

THE EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF GEN Z: PERCEIVED
SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES

BY
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Abstract

Technology has rapidly interwoven itself into the life of an individual. Social media makes up a large part of technology, an ever-changing system of mediums that portray messages depending on the current events. The messages communicated on various social media platforms fundamentally alter Generation Z's (Gen Z's) emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. As technology progresses, the necessity of studying the impacts of mediums on Gen Z, digital natives, increases. A study was conducted on 46 Gen Z participants specifically on how they utilize the most popular social media platform for Gen Z—Instagram, to determine their perceived emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. This mixed-method study evaluated both negative and positive messages perceived by Gen Z on Instagram. A mixed-method study was applied along with using three communication theories as the foundation of the study for results: Media Ecology Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and Cultivation Theory. The study analyzed Gen Z's Instagram usage for 146 total survey responses over five days. The study determined the overall amount of Instagram usage by participants, the types of messages communicated through the medium, and how the use of the medium impacts emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. The overall outcome concluded that Instagram positively impacted Gen Z emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

Keywords: Instagram, Gen Z, Emotional, Mental, Spiritual

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social Media and Generation Z

Social media has quickly become a relevant form of communication. In more recent years, social media has become a commodity that people of all ages interact with, allowing the messages portrayed online to impact them personally. The definition of social media is “forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content” (Merriam-Webster, 2021, para. 1). Another definition of social media benefits users by saying social media is “Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Lexico, 2021, para.1). Social media has become an integral part of all forms of communication, whether by sharing information through pictures, videos, or messages.

Generation Z is largely familiar with social media, given they are the first generation exposed to an unmatched amount of technology since the web revolution took place in the 1990s (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2020). They are born into technology and utilize social media daily. Per the International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research, Gen Z is the first generation born into technology, experiencing the widespread internet firsthand, a defining factor compared to previous generations (Baldonado, 2018). They have grown up in a culture and world of technology and social media.

Gen Z makes up a large percentage of the United States and a large part of the global population. Generation Z, also known as “iGen, Post-Millennial, Gen Tech, Digital Natives, Net Gen, Facebook Generation, and Plurals,” comprises 25% of the United States of America (Baldonado, 2018, p. 56). Gen Z has surpassed millennials in size, resulting in 32% of the global population of 7.7 billion in 2019 (Gonzalez & Almeida, 2020).

The largest generation currently utilizes a large part of social media daily, impacting their perception of most given messages online. On average, Gen Z spends nine hours a day using social media and is exposed to over 13 hours of media on average each day (Vitelar, 2019). This average exposure time means that Gen Z is exposed to media throughout the day and night, aside from when asleep. During this exposure time, the content that is seen encapsulates information that could potentially be true or false and could strongly impact the user's emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being either positively or negatively.

Social media encompasses mediums highly utilized by Gen Z such as Facebook, Twitter, Tik-Tok, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and more. Instagram captures over 71% of Gen Z's audience for the usage of social media (Pew Research Center, 2021). Gen Z users are on many social media platforms aside from Instagram. A social media study shows that while Facebook remains a popular social media platform utilized by older Gen Z users, there remains a steady decline in Facebook's popularity (IPSOS MORI, 2018, as cited in Vitelar, 2019). Gen Z users prefer Instagram over Facebook. It is a newer platform that does not deteriorate the importance of Facebook or other social media platforms but instead highlights the popularity of Instagram with Gen Z.

Instagram is a social medium with features such as a news feed, stories, an explore page featuring reels and posts, a shopping page, and a personal page. Instagram has many features on the medium to communicate and interact with one another. Instagram was first released on the iPhone on October 6, 2010, highlighting the applications' photography and editing capabilities (Manovich, L., 2017).

From the beginning of Instagram, the medium has continued to change and adapt to current technological advances and media trends. "Instagram is the fastest growing social

network, with nearly 5% growth each quarter” (Purba, 2021, p. 85). Since Instagram can capture a large audience quickly, particularly with Gen Z, the medium impacts the audience positively or negatively. Regardless of the features they are viewing and interacting with, Instagram impacts Gen Z.

Justification

While media has been around for a while, the earliest rise of social media, even though short-lived, began with the Six Degree profile uploading service in 1997. The year 1997 became the official start of social media which aligns right around the beginning of Gen Z.

Blogs were introduced by the LiveJournal publishing site in 1999 and became an early form of social communication (Maryville University, 2021). In 2001, Friendster was introduced, which attracted millions of users to provide their email address upon registration and begin basic online networking (Maryville University, 2021). In 2002, LinkedIn, a social networking site for business professionals, was founded, and ten years later, in 2002, it grew to 675 million users worldwide (Maryville University, 2021). Today, LinkedIn is still used by business professionals to connect with other career-minded individuals. In 2003, Myspace launched and three years later became the “most visited website on the planet, spurred by users’ ability to share new music directly on their profile pages” (Maryville University, 2021, para. 17). By this time, social media continued to advance and become more personalized. Facebook was introduced in 2004 but took off in 2008, making Myspace fall backward (Maryville University, 2021).

This early timeline of social media is helpful concerning Gen Z because it is intertwined with the web revolution and started around the same time as Gen Z’s beginning. Over time, technology and media have developed and rapidly changed how users communicate with one

another. Through the introduction of applications like Instagram, communication is easier than ever.

With technology and social media constantly changing and evolving every day, users are unaware of its impact on their everyday lives. Studies have been conducted about social media and its impact on users in the past. Still, there is little to no research on how the messages are currently communicating to Gen Z through Instagram and the positive or negative impacts on their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the research and to answer the question: Were the messages communicated on Instagram, perceived by Gen Z audience to have a positive or negative impact on their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being? Through conducting studies on Gen Z and findings of methods and research on Instagram, the outcome of this study concluded with a deeper understanding of Gen Z and how they are impacted emotionally, mentally, and spiritually by the messages perceived through the social media platform Instagram. This comprehensive study advances the field of communication by analyzing the impact that Instagram messages have on Gen Z's perceptions emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

The Instagram user's self-perceived emotional being was analyzed to determine the medium's impact on emotions. The Instagram user's self-perceived mental state was studied to determine the medium's impact specifically on mental health. The Instagram user's self-perceived spiritual condition was evaluated through the study while utilizing Instagram to determine whether or not the medium furthered or distanced ones' relationship with Christ.

The following thesis, *The Emotional, Mental and Spiritual Well-Being of Gen Z: Perceived Social Media Messages*, sought to provide a mixed study of both quantitative and

qualitative insight into either positive or negative messages communicated via Instagram and the impact on Gen Z. The focus of the study is research concluded from a five-day survey of 146 Gen Z participant responses. 46 Gen Z participants took part in the survey.

The study solely focused on social media and how the messages were perceived across Gen Z's top platform application—Instagram. The study analyzed the medium's impact on participants based on the messages that were being perceived. This study determined whether the messages communicated through social media, specifically Instagram, were perceived by the user to positively or negatively impact their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

The structure of this study was formatted to introduce previous research and insight into Gen Z and how one is impacted by Instagram messages on social media. The emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of Gen Z were broken down into three parts that study the individual impact each distinguished category has based on the perceived messages through social media.

The remaining section of the thesis provides a review of literature categorized by theories relevant to the study, how social media both positively and negatively impacts users, previous studies that have been conducted, and insight into the emotional, mental, and spiritual impacts of users on Instagram, and specifically with Gen Z.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For this study, the literature review is broken into six central themes around social media and Gen Z. The structure of this chapter will include the characterization of Gen Z, both positive and negative impacts of social media, and the main themes. These significant themes include a characterization of Gen Z, relevant communication theories including media ecology theory, media dependency theory, and cultivation theory, the positive and negative impacts social media

has on Gen Z, the emotional impacts on Gen Z's well-being, the mental impacts on Gen Z's well-being, and the spiritual impacts on Gen Z's well-being.

