



The Influence of Instagram on Mental Health of Youth: A Case Study of Sialkot

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Abstract

This study explores how Instagram affects the mental health of young people in Sialkot. Instagram is one of the most popular social media apps, with billions of users worldwide, especially teenagers and young adults. While Instagram helps people stay connected, share moments, and express themselves, it can also have negative effects. Many young users compare themselves to influencers and celebrities, which can lower their self-esteem and increase feelings of depression and anxiety. Excessive use of Instagram may also lead to stress, loneliness, and distraction from daily tasks. This research was conducted at the University of Management and Technology (UMT) in Sialkot. A survey was given to 70 students and faculty members to understand how Instagram influences their mental well-being. The results show that many young people struggle to control their time on Instagram and feel pressure to meet unrealistic beauty and lifestyle standards. However, some respondents also reported positive effects, such as improved communication and reduced loneliness. The study highlights the need for balance in social media use. Reducing screen time and taking breaks from Instagram may improve mental health. The findings suggest that young people should be aware of the risks of excessive social media use and focus on healthy online habits.

Keywords: depression, anxiety, unrealistic standards, social comparison

Introduction

Instagram is a third most popular used app in a world. There are 2 billion monthly active users and over 500 million daily active users globally. The majority of these users are active on Instagram to share their photos and videos. Instagram users are between mostly 18 to 34 years old. Everyday more and more people create accounts on Instagram especially young people. They often rely on this app to communicate with friends' colleagues individually etc. Instagram can have both positive and negative effects such as promoting feelings of gratitude, altruism and willingness to donate. Contributing to



mental health problem such as depression, loneliness and other mental health issues. Promoting poor body image which can result in unhealthy obsessions with appearance, body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem & promoting One in eight young people struggle with a mental health condition which includes depression, anxiety, psychological effects of excessive social media use. Fomo (fear of missing out), etc. Instagram content promoting unrealistic beauty standards, frequently through excessively manipulated or filtered photographs of influencers and celebrities, can cause body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem in young users. Similarly, edited highlight reels and lifestyle content that depict idealized images of prosperity and pleasure can instill feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, and FOMO. Exposure to cyberbullying, trolling, or unpleasant comments can have a significant impact on mental health, causing anxiety or sadness. The platform's emphasis on competitive measures such as likes, follows, and views frequently leads to a reliance on external validation, exacerbating the stress and anxiety felt by young users. Furthermore, harmful trends or challenges might drive dangerous behavior.

Instagram is a social media software that lets users publish videos and images for free. Additionally, users can watch, comment on, and like the content created by other users.

Features

Sharing: Users have the option to share images and videos with the public, friends, or followers.

Editing: Users can apply filters, contrast, brightness, and other adjustments to their media.

Organizing: Using hashtags and geographic labeling, users can arrange their media.

Browsing: Users can view trending material and browse stuff by tags and places.

Following: To view other users' stuff on their feed, users can follow them.

Stories: Users can post fleeting images and films that vanish after a day.

Users have access to add-on applications such as Layout, Boomerang, and Hyper lapse.

Silvana M Romero Saletti, Stephan Van den Broucke, Wendy Van Beggelaer (2022) This author explained in their study that Instagram use among Belgian and Peruvian youths, identifying motivations like self-expression and connection, and usage patterns such as social comparison and anxious posting. It highlights the platform's impact on self-esteem, time management, and emotional well-being [1]. Muhammad Ramzan, Javeria Arshad, Hina Adeeb, Muhammad Asif (2019). This author explained in their study that Excessive use of Instagram among young adults is linked to higher rates of anxiety and depression. Reducing Instagram usage can help mitigate these negative mental health effects.[2]Yifan Zhao, Drew P Cingel, Lindai Xie, Muheng Yu (2023). This author explained in their study that the relationship between Instagram use and mental health among young adults, finding that passive use linked to improved self-esteem and body satisfaction but also to depression when self-reported. Active use was consistently linked to higher depression, highlighting the impact of use type on mental health outcomes.

[3]Alanna McCrory, Paul Best, Alan Maddock (2020). This author explained in their study that scoping review examines the psychological impact of highly visual social media (HVSM) on adolescents, revealing limited research and inconsistent findings.



