend on social media, providing a pop up when he or she nears "heavy usage," the study authors wrote.

The research supports previous evidence that social media use can have a negative effect on mental wellbeing. A 2015 study found that more than two hours of social media use is linked with mental health issues, psychological distress and suicidal thoughts in teens.

But all of this isn't to say that you should delete your apps entirely. They can also be helpful in certain circumstances.

For example, the study found that Facebook provides the opportunity for young people to learn about the mental health experiences of others through posts their friends may share on their newsfeed. Social media can also be a positive platform for self-expression. "Liking" pages and groups helps users and marginalized individuals find emotional support and build community, according to the study.

Instagram has been working to focus on mental health, too. The app, which has nearly 700 million users, launched a campaign earlier this month aimed at starting a conversation about mental illness on its platform. Anecdotally, some users describe Instagram as a positive

influence on their mental health because, like the study found with Facebook, it connects them to a community of other people dealing with the same issues.

The trick is to be mindful. Too much of anything — even time spent online — can be detrimental. Tap into your digital social networks when you need them, by all means. But it's important to keep in mind that they rarely paint the whole picture of someone's life.

And then lean on your in-person network for support, too.

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/instagram-worst-mental-health_us_59245f86e4b034684b104a54