Characterization of Gen Z

Understanding the history of social media and Gen Z is imperative to understanding Instagram's positive and negative impacts on Gen Z. Social media is a broad yet significant topic of study that becomes more prevalent as time advances and technology grows in popularity. While much research has been conducted, there is currently little to no research on the impact of social media, specifically Instagram, on Gen Z.

A defining factor or event influences a generation's response to something with every generation. Gen Z's defining factors were both September 11 terrorist attacks and the Great Recession, which significantly influenced this generation (Baldonado, 2018). They are continuing to grow up in a post-9/11 world. Gen Z is characterized by the events that took place in which they were born.

Gen Z, as stated, is the generation born into technology from the moment they entered the world. This is a distinguishing factor within this generation compared to other generations. Studies show that every 60 seconds, Gen Z is exposed to some form of social media more than any other activity taking place (Baldonado, 2018). Gen Z has become familiar with social media, and it is integrated into their daily lives minute to minute. "Ninety-two percent report going online daily. A quarter say they go online 'almost constantly.' Ninety-one percent go to bed with their device" (White, 2017, p. 43). This constant connection of an online world with Gen Z has both positive and negative impacts. Gen Z's perception of Instagram messages impacts them emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

Relevant Communication Theories

It is important to note three relevant communication theories. The first theory discussed is media ecology theory, the second theory discussed is media dependency theory, and the third theory discussed is cultivation theory.

Media Ecology Theory

Media ecology theory examines the impact media has on individuals and how ideas and behaviors shape them. Neil Postman initially addressed this theory which formally is “the study of media as environments” (Strate, 2017, p. 5). The key term “media” expands from Marshall McLuhan’s idea that “the medium is the message.” Marshall McLuhan lived from 1918-1963 and posed an idea about media that remains relevant today. His idea is that media “is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 24). What makes a medium powerful is not its content but its power to deliver content. Ideas can move slowly, but technology, precisely mediums, can move much faster; therefore, beliefs may change how one interacts with one another, but the medium changes the scale of those interactions.

A medium fundamentally changes the way content is delivered. “Indeed, it is only too typical that the “content” of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 24). The content is critical when delivered through a medium versus being delivered in itself. A user on social media’s worldview is altered based upon which medium the content is delivered.

McLuhan believed that media does not create a form of illiteracy but a form of awareness. When he spoke on his idea in 1963, television and radio were popular mediums;

therefore, there is a heavy emphasis on the two. Since then, technology has evolved, but McLuhan's key idea within media ecology theory still applies to current media and technology.

McLuhan believed that the most rapid form of violence is dialogue. Through our words, one has the power to either be destructive or not. "This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 23). Users on social media are experiencing the medium as being the message, reinforcing media ecology theory and McLuhan's idea.

When applying McLuhan's ideas to Instagram messages, it is essential to understand that Instagram is the medium. According to McLuhan, Instagram would be one extension of humans that influences users. Instagram itself is the message that relays content such as pictures, videos, captions, and stories that impact Gen Z. This is significant in understanding Gen Z's perceptions of Instagram and the impact the messages have on them.

McLuhan claimed that television and radio changes one's perception of time and reality. If a bulk of the content is quickly displayed across a screen, he argues that it shifts one's perception of time. Media ecology theory provides a foundation of McLuhan's idea that could apply to Instagram. It changes one's perception of time and reality through the time the content is posted compared to real-time.

Media Dependency Theory

In 1976, media dependency theory was first introduced by the American Communication researchers Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur (Yang, 2015). Since then, this theory has become more relevant given the extensive usage of media. It is formed from other theories but focuses on an internal link between three components that comprise media, audience, and a

comprehensive social system (Communication Theory, 2018). Media dependency theory aligns with the current study of Instagram and Gen Z, being that it directly affects media and its audiences.

Media platforms create a dependency on the user if specific goals are achieved, which can include a direct correlation with the individual, social stability, and an active audience. For the individual, the media needs to satisfy a user's needs, and once this is completed, the user will become more dependent on that media platform (Communication Theory, 2018). This theory can be directly applied to Instagram if the user feels that it will instantly satisfy their needs, and if they believe that it will, they will become dependent upon Instagram.

Media dependency theory primarily increases social stability if users reevaluate their current beliefs, behaviors, or practices. This can happen when people are forced to make new decisions based on social change, conflicts, riots, or elections (Communication Theory, 2018). If an upcoming election occurs, users may turn to Instagram for information that might influence their decision. A user's dependency on Instagram can increase based upon having to make a decision and needing reinforcement.

Media dependency can happen based on an active audience engaging in content and information related to their personal life experiences. An active audience may be media-dependent based on individual needs like culture and society (Communication Theory, 2018). If an alternative source fills that gap, there will be a decrease in media dependency.

Media dependency theory will be applied to this specific research in studying the perceptions of media and the outcome it has on Gen Z. According to Yang; media dependency theory is a "...systematic approach to the study of the effects of mass media on audiences and of the interactions between media, audiences, and social systems" (Yang, 2015, para. 1). This

theory aligns with social media, specifically Instagram, and its impacts on Gen Z, given the constant use of the generation and application. Applying this communication theory will help determine the causes of the research.

Using media dependency theory, conclusions can be drawn that Gen Z users are becoming dependent upon social media, specifically Instagram, to seek content and find answers related to their needs and wants. The more dependent Gen Z becomes on social media, the higher the influence will be from the medium. “Media Dependency Theory has also found that a ‘higher dependence of an individual on a form of media is accompanied by a stronger influence of such media on the user’s perceptions and behaviors’” (Isaf, 2020, as cited in Vitelar, 2019, p. 8). Perceptions and behaviors are influenced based on the dependence that a user has on social media.

Given that Gen Z is the largest generation thus far, “they will not simply influence American culture, as any generation would; they will constitute American culture” (White, 2017, p. 37). Gen Z’s perception of Instagram influences their decisions to impact future generations and businesses.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner, examines media's long-term impact on viewers’ reality. “He claimed that because TV contains so much violence, people who spend the most time in front of the tube develop an exaggerated belief in a mean and scary world” (Griffin et al., 2019, p. 356). Cultivation theory analyzes the relationship between the media and the user. There are three cultural indicators within cultivation theory, described as three prongs, which are part of Gerbner’s paradigm. The first prong “represents scholars’ concern for the reasons why media companies produce the messages they do” (Griffin et al., 2019, p. 357). This first prong is

a concern labeled as the institutional process analysis. The second cultural indicator emphasizes the essential need to know the media messages and how they are transmitted to users, altering their perception of reality (Griffin et al., 2019). This second prong is called the message system analysis, and this strictly deals with the content of the media. The third cultural indicator, described as the third prong of the plug, is called cultivation analysis. To further explain, “cultivation analysis deals with how TV’s content might affect viewers—particularly the viewers who spend lots of time glued to the tube” (Griffin et al., 2019, p. 358). This is the part of the theory where the most action will occur.

Cultivation theory states that the media reinforces what the audience already believes. “Gerbner was more concerned that it affects viewers’ beliefs about the world around them and the feelings connected to those beliefs” (Griffin et al., 2019, p. 356–357). The media can impact a viewer’s current belief system, and the more exposure there is, the more significant the impact will be. The longer a user is exposed to the media, the higher the risk of altering one’s perception of the world and how they conduct themselves.

If a user does not like something, they tend to go towards media outlets that provide a similar worldview, and the more the user intakes, the narrower their perspective may become. This is not something that happens immediately but instead gradually impacts and audience. If users on social media view content similar to their worldview, this, over time, can reinforce their worldview on an idea, whether it be positive or negative. Cultivation theory can be applied directly to Instagram's impact on Gen Z. A practical example of applying this theory to this study is if a Gen Z user is fearful of missing out (FOMO) and consistently views content on Instagram related to other users traveling and having fun. Seeing this content could bleed into the user’s reality. Viewing this content could cause FOMO, leading to increased anxiety and depression.