Most studies rely on quantitative methods, lacking qualitative data to explore underlying reasons for mixed results [4]Pixie G Turner, Carmen E Lefevre (2017).This author explained in their study that Social media, especially Instagram, is linked to negative effects on body image, depression, and disordered eating. Orthorexia nervosa, an obsession with healthy eating, is prevalent in health-conscious individuals and often coexists with anorexia nervosa. This study explores the connection between Instagram use and orthorexia nervosa symptoms [5].Muhammad Al Dzikri (3024).This author explained in their study that the impact of mental health content on Instagram, specifically @satupersenofficial, on Gen Z adolescents' self-confidence. While the content positively influences mental health awareness and actions, its effect on self-confidence is modest (19.8%), with other factors playing a more significant role. The study highlights the complex relationship between social media, mental health, and self-confidence, offering insights for content creators and future research.[6]Carla Moss, Christopher Wibberley, Gary Witham (2023).This author explained in their study that the impact of Instagram on adolescent mental health, particularly its link to deliberate self-harm. Analysis of 15 studies found correlations between time spent on Instagram, normalization of self-harm, social contagion, and a sense of belonging among users. The study highlights concerns over rapidly evolving social media trends and the limitations of self-reported data.[7]Ehsan-Ul Haq, Lik-Hang Lee, Gareth Tyson, Reza Hadi Mogavi, Tristan Braud, Pan Hui (2022).This author explained in their study that the Instagram influencers specializing in mental health coaching, examining 97k posts to understand their linguistic and behavioral traits. Findings show that engagement varies based on self-declared identities, with Coaches providing more support than Authors. Increased informational support boosts engagement, offering insights for mental health practitioners to enhance outreach.[8]Ayesha Siddiqa, Gürcan Seçim, Hafsa Mukhtar (2024).This author explained in their study that how Instagram use affects self-esteem and happiness among young people in Northern Cyprus. Findings revealed that Instagram negatively impacted happiness but boosted self-esteem for those engaging in upward social comparison. Recommendations include fostering media literacy and providing mental health resources to mitigate social media's negative effects.[9]Nicole Gifford (2021).This author explained in their study that how Instagram's photo-based nature fosters upward social comparisons, especially among adolescents. As the largest social media consumers, adolescents may be vulnerable to unrealistic portrayals, impacting their mental health. Given rising mental health concerns in New Zealand, more research is needed to understand Instagram's effects.[10]

Objective

This study aims to understand how instagram impact on youth mental health and in what way this impact on mental health like negative impact includes stress, depression or impact positively like reducing loneliness, communication way

1.2 Problem statement:

Instagram is one of the most popular social media networks among young people, but the influence on their mental health is an increasing issue. According to research, excessive Instagram use can lead to difficulties such as anxiety, sadness, and depression,



which are frequently impacted by social comparison, cyberbullying, and the pressure to maintain an idealized online image. This project seeks to investigate how various features of Instagram use affect young people's mental health, uncovering both good and negative outcomes to inform prospective treatments for promoting healthy social media use.

1.3 Research Question:

How does Instagram usage impact mental health, particularly in terms of feelings of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem?

Does reducing Instagram usage improve mental health and overall well-being?

2. Literature review:

Gbadebo Collins Adeyanju, Ron Patrick Solfa, Thuy Linh Tran, Sophia Wohlfarth, Jonas Büttner, Oluyomi A Osobajo, Afolabi Otitoju (2021). This author explained in their study that Instagram use and depression, finding a strong relationship but no direct causality. Nine studies published between 2010 and 2018, focusing on young users, highlight factors like social comparison, self-esteem, and social media dependence as moderators. Further research is needed to establish direct causality between Instagram use and mental health disorders.[11] Daniela Schwarz, Kira Steinau, Laura Kraus, Tina In-Albon (2022). This author explained in their study that A study on 298 youth found that a 1-week Instagram abstinence led to reduced depressive symptoms, improved self-esteem, and better mental health. Both the experimental group and control group showed positive changes, suggesting short-term benefits of reduced social media use.[12] Laura Moreton, Sheila Greenfield (2022). This author explained in their study that UK university students' perceptions of mental wellbeing and examines how Instagram may affect their mental health, amidst a rise in demand for university counselling services. While previous research has linked Instagram to negative mental wellbeing, little qualitative work has been done specifically with undergraduates.[13] Isabell Koinig (2022). This author explained in their study that A study during COVID-19 examined how young adults evaluated mental health content from influencers on Instagram, finding that motivational quotes and influencer posts were most favored. The results suggest people prefer content that boosts self-esteem or has a personal, relatable touch.[14] Dr Bharat Dhiman (2024), This author explained in their study that the impact of Instagram on the physical and mental well-being of Indian youth, focusing on body image, self-esteem, and social comparison. It highlights both the positive and negative effects of Instagram within the cultural context of India.[15] Frison, Steven Eggermont (2017). This author explain in their study that A longitudinal study of 671 Flemish adolescents found that Instagram browsing increased depressed mood over time, while higher depressed mood led to more Instagram posting. These reciprocal relationships were similar for both boys and girls.[16] Aparna Sharma, Kavish Sanghvi, Prathamesh Churi (2022). This author explained in their study that A study of 726 young adults in India found that social comparison on Instagram is linked to colourism and mental health issues, with age influencing these relationships. Gender showed no significant effect, and the study emphasizes the need for awareness to protect users' well-being on social media.[17] Negar Vakili, Sherry H Stewart, Savanah Smith, Annphin Mathew, Christine Wekerle (2020). This author explained in their study that



social media's potential for disseminating sensitive topics like violence victimization and mental health among youth is under-researched. The study suggests youth-focused platforms could effectively promote resilience and well-being through knowledge mobilization.[18]

Hypotheses

Excessive Instagram usage is associated with negative mental health outcomes, including increased feelings of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

Reducing or taking a break from Instagram positively impacts mental health, improving emotional well-being and reducing feelings of disconnection.

Independent Variables

Amount of time spent on Instagram.

Types of Instagram activities (e.g., communication, entertainment, scrolling).

Dependent Variables:

Mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem).

Impact on daily life (e.g., distraction from tasks, feelings of disconnection).

Changes in mental health after reducing Instagram usage.

Theoretical framework

By concentrating on the reasons underlying Instagram use and the ensuing psychological impacts, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) contributes to the understanding of how Instagram affects young people's mental health. Instagram is used by young people for a variety of purposes, such as information searching, entertainment, self-expression, and social interaction. Although likes and comments might provide users a feeling of acceptance and validation, overuse can have detrimental effects on mental health, including anxiety, despair, and low self-esteem. Constant exposure to well-chosen and romanticized photos can lead to unattainable beauty standards, which in turn can encourage comparison and discontent with one's own life. Furthermore, stress and social anxiety may be exacerbated by the pressure to maintain a desirable online presence. But Instagram can also be beneficial when utilized for networking, self-expression, and receiving assistance from virtual communities. As a result, how Instagram affects young people's mental health primarily depends on how they use the app and what kind of satisfaction they look for

Research methodology

This study conducts statistical analysis and quantitative approach methods to get to know the impact of Instagram on mental health of youth. In this study quantitative data analysis method was used. The data was collected and analyzed by using quantitative techniques such as survey. For this purpose, a questionnaire based on consumer decision making process was made and a survey was conducted among 70 respondents. The reason of selecting this approach is to get insights into the impact of Instagram on mental health on youth among different age groups or preferences



Population

The population includes respondents from UMT, Sialkot. The respondents involved would usually be student's faculty and staff connected to the university this group would be quite diverse, including undergrads, postgrads, and academic staff. presenting how Instagram impact on mental health

Sampling size

The sampling size is set at 70 respondents this number is chosen to ensure a diverse representation of opinions and experience related how Instagram usage impact on mental health. By gathering insights from 70 individual, the study aims to achieve a balanced perspectives on the impact of Instagram on mental health

Sampling techniques

In this research we applied stratified random sampling technique

3.4 Data collection

For data collection a survey is conducted based on the questionnaire through Online survey

Data analysis

The data analysis method used in this research after gathering of data through survey is SPSS software generally used for statistical analysis, allowing user to perform variety of statistical test, manage data and generate reports

Data presentation

In this research the data is presented in graphs, tables and their interpretations

Data presentation and Analysis

Table 4.1 cross tab of Age group of respondents

age	18 -20	20 -22	22-24	24-26	total
frequency	27	22	16	5	70
percent	38.6%	31.4%	22.9%	7.1%	100%

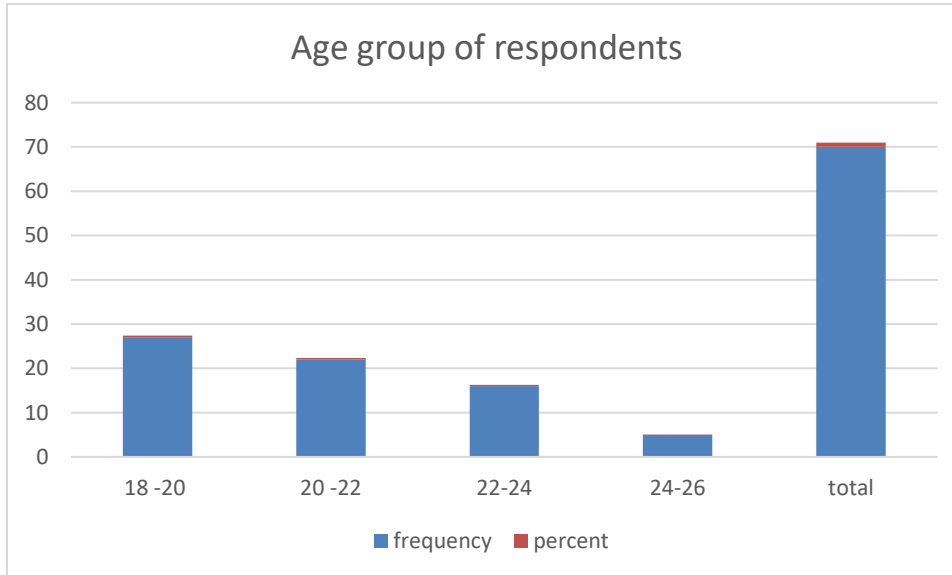


Table 1: shows a cross-tabulation of the age of respondents' the overall data shows 38.6% respondents between 18 to 20 age as compared to other categories 31.4% between 20 to 24, 22.9% respondent's between 24 to 26 age 7.1%