The over-consumption of this content increases the user's internal belief that may not have been a reality before. The more exposure Gen Z has to Instagram, the more significant the impact of their existence will be, whether that be positive or negative. If users perceive Instagram messages to be positive, then there is a higher chance their perception of their reality and world will be positive. If users perceive Instagram messages to be negative, then there is a higher chance their perception of their reality and world will be negative.

Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media

It is essential to acknowledge that social media can positively or negatively impact Gen Z users. Many variables are included in interpreting a user having a positive or negative experience on social media, such as the demographic and psychographic of the user, the time of the week, time of day, the platform itself, events that are occurring, and many more. These components are essential for evaluating whether a positive or negative experience will occur.

Vivek Pandit, a writer who is part of Generation Z, acknowledges the advancement of social media and technology. "We must acknowledge that the pace of the technological advancement has continued to accelerate over the span of generations" (Pandit, 2015, p. 17). Pandit points out that technological advancements can benefit one's quality of life if taken advantage of by social media platforms. He gives an example of medical enhancements and how one currently utilizes medicine to improve an individual's health; therefore, the same can be done with technological advancements and social media (Pandit, 2015).

There are positive components of social media overall, specifically when considering Gen Z. Given that Gen Z is the first generation born into technology, they use all resources possible on social media to gain instant internet connectivity. "Social media has many potential positive influences on young people's lives, such as increasing social connections, helping with

homework and enabling teenagers to develop their identities and share creative projects” (Vitelar, 2019, para. 17 as cited in IPSOS MORI, 2018).

While reviewing some of the benefits of social media and technology, it is also essential to note the negative impacts of social media platforms and technology. Pandit warns about the harmful effects of social media and technology, stating, “...with the adoption of new technology, we often become so blinded by the positive enhancements that we do not always bother to consider the unintended consequences, whether to our own lives or to others” (Pandit, 2015, p. 17). Both positive and negative effects of social media are present, but it is crucial to understand and differentiate the two.

Both Gen Z and social media are influenced by specific environmental influences that impact an individual’s acceptance process and social media usage. Environmental factors that affect Gen Z’s social media usage include political constituents, economic factors, technological changes, and cultural/legal variables. The environmental factors directly or indirectly influence Gen Z. These influences can impact Gen Z socio-economically, educationally, and occupationally (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2020). These environmental factors can affect Gen Z’s acceptance process and its usage of social media. Personal factors also influence Gen Z and their usage of social media. “Personal factors like social & economic class, morals/choices, lifecycle stage, age-maturity, and culture/subculture do play a key role in molding Gen Z’s online accessibility pattern” (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2020, para. 8). Gen Z’s influences and experiences play a role in impacting their online lives.

Ethical approaches must be followed when utilizing social media and making decisions for publishing content. Philosophers developed five types of approaches to determine ethical decision-making (Velasquez, 2015). The utilitarian approach, the rights approach, the fairness or

justice approach, the common-good approach, and the virtue approach are all approaches to understanding and dealing with moral issues and how to tie these approaches into creating and interacting with content on social media. These approaches are essential for ethical decision-making on social media.

Studies have shown both positive and negative outcomes perceived by Gen Z and the top platforms used. While much research has been conducted on various social media platforms and even Gen Z themselves, there is currently little to no research on the impact of social media, specifically Instagram, on Gen Z. It has not been made clear if there is a negative or a positive impact by Instagram with Gen Z.

Emotional Impacts on Well-Being

The messages portrayed on Instagram have either a positive or negative impact on Gen Z emotionally. Emotions such as sadness, happiness, anger, disappointment, nervousness, and excitement are emotions users may feel when utilizing Instagram. Social media can have a lasting emotional impact on the user or society through using social media marketing communication to influence purchase decisions.

Within social media, marketing communication can impact Gen Z through their perception of a product or company. In 2019, a study sample was conducted with 325 respondents to reveal the attitudes of Gen Z and how the messages communicated via social media positively or negatively affect their emotional needs (Ulfa, & Astuti). The research examines social media marketing communication and how it can impact Gen Z's attitude. Social media marketing often occurs on Instagram and utilizes emotions to influence purchase decisions. In terms of social media marketing, there are three attitudes to Gen Z: cognitive, affective, and conative. Cognitive components include awareness and knowledge, affective

components are linked directly to an attitude that creates the most substantial influence for changing attitudes, and conative components are the individual's behavioral action based on their attitude (Ulfa, & Astuti).

The first attitude or emotion is cognitive. A cognitive component makes up the awareness and knowledge of information and brands retrieved from social media content (Ulfa, & Astuti, 2019). Consumers subconsciously relate to content seen on social media. The second attitude or emotion is labeled as affective. The affective component, referred to as the emotional component, relates to the attitude towards a brand and can be either positive or negative (Ulfa, & Astuti, 2019). The affective component has the most vital ability to change the mindset of a consumer. The third attitude or emotion is conative. Conative, referred to as the behavioral component, is a consumer's tendency or react to a product or behave in a particular manner (Ulfa, & Astuti, 2019). The consumers' belief system and feeling towards a subject heavily rely on their behavior in the current situation.

Social media in marketing communication includes access, length of time, log-on frequency, duration of log-on, and updating profiles. The study conducted on 325 Gen Z respondents showed that these features have little to no direct effect on Generation Z's cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes (Ulfa, & Astuti, 2019). While marketing communication methods on social media have little to no impact on Gen Z's emotional being, their personal life and interest in social media remain a separate study that can impact the user.

Aside from marketing communication on social media, there is a concern that users could be negatively impacted on social media at a societal level if negative emotions are being portrayed. "[H]uman beings tend to encounter negative set of emotions and feelings like animosity, rage, grudges and resultant they react online and offline respectively" (PrakashYadav

& Rai, 2020, para. 25). If negative emotions are being acted upon online, this could result in severe consequences for users. This impacts users explicitly on Instagram because Gen Z utilizes the application, and when one posts a picture, video, story, or comment, it is out there for the world to see. If users post harmful content online, not only can it result in consequences for that user, but it can also negatively impact other users emotionally.

Mental Impacts on Well-Being

The messages portrayed on Instagram, whether positive or negative, can have a mental impact on Gen Z. Studies have been made with Gen Z and social media to understand the lasting impacts media will have on a user's mental health, both physical and mental, and whether that be positive or negative. The messages that Gen Z views on Instagram can impact their early devolvement, their physical and mental health, and their career either knowingly or unknowingly.

Social media impacts Gen Z's mental characteristics and development. A study conducted on Gen Z and their adolescent attachment style found that social media and the messages portrayed online can positively impact young individuals (Nicolas, 2020). When young children grow actively participating and using social media, development within the child can be affected mentally.

Instagram impacts Gen Z's physical and mental health. The Generation Z and their Social Media Usage: A Review and a Research Outline, was published in 2020 by PrakashYadav and Rai to provide further insight into social media messages and the impact it has previously had on Gen Z. Social media provides the "medium to spread the positive physical and mental well-being by effectively and competently informing about health and nutrition, spirituality, societal concerns to the younger population of the world especially the developing nations at their finger"

(PrakashYadav & Rai, 2020, para. 13). Social media can provide a space where both physical and mental health information can be shared to raise awareness on these topics.

Broadcasting trends on social media involve information that provides topics to Gen Z on “health and hygiene, girl education, consumer awareness, and other critical social issues, creating consciousness to societies at large, specifically teenagers and youths” (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2020, para. 25). Societal awareness of physical and mental health and nutrition displayed through social media can positively impact Gen Z’s mental well-being by informing users about their health and nutrition.