Table 2: Cross tab of gender of respondents

	male	female	total
frequency	11	59	70
percent	15.7%	84.3	100%

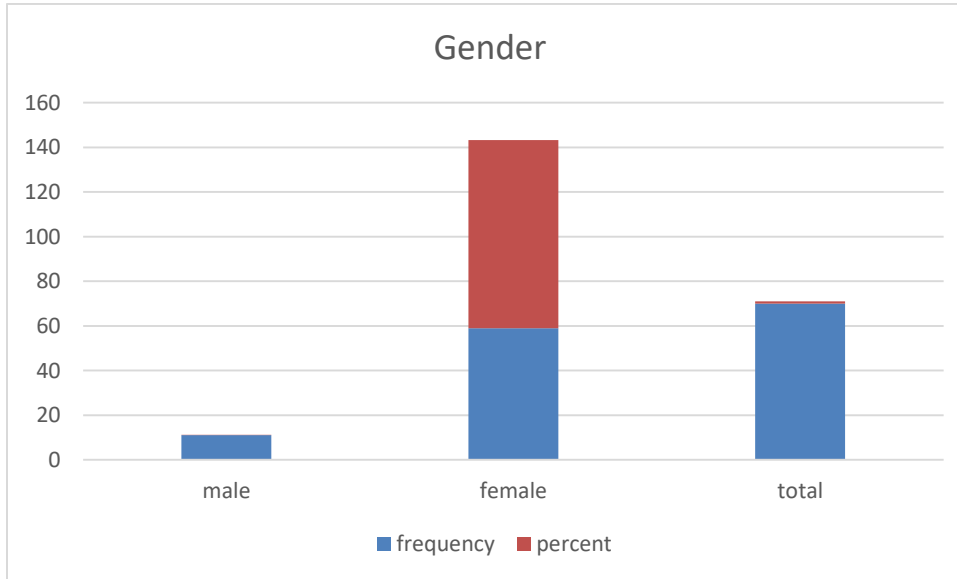


Table 4.2 shows a cross-tabulation of the gender of respondents the overall data shows 84.3% of respondents are female and 15.7% are male

Table 3: Cross tab qualification of respondent's

	Bachelor	Masters	M.S/M.Phil.	other	Total
frequency	33	13	4	20	70
Percent	47.1%	18.6%	5.7%	28.6%	100.0%

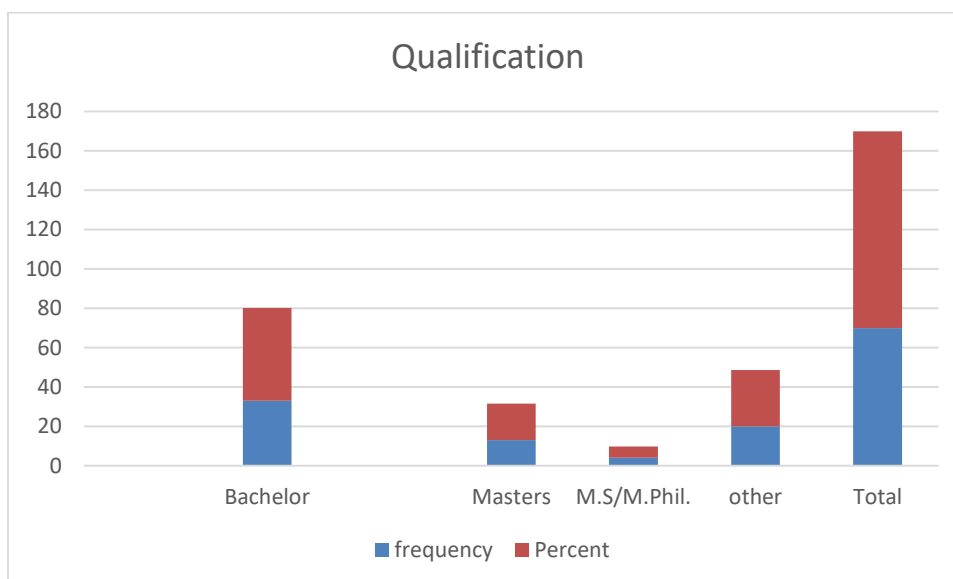




Table 4.3 shows a cross tabulation of the qualification of respondents the overall data shows 47.1% of respondents are from bachelor as compared to other category 18.6% from masters, 5.7% from M.S /M.PIL 28.6% from other

Table 4: cross tab of spend a significant amount of time daily scrolling through Instagram

	Up to an hour	Up to 2 hour	up to 3 hour	up to 4 hour	Total
frequency	16	29	11	14	70
percent	22.9%	41.4%	15.7%	20.0%	100.0%

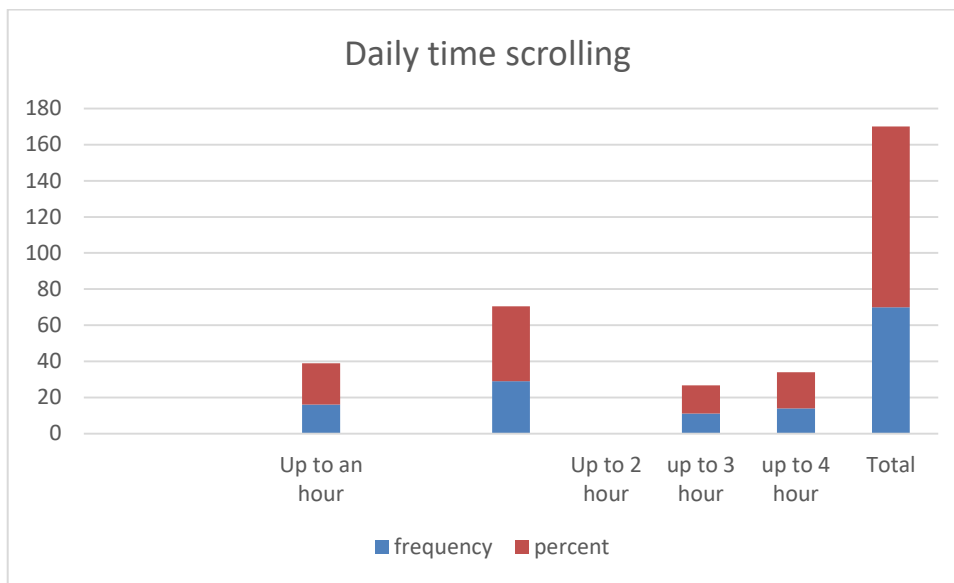


Table 4 shows a cross tabulation of spend a significant amount of time daily scrolling through Instagram 41.4 % use up to 2 hours ,22.9% scroll up to an hour ,20.0 % scroll up to 4 hour and 15.7% scroll up to 3 hours

Table 5: cross tab

	strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree	Total
Frequency	12	12	21	24	1	70
percent	17.1%	17.1%	30.0%	34.3%	1.4%	100.0%

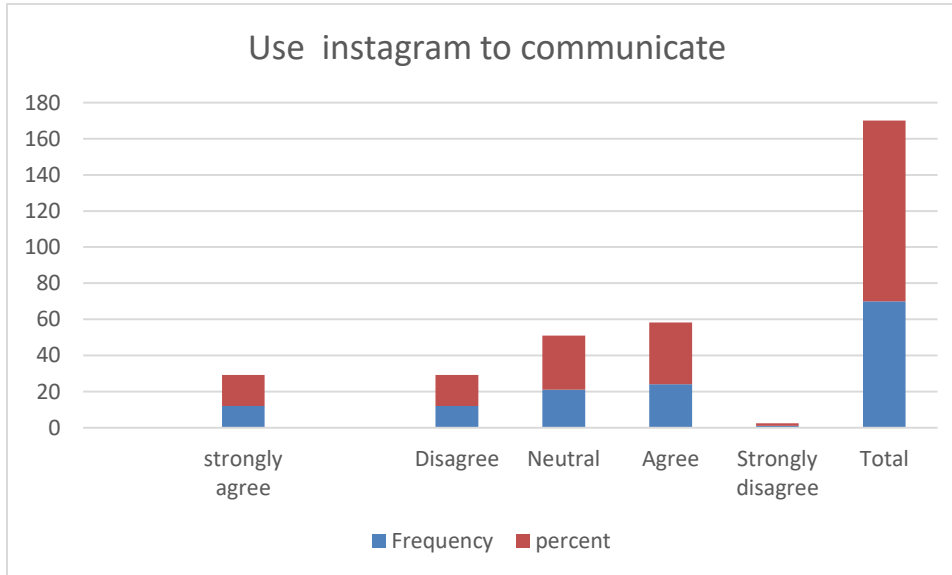


Table 5 shows a cross tabulation of frequently use of Instagram to communicate with friends, colleagues and family 34.3% agree as compared to other 30.0% are neutral, 17.1% are disagree and strongly agree

Table 6 Cross tab of Instagram is my primary source of entertainment and news

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	strongly disagree	Total
frequency	20	8	13	25	4	70
percent	28.6%	11.4%	18.6%	35.7%	5.7%	100.0%