There is a significant focus on social media and the negative impacts it has on Gen Z. Geraldine Walsh writes that extended periods of social media can be detrimental to Gen Z. Mental health concerns such as loneliness, depression, and a lack of confidence were studied in-depth to determine whether social media is part of the cause for Gen Z. Staying logged onto social media for an extended period can result in damaging the mental state (Walsh, 2019). Adverse outcomes can occur on Instagram, such as negative mental health patterns for Gen Z if not appropriately managed.

Gen Z communication methods vary from older generations because they typically communicate using non-traditional methods. Older generations may be less involved online than Gen Z (Walsh, 2019). FOMO, which means the fear of missing out, is a common mental state that online users can experience, specifically with Gen Z. An even larger fear than FOMO is the fear of living offline (Walsh, 2019). Separating oneself from the real world can confuse users leading to a fear of living offline. Users can avoid these experiences if they know how much time they are spending online.

Employers of Gen Z are also impacted by how Gen Z communicates and their attitudes toward a topic. When comparing the generation with other generations, Gen Z has different attitudes and techniques towards career aspirations (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2020). They are more inclined to use social media in every aspect of life, including work. This can, in return, impact the companies and employers themselves. Unlike other generations that may not adapt to social media in their careers, Gen Z is impacted by social media.

Gen Z users on social media are mentally impacted by the messages portrayed online through a marketing viewpoint. A study conducted on undergraduate college students through Qualtrics found that social media can negatively impact Gen Z (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020). Using social media can cause consumers to feel internal pressure, create moral distractions, and create consumer misbehavior within the marketplace (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020). Internal pressure, moral distraction, and consumer misbehavior can be negatively impacted if consumers feel pressured to purchase a product.

The outbreak of COVID-19, an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, started on December 21, 2019. The outbreak created a shift in the use of social media and the mental impacts of Gen Z (Gao, 2020). A study performed in Wuhan, China, where the virus originated, measured social media's impact on users during COVID-19 (Gao, 2020). An online questionnaire was sent out to citizens older than 18 years that specifically studied the effects of social media during COVID-19. Almost 8,000 participants were included in this study, with a univariate analysis finding of social media exposure being higher in women than men and more increased in younger ages than elders (Gao, 2020).

The messages portrayed online brought about a change due to the way messages are perceived and communicated on social media. The study performed in Wuhan, China analyzed

participants' mental health, COVID-19, and the misinformation about COVID-19 spread on social media. Studies confirmed that because of the misinformation spread about COVID-19 on social media, there was an increase in fear, worry, nervousness, and anxiety (Gao, 2020). Social media users are impacted and influenced by social media, specifically with messages shared about COVID-19 and the false and factual information shared on the platforms. Mental health services increased and were openly provided to Chinese citizens to combat the higher rates of social media exposure during COVID-19. The results from the study found that the more social media exposure, the higher participants' anxiety, and depression levels were. Given a significant, unexpected event, the information spread on social media can harm users mentally

Spiritual Impacts on Well-Being

The messages portrayed on Instagram, whether positive or negative, are impacting Gen Z spiritually. Social media can be seen as a tool to further education on spirituality. Users can learn more about God and further their relationships spiritually through using non-traditional methods of learning. Instagram can also negatively impact Gen Z spiritually if too much time is spent online, inhibiting one's relationship with God.

A study was conducted on youth ministry to understand the spiritual maturity of Gen Z (Bergler, 2020, as cited in Martinson, 2010). Evidence suggests that social media can impact the values of Gen Z, causing the generation to hold individualistic values on emerging topics (Bergler, 2020). Social media can influence Gen Z and their Christian walk altogether.

Viewing Instagram through a positive lens allows one to see benefits from educating users on God and ultimately influencing their relationship with God in a positive light. This impacts the instilled values of Gen Z, and in this case, it would be positive. "Concerning how to teach spirituality, many scientists, researchers, and teachers believe that spirituality can improve

through new teaching methods, one of the newest of which is using social media” (Hasanshahi & Mazaheri, 2016, para. 10). The new teaching method, social media, can have a positive association between social media and spirituality, as social media platforms are more contemporary and a less traditional method of learning.

Given that Gen Z users are known as digital natives, social media is the most accessible form of communication, creating a platform for spiritual education. “Education through social media enables the learners to access educational content in an online environment from anywhere and anytime they tend to” (Hasanshahi & Mazaheri, 2016, para. 18). This impacts the study of Instagram because it can be easily accessed from anywhere and used to educate oneself on Christ. Education on spirituality significantly impacts users’ overall spiritual being and makes a difference (Hasanshahi & Mazaheri, 2016).

While social media can provide a positive outlook on Gen Z and spirituality, there remains a low number of Gen Z actively pursuing a spiritual relationship. There are fewer Christians who are active in their faith that makeup Gen Z. “Most people of Generation Z still believe in the existence of God (78%). However, less than half attend weekly religious services of any kind (41%), and only 8% would cite a religious leader as a role model” (White, 2017, p. 49). Even though Gen Z claims to believe that God exists, fewer pursue a relationship spiritually.

White (2017) brings in the argument that this lack of actively pursuing Christian faith results from over-consumption of media from having access to technology and media from a young age (p. 52). There is an excessive amount of messages that Gen Z views on social media that are negatively impacting their spiritual well-being due to the over-consumption of media.

Social media utilized by Gen Z attributes to the spiritual formation of the user. A study conducted by Sam Ninan (2021) measured the impact of social media on spiritual formation

among Gen Z freshman college students. Results found that social media has altered Gen Z and their spiritual formation, such as reading the Bible, quiet time, and prayer in a way that invalidates these acts. The article presents the argument that social media takes away time from Gen Z directly speaking with one another, creating difficulty for spiritual formation within a community of believers (Ninan, 2021). The argument involves social media and Gen Z's spiritual maturity, stating that excessive amounts of time on social media negatively impact Gen Z and their perception.

The section below provides insight into the methodology of conducting current research with social media and whether messages being communicated via social media platforms have a perceived positive or negative impact on Gen Z's emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Question

Were the messages communicated on Instagram, perceived by Gen Z audience to have a positive or negative impact on their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being?

Using the above question, a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research took place to analyze the current situation with numerical and non-numerical data to show the impact social media messages had on Gen Z. This study provided further insight into theoretical applications and descriptive statistics to summarize the sample of data from the survey participants adequately. A theoretical integration of media ecology theory, media dependency theory, and cultivation theory was used as a foundation for the study.

The mixed-method study was applied to give an in-depth analysis into how Gen Z is impacted emotionally, mentally, and spiritually through the various messages portrayed on Instagram and whether there was a positive or negative impact. Within the mixed-method study, research was conducted through surveys and written explanations from the participants. The overall results from the surveys provided adequate insight into messages that Gen Z perceived on Instagram.

Step 1: Deciding to Study Instagram

The topic was first formulated due to a personal interest in social media and its impact on Gen Z and how they perceive the messages. Upon researching the best social media platforms, the study narrowed down to Instagram, being that it is currently one of the most popular platforms used by Gen Z. Once was topic was formed, the research question followed.

The process for the study began following the research question. Journal articles on studies previously done on social media and Gen Z were collected to form the literature review.

The three theoretical integrations were implemented to provide a foundation for the study. Upon reviewing previous studies, a survey was determined to be the best research method for the study. Once the research method was chosen, the specific study for this research was formed, including certain criteria about the participants and what questions would be included in the survey.

Step 2: IRB Approval on Survey

The complete survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before the survey was released to participants. Privacy and transparency are essential and were maintained and understood in this specific study that dealt with human lives. This research ensured the participants understood what the study was being used for and how it might affect them. Participants were assured their privacy rights were protected and thoroughly discussed beforehand, along with the potential of any emotional harm. Participants have the right to truth, privacy, not to be injured, and what is agreed to (Velasquez, 2015). Before participating, the participants filled out a consent form that stated the qualifications, purpose of the study, specifications of the survey, benefits, risks, data collections, withdrawal information, privacy rights, and contact information. No known bias was present throughout the study. The participants answered truthfully, and the answers given were carefully analyzed.