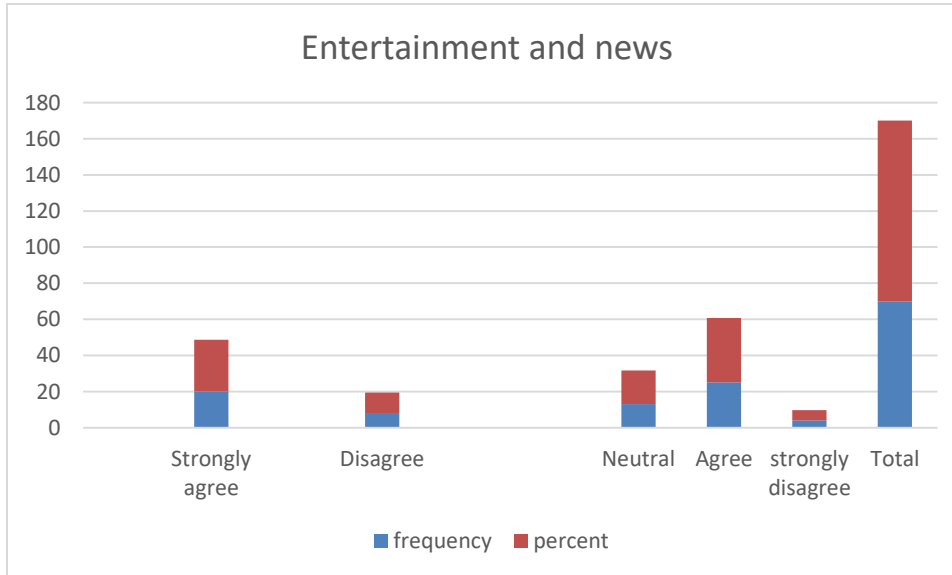


Table 6 shows the cross- tabulation Instagram is my primary source of entertainment and news 35.7 % students agree as compared to other 28.6% students strongly agree 18.6% students are neutral 11.4% students disagree and 5.7% students strongly disagree

Table 7 : Cross tab of I find it difficult to limit the amount of time I spend on Instagram

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
Frequency	6	10	23	31	70
percent	8.6%	14.3%	32.9%	44.3%	100.0%

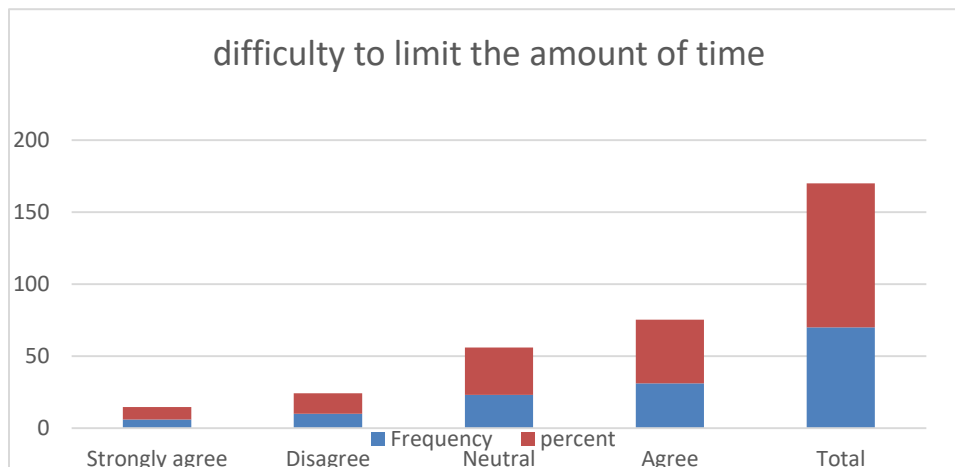




Table 7 shows the cross tabulation of find it difficult to limit the amount of time I spend on Instagram 44.3% students agree as compared to other 32.9% students neutral 14.3 students disagree and 8.6 % students strongly agree

Table 8 cross tab of Instagram usage often distract me from my important task and responsibility

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree	Total
frequency	22	20	4	19	5	70
percent	31.4%	28.6%	5.7%	27.1%	7.1%	100.0%

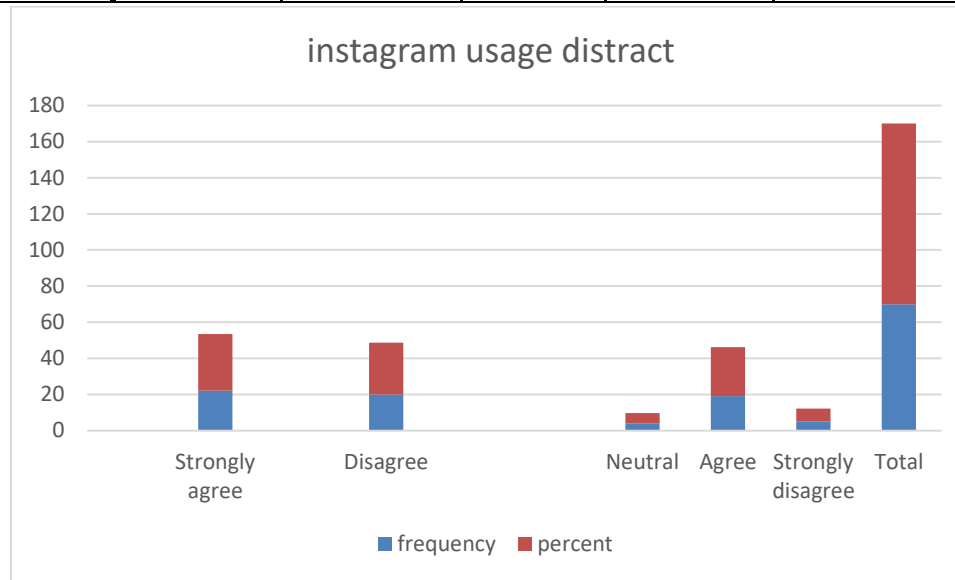


Table 8 shows cross tabulation of Instagram usage often distract me from my important task and responsibility 31.4% students strongly agree as compared to other 28.6% students disagree 27.1% students agree 7.1% students strongly disagree and 5.7% students neutral

Table 9 cross tab of Using Instagram makes me feel depressed, anxious, low self-esteem viewing unrealistic photos, Reels.

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree	Total
frequency	22	20	4	19	5	70
percent	31.4%	28.6%	5.7%	27.1%	7.1%	100.0%

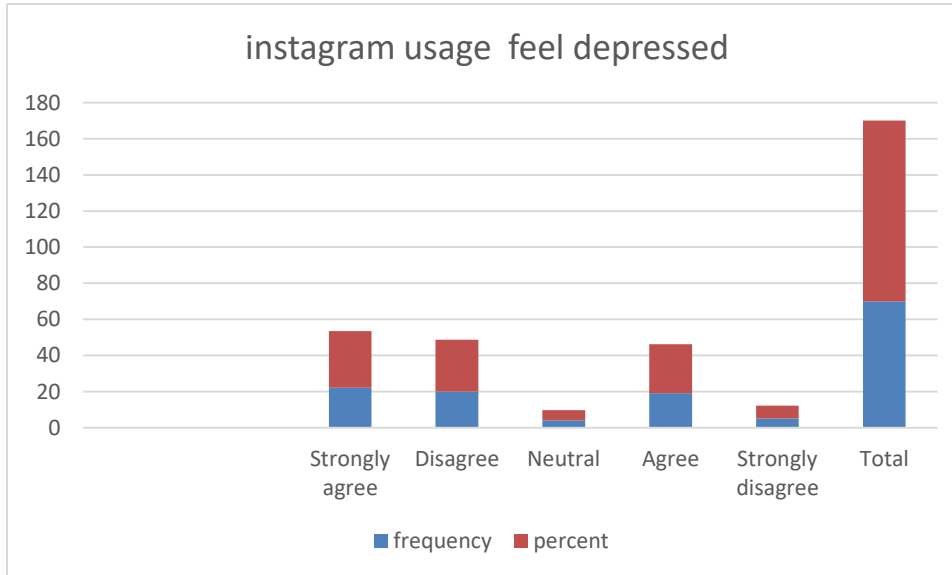


Table 9 shows the cross tabulation of Using Instagram makes me feel depressed, anxious, low self-esteem viewing unrealistic photos, reels 31.4% students strongly agree 28.6 %students disagree 27.1%students agree 7.1% students strongly disagree and 5.7% students are neutral.

Table 10 cross tab of I feel disconnected from people around me because I spend too much time on Instagram

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree	Total
frequency	14	12	8	30	6	70
percent	20.0%	17.1%	11.4%	42.9%	8.6%	100.0%

Table 11 cross tab of Taking break from Instagram positively impact on my mental health

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree	Total
frequency	12	12	21	24	1	70
percent	17.1%	17.1%	30.0%	34.3%	1.4%	100.0%

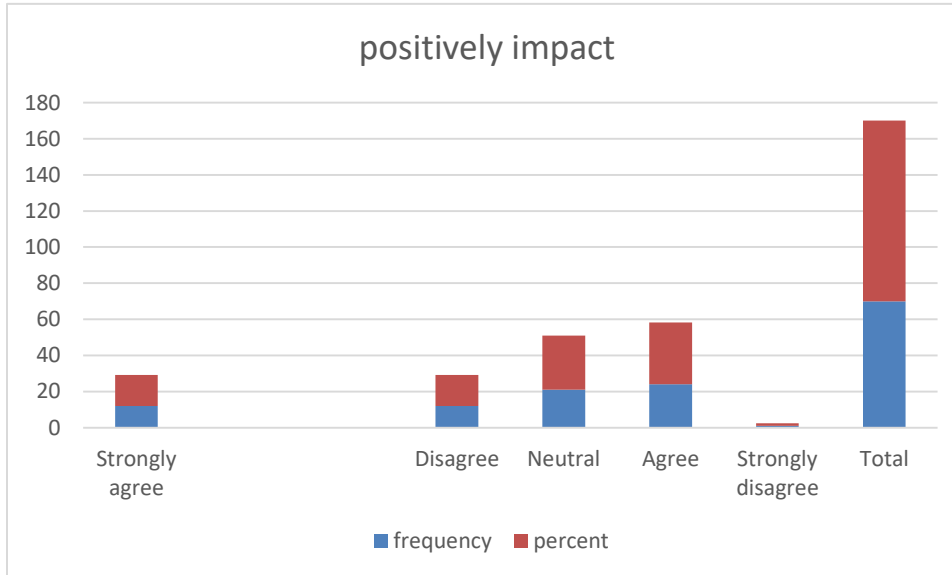


Table 11 shows the cross tabulation of Taking break from Instagram positively impact on my mental health 34.3% students agree as compared to other 30.0% students neutral 17.1% students strongly agree and disagree, 1.4% students strongly disagree