Step 3: Selection of Participants

Criteria used to select participants was on a volunteer basis in which participants interested in completing the surveys completed one pre-screening quiz before the survey. The pre-screening quiz was linked through a QR code shown on a flyer displayed in classes at a prominent evangelical Christian university. The same flyer was also posted to multiple accounts on Facebook and Instagram, including personal accounts and university-related accounts. The

pre-screening survey was advertised one week before the official study started Monday–Sunday at midnight.

Step 4: Pre-Screening Survey

The pre-screening survey was conducted through Google Forms (Appendix B). The participants who volunteered completed five screening questions about themselves and any information related to the study. Once participants completed the self-screening survey, the qualifying participant who completed the pre-screening survey anytime from Monday–Sunday was placed into a secure Google Sheet document with their email.

Participants' email addresses were input into Microsoft Automate, which sent out two automated emails twice a day, one at 8:00 a.m. and another at 8:00 p.m., serving as a reminder to complete the survey that day. Within the emails was a link to the Qualtrics survey, described below.

Step 5: Survey

The primary survey that measured the impact of Instagram on Gen Z was created through Qualtrics (Appendix A). Participants who volunteered answered the questions to the best of their ability, giving honest answers related to their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and how Instagram affected them. A random group of participants who currently utilize Instagram completed the survey via Qualtrics for five days, Monday-Friday. Other participants who currently employed Instagram completed the survey via Qualtrics for four days or less, from Monday–Friday of the same week.

During the study, participants were asked to complete 16 questions overall. One question included the consent form at the beginning, and the following 15 included questions were regarding the study. Participants that completed the survey were asked six closed-ended

questions, including multiple-choice questions, yes or no questions, and three Likert scale questions. The Likert scale questions were two-fold: The first part of the three questions provided a Likert scale containing choices as follows: “Very Good,” “Somewhat Good,” “Somewhat Bad,” and “Very Bad.” The Likert scale was included in questions about their emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. The other part of the three questions asked an open-ended “Why?” to gauge a personal response of Instagram’s positive or negative impact on the participants. Participants were also asked if a significant event had occurred that day to record any information that might skew participants’ results.

Step 6: Coding Categories

The responses recorded from the survey were then placed into categories and analyzed according to the questions. The categories were coded based on the three areas of study, the Likert scale questions, and the “Why” responses. The three areas of study were emotional, mental, and spiritual. These categories were divided up into three sections. Those three categories contained the four Likert scale responses (“Very Good,” “Somewhat Good,” “Somewhat Bad,” and “Very Bad”) and were divided up into sections in order of popularity. The “Why” responses were grouped into categories within each of the four sections based on their Likert answer response. The formed categories were strictly based on the responses given for the individual Likert scale answer provided, and this was done for each category of emotional, mental, and spiritual responses. The survey answers were then determined, with conclusions drawn based on the overall study results.

Approach

The purpose of this study was to gain further insight into Gen Z and how they perceive messages communicated through Instagram, specifically how Instagram impacted their perceived

emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and whether it was positive or negative. This study was conducted to gain further knowledge within the field of communication by studying Instagram's impacts on the generation.

Surveys were used to determine the outcome of the study itself. Within the study related to social media usage, the surveys were structured with pre-determined questions. The rationale for this approach is that the questions for each participant are structured the same and fairly, resulting in accurate answers and results. The open-ended questions allowed the individual participants to discuss their answers briefly or in detail as needed. The time completion for the survey was estimated to take about three-five minutes to complete.

Instruments used in this study included a personal device to complete the survey via Google Forms and Qualtrics for participants. To record responses for participants, the instrumentation needed included a computer or a mobile device. To receive the highest level of effectiveness for the instrument, each survey participant had to have a device to communicate through along with an internet connection.

The data collected through the survey questions from participants will remain confidential, protecting the individual's privacy, unless otherwise stated. The study's independent variable will be the analysis performed, and the dependent variable will be the outcome of the survey conducted.

In the next step, survey results are analyzed and discussed with the intent of answering the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Gen Z participants who were 18–24 years old were asked to complete a set of surveys over five days voluntarily, Monday–Friday, how each day specifically impacted them overall, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. There were a total of 164 survey responses recorded with 146 qualifying participants over the five days. The total results are shown in the tables below based on specific questions. There were 46 participants that completed the surveys over five days (Monday–Friday). A total of 11 questions, containing five open-ended questions, not including four sub-questions and the consent question (Appendix A).

To answer the research question “Were the messages communicated on Instagram, perceived by Gen Z audience to have a positive or negative impact on their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being?” the results were compiled. The participants that completed the survey consecutively for five days were combined with participants that completed the survey for four days or less for overall results.

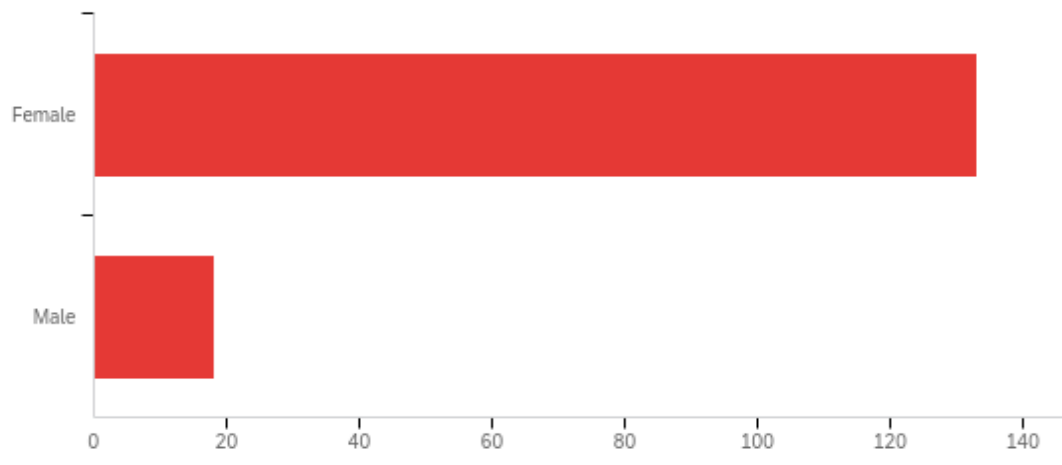
Question Results

Q1: Consent Form

The first question asked of participants was their consent (Appendix B), where they read through all terms and conditions before taking the survey. Participants either chose yes (100%) or no (0%). If participants did not agree to the study, they were immediately opted out of the survey, and the form would submit.

Table 1

Q2: Please provide your gender.



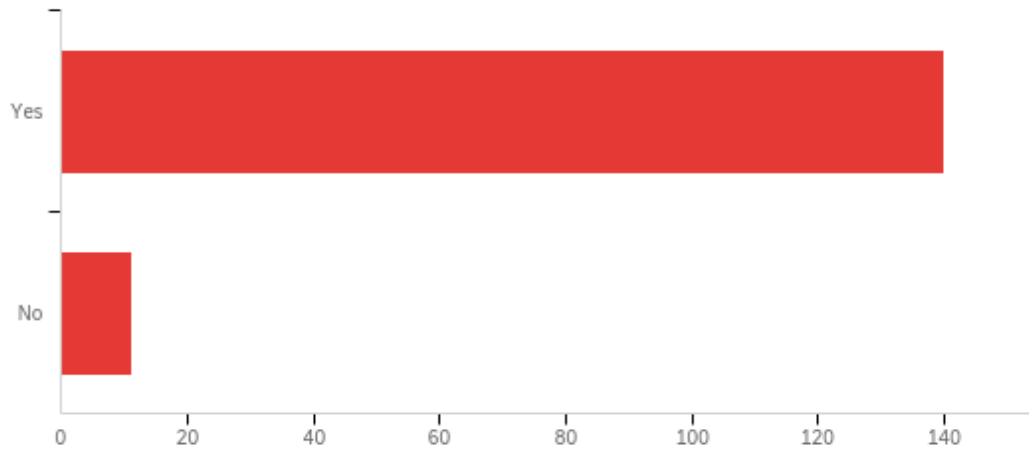
Out of the 151 total survey responses, the majority of participants that took the survey were female (88%), and the remainder of the participants were male (12%).

Q3: Please provide your email.

All participants provided their emails.

Table 2

Q4: I have used Instagram today.

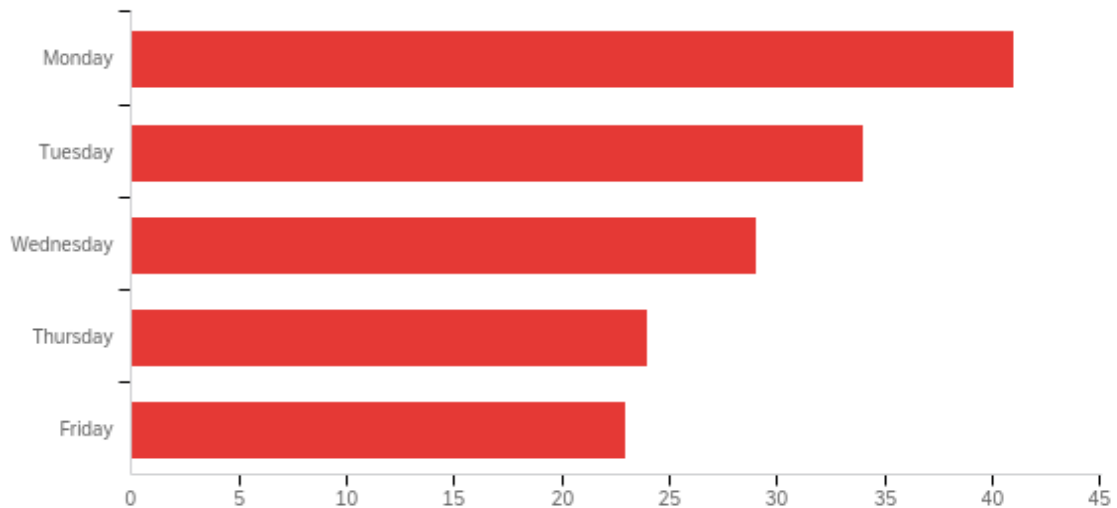


Out of 151 total survey responses for participants using Instagram for that specific day, 93% of participants overall used Instagram on the day and time the survey was completed leaving 7% who did not use Instagram. Survey instructions were detailed to include that

participants should use the social media platform on that specific day prior to completing the survey.

Table 3

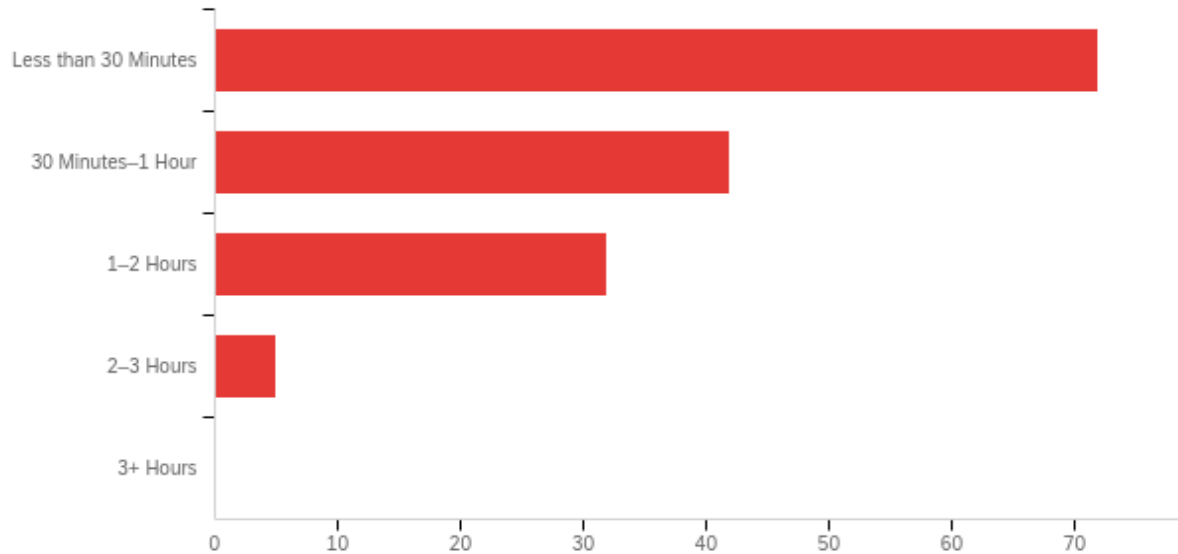
Q5: Please provide the day.



Monday received the highest number of survey responses (27%), followed by Tuesday, which received the second-highest number of survey responses (23%). Wednesday received the third-highest number of survey responses (19%), followed by Thursday, which received the fourth-highest number of survey responses (16%), then Friday, which received the least number of survey responses (15%).

Table 4

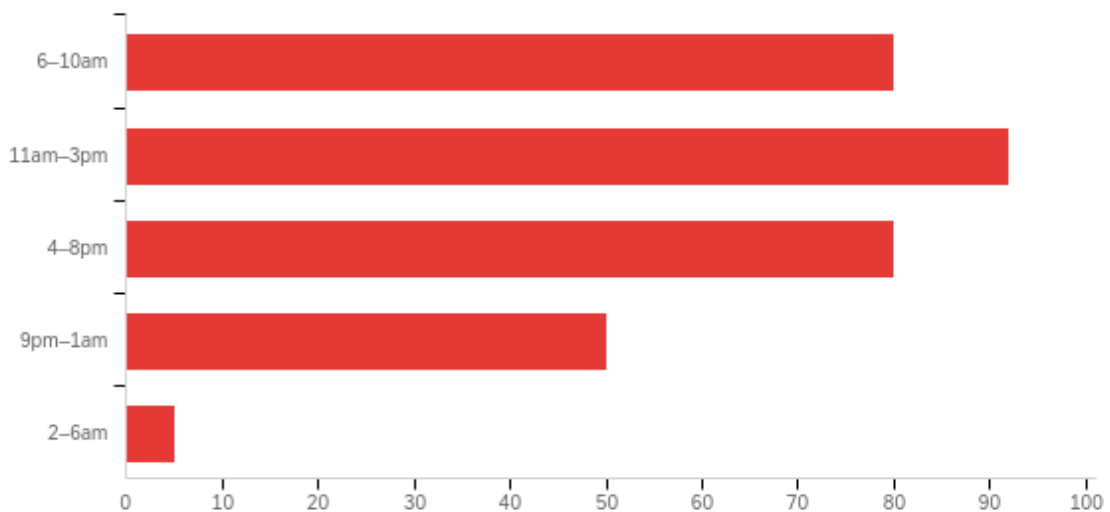
Q6: Using your device to find your screen time activity, about how many hours have you spent on Instagram today?



Overall, the most chosen time frame spent on Instagram for participants was less than 30 minutes (48%), followed by 30 minutes–1 hour (28%), then 1–2 hours (21%), and 2–3 hours (3%). There were no participants that used Instagram for 3+ hours (0%). The choice with the lowest time usage was chosen the most consistently for daily Instagram usage.