Table 12 cross tab of Instagram is primary source of reducing loneliness

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree	Total
Frequency	8	14	13	34	1	70
percent	11.4%	20%	18.6%	48.6%	1.4%	100.0%

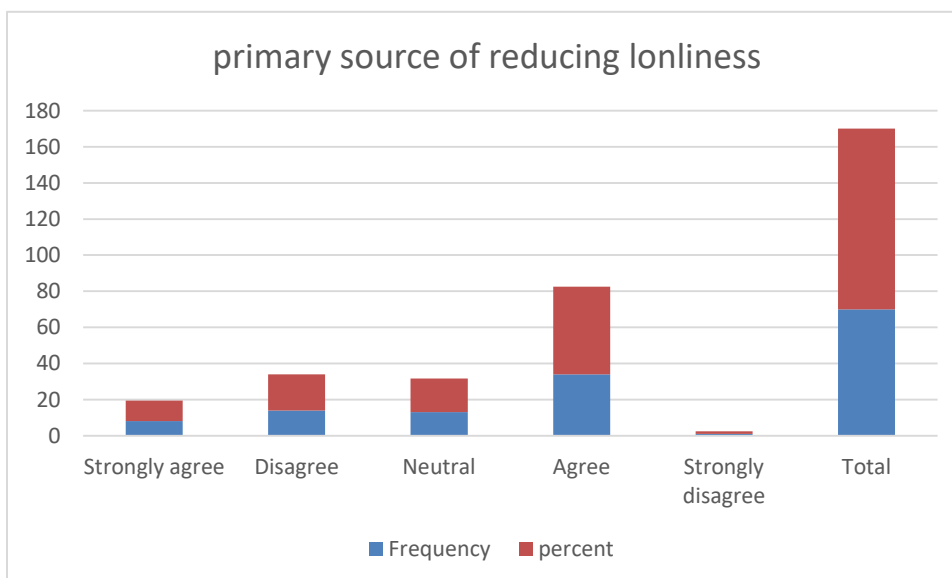




Table 12 shows the cross tabulation of Instagram is primary source of reducing loneliness 48.8% students agree as compared to others 20% students disagree 18.6% students neutral 11.4 students strongly agree and 1.4% students strongly disagree.

Interpretation of Results

Hypothesis 1: Excessive Instagram usage is associated with negative mental health outcomes, including increased feelings of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

1. Time Spent on Instagram (Table 4.4)
 - A significant portion (41.4%) of respondents use Instagram for up to 2 hours daily, while 20% spend 4 hours scrolling.
 - This suggests a high engagement level, which may contribute to mental health issues.
2. Difficulty in Limiting Instagram Use (Table 4.7)
 - 44.3% of respondents agree that they find it difficult to limit their time on Instagram.
 - This aligns with the hypothesis that excessive Instagram usage can lead to compulsive behavior and negatively impact well-being.
3. Instagram Usage and Mental Health Issues (Table 4.9)
 - 31.4% strongly agree and 27.1% agree that Instagram makes them feel depressed, anxious, or suffer from low self-esteem due to unrealistic images and reels.
 - This means that over 58% of users acknowledge a negative mental health impact, supporting the hypothesis.
4. Instagram as a Distraction (Table 4.8)
 - 31.4% strongly agree and 27.1% agree that Instagram distracts them from important tasks.
 - This indicates a significant impact on daily life, reinforcing that excessive Instagram usage can lead to time mismanagement and stress.
5. Feeling Disconnected (Table 4.10)
 - 42.9% of respondents agree that they feel disconnected from people around them due to excessive Instagram use.
 - This supports the hypothesis that heavy usage leads to social isolation.

Hypothesis 2: Reducing or taking a break from Instagram positively impacts mental health, improving emotional well-being and reducing feelings of disconnection.

1. Positive Impact of Taking a Break (Table 4.11)
 - 34.3% of respondents agree that taking a break from Instagram improves their mental health.
 - 30% are neutral, which might suggest they have not experienced or noticed an impact yet.
 - However, only 1.4% strongly disagree, meaning very few people believe Instagram breaks have no effect on mental health.
2. Instagram as a Way to Reduce Loneliness (Table 4.12)



- 48.6% agree that Instagram helps reduce loneliness, while 20% disagree.
- This suggests that while Instagram can provide social connection, it does not replace real-life interactions.
- The previous data (Table 4.10) showing feelings of disconnection contradicts this, indicating that social media use may create a false sense of connection rather than genuine emotional support.

Conclusion

- The data strongly supports Hypothesis 1, showing that excessive Instagram usage correlates with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, distraction, and social disconnection.
- The data partially supports Hypothesis 2, as taking a break from Instagram improves mental health, but many users still view it as a way to reduce loneliness.
- While Instagram can provide entertainment and connection, excessive use leads to negative psychological effects, reinforcing the importance of moderation and digital detox practices.

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