Table 5

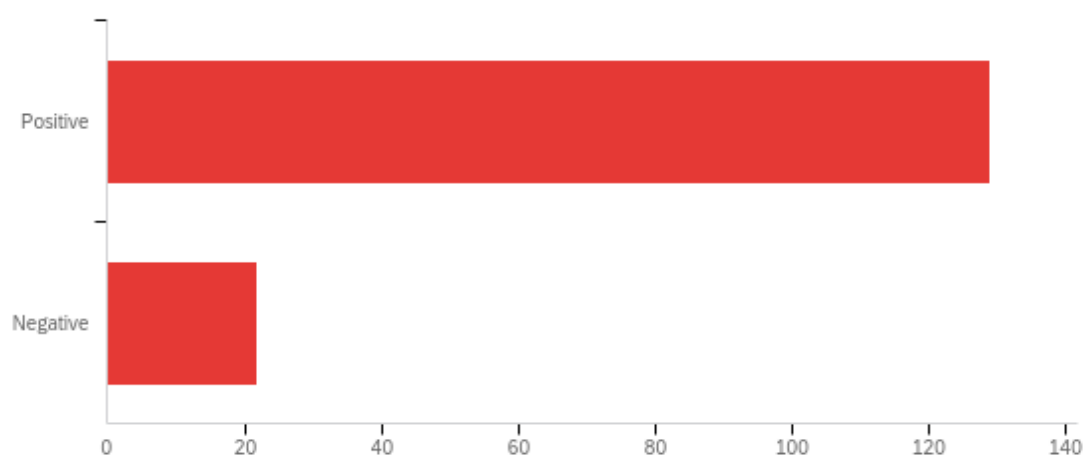
Q7: Please provide the time of day you have used Instagram. Check all that apply:



For Instagram usage, most participants (30%) chose that the time of day they used Instagram was from 11 a.m.–3 p.m. The second highest time of day that participants (26%) used Instagram was from 6–10 a.m. This tied with participants (26%) who used Instagram from 4–8 p.m. Other participants (16%) used Instagram from 9 p.m.–1 a.m. The lowest time participants (2%) used Instagram was from 2–6 a.m. The most time that Gen Z used Instagram throughout the day was from 11 a.m.–3 p.m.

Table 6

Q8: Overall, were the messages viewed on Instagram perceived to be positive or negative and why?



Overall, most participants (85%) answered that the messages viewed on Instagram were perceived to be positive. The other participants (15%) answered that the messages viewed on Instagram were perceived to be negative.

Q9: Why?

Participants chose either “Positive” or “Negative” open-ended responses. The open-ended question asking “why?” received various responses. For participants that perceived Instagram to have an overall negative impact, responses included seven categorical indications with one

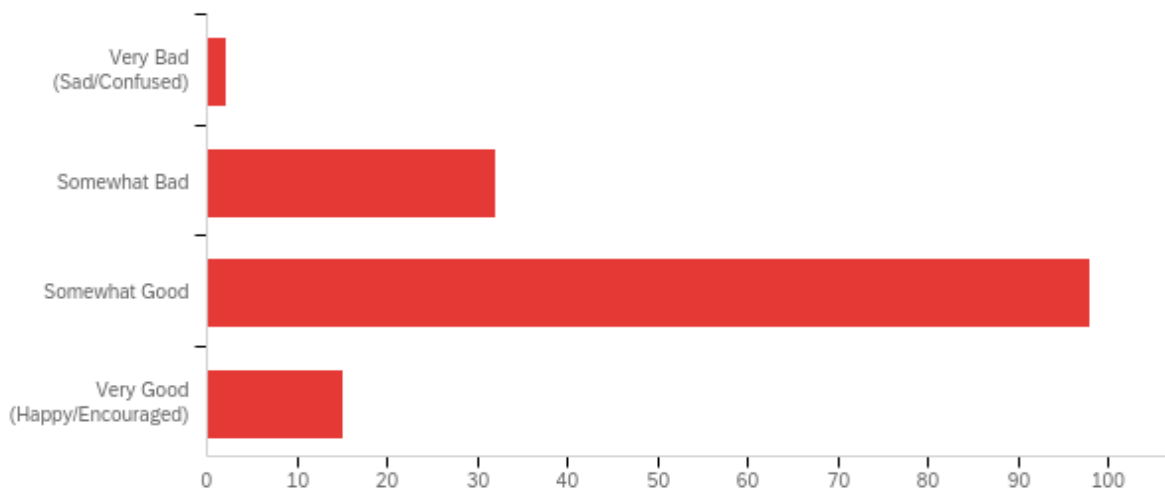
response related to family and friends, one response related to anxiety, two participants that were not entertained or unencouraged, three participants who felt neutral, one response which was unable to be interpreted, 13 participants that listed personal issues which resulted in a negative impact, and one for spiritual reasons. Personal issues such as body confidence and conflict with others were the most given response for a perceived negative overall experience on Instagram. One participant in this category said, “The messages were negative because I felt envious toward other people’s lives” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). Other responses within this category included political answers and negative posts in general.

Participants perceived Instagram to have an overall positive impact on them. The responses included categorical reasons with 51 related to family and friends, 39 that felt entertained and encouraged, 21 that felt neutral, eight that were unable to interpret, and three for spiritual reasons. Responses related to content that included family and friends were the most given response for why participants perceived positive overall Instagram experience. One participant in this category said, “The messages on Instagram were positive because people were showing love towards their family and their friends” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). This category also included responses about family, friends, influencers, and people they follow in general posting uplifting and positive content.

Given the information above, Monday was the highest day of respondents, less than 30 minutes was the most time spent on Instagram daily, 11 a.m.–3 p.m. was the most popular time of day while using Instagram, and 85% had an overall positive perception of Instagram. Fifty-one of the respondent surveys had an overall perceived positive experience on Instagram due to family and friends.

Table 7

Q10: How has Instagram affected you emotionally? (ex: sad, happy, confused, encouraged, etc.)



This question was a Likert scale that contained four choices being “Very Good (Happy/Encouraged).” “Somewhat Good,” “Somewhat Bad,” and “Very Bad (Sad/Confused).” The majority of participants (67%) chose “Somewhat Good.” The second highest answer from participants (22%) was “Somewhat Bad.” The other participants (10%) chose “Very Good (Happy/Encouraged).” The lowest number of participants (1%) answered: “Very Bad (Sad/Confused).”

Q11: Why?

According to the perception of Gen Z participants, Instagram did not have a negative impact on their overall emotional life, but a positive impact. When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z emotionally, 67% of participants, the most chosen answer, said “Somewhat Good.” When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included 27 of those related to content that included family and friends, five related to having no anxiety, 32 who felt entertained or encouraged, 24 that were neutral, seven which were not able to interpret, two participants that listed no personal issues, and one related to spiritual reasons.

When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z emotionally, 22% said “Somewhat Bad.” When asked, “Why,” the categorical reasonings included one participant that included family and friends, eight of those related to having anxiety, four who felt neutral, two which were unable to interpret, and one participant that that was categorized as miscellaneous stated, “Misleading Info with zero science” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). There were 16 participants that described reasons related to personal issues. One of the participants, in particular, that was perceived to have a “Somewhat Bad” emotional experience on Instagram related to personal issues stated:

I would honestly say it has been good and bad. I have been able to connect with new people and start a side hustle on there as well. But it also takes a toll on my mental health. Wasting hours of a day on Instagram to constantly seeing the highlights of people’s lives and even wanting to compare my body to someone else’s on there. It’s like I struggle at school with these things only to struggle with them on social media too. (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

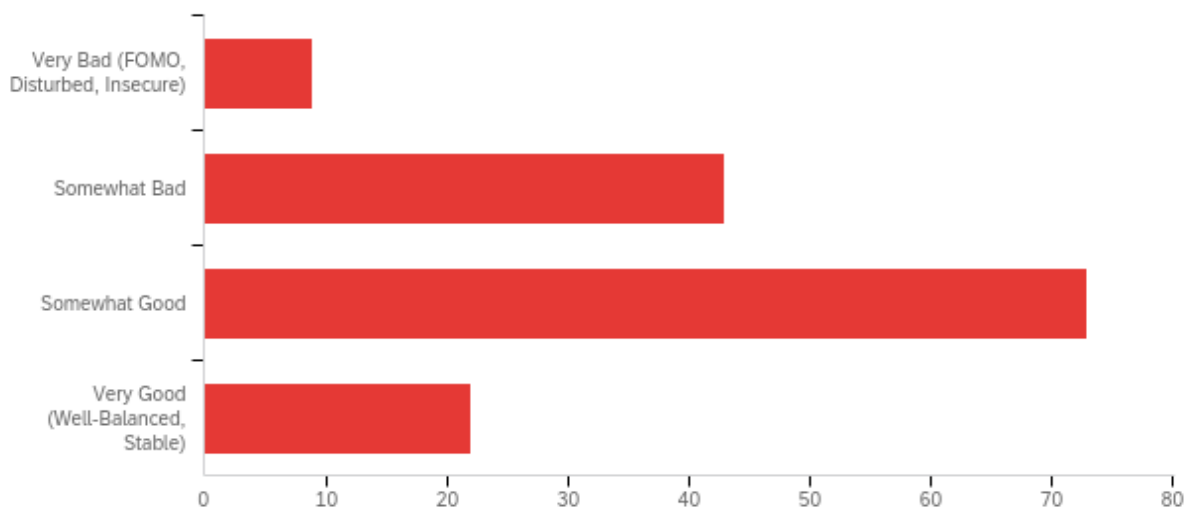
When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z emotionally, 10% said, “Very Good (Happy/Encouraged).” When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included one participant that included family and friends, two unable to interpret, two that gave spiritual reasonings, and 10 of those that felt entertained and encouraged. One participant that felt entertained and encouraged said, “I feel like most of the people I decide to follow are encouraging. I do not follow people that post discouraging and mean things” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z emotionally, 1% said, “Very Bad (Sad/Confused).” When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included two participants

having anxiety. One of the participants said, “I felt sad because I was missing out on social events,” and the other participant said, “My communication on Instagram has not encouraged me” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). Both participants perceived Instagram to have a “Very Bad” impact on their emotional well-being.

Table 8

Q12: How has Instagram affected you mentally? (ex: FOMO, well-balanced, disturbed, stable, insecure, etc)



This question was a Likert scale that contained four choices being “Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable).” “Somewhat Good,” “Somewhat Bad,” and “Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure).” The majority of participants (50%) chose “Somewhat Good.” The second highest answer from participants (29%) was “Somewhat Bad.” The other participants (15%) chose “Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable).” The lowest number of participants (6%) answered: “Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure).”

Q13: Why?

According to the perception of Gen Z participants, Instagram did not have a negative impact on their overall mental life, but a positive impact. When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z mentally, 50% of participants, the most chosen answer, said “Somewhat Good.” When asked, “Why,” the categorical reasonings included one participant related to family and friends that stated, “It has to help me keep in stable communication with friends” (See Appendix C). Six participants had a relatively good impact that related to having no anxiety. Participants answered that they did not experience FOMO for that day. There were 30 participants who answered that they felt entertained or encouraged. One participant in this category said, “The accounts I follow I choose very intentionally, and I try to only follow positive, uplifting accounts to positively impact me” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). There were 29 participants that answered they felt neutral or were not mentally impacted by anything in particular on Instagram. There were six participants not able to interpret. One participant stated a spiritual reason by saying, “I watched short sermons on it” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z mentally, 29% said “Somewhat Bad.” When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included four related to family and friends. One participant in this category stated, “Sometimes it’s hard to be grateful when people post with friends all the time” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). There were 23 participants that felt they were mentally impacted “Somewhat Bad” by experiencing anxiety. One participant that experienced this category said:

This is very shallow of me but I wonder why I get less likes on certain posts and I wonder what I could do to change that. I used to get a certain amount of likes and now I am getting 100 less so that makes me insecure (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

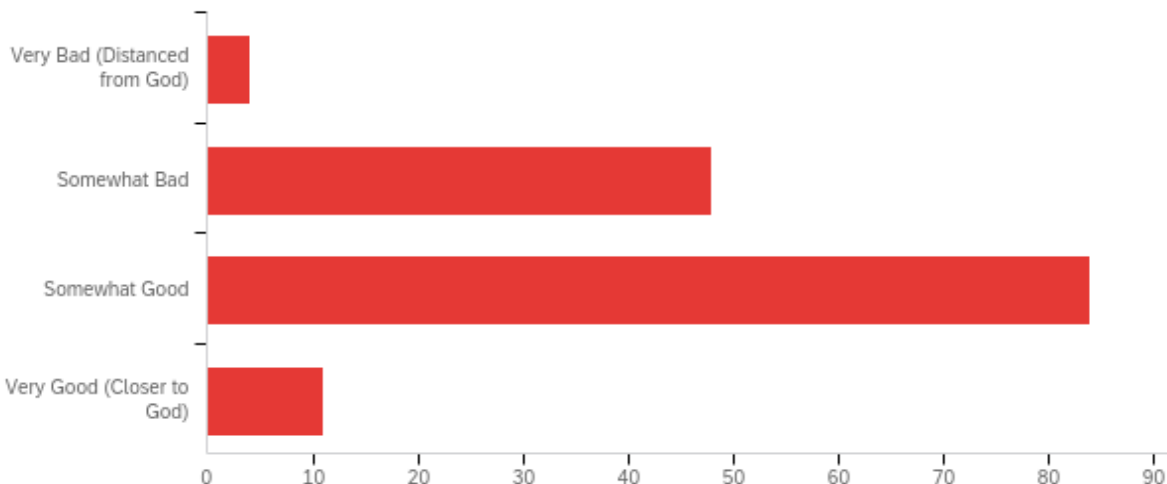
One participant could not interpret, and 15 participants listed personal issues, which resulted in a negative mental impact. Most participants provided reasoning that dealt with body confidence, like one participant who said, “I spend way too much time on it so that is a problem. I always see the models with the perfect faces and bodies, so that makes me self conscious about myself” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z mentally, 15% said, “Very Good (Happy/Encouraged).” When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included two participants related to family and friends, three that experienced no anxiety, seven that felt entertained and encouraged, six who felt neutral, three responses that were unable to interpret, and one for spiritual reasons.

When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z mentally, 6% said “Very Bad (Sad/Confused)” (Table 11). When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included one related to family and friends resulting in a negative mental impact, six participants experienced anxieties such as insecurities and FOMO. One participant in this category said, “Recently I’ve had a bit of FOMO because it seems like the world is opening up a lot” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). Two responses were unable able to interpret.

Table 9

Q14: How has Instagram affected you spiritually? (ex: Closer to God, distanced from God, etc.)



This question was a Likert scale that contained four choices being “Very Good (Closer to God),” “Somewhat Good,” “Somewhat Bad,” and “Very Bad (Distanced from God.” The majority of participants (57%) chose “Somewhat Good.” The second highest answer from participants (33%) chose “Somewhat Bad.” The other participants (7%) chose “Very Good (Closer to God).” The lowest number of participants (3%) answered: “Very Bad (Distanced from God).”

Q15: Why?

According to the perception of Gen Z participants, Instagram did not have a negative impact on their overall spiritual life, but a positive impact. When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z spiritually, 57% of participants, the most chosen answer, said “Somewhat Good.” When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included one participant that experienced no anxiety related to comparing themselves with others and one participant that had fewer distractions from God and quiet time due to not utilizing Instagram for an extended time. There were 52 of those that felt entertained and encouraged with one participant that stated:

I would not say that using the app brings me closer to God in comparison to reading my bible/quiet time. However, I do follow a lot of Christian people and they constantly post

scripture and sermons and reminders to live for Jesus so that helps me stay surrounded in the Lord a lot (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

Five participants provided spiritual reasons such as “Not focusing on the world helps me focus on God” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). There were 17 participants who felt neutral with Instagram neither helping nor hurting their spirituality, and eight of those unable to interpret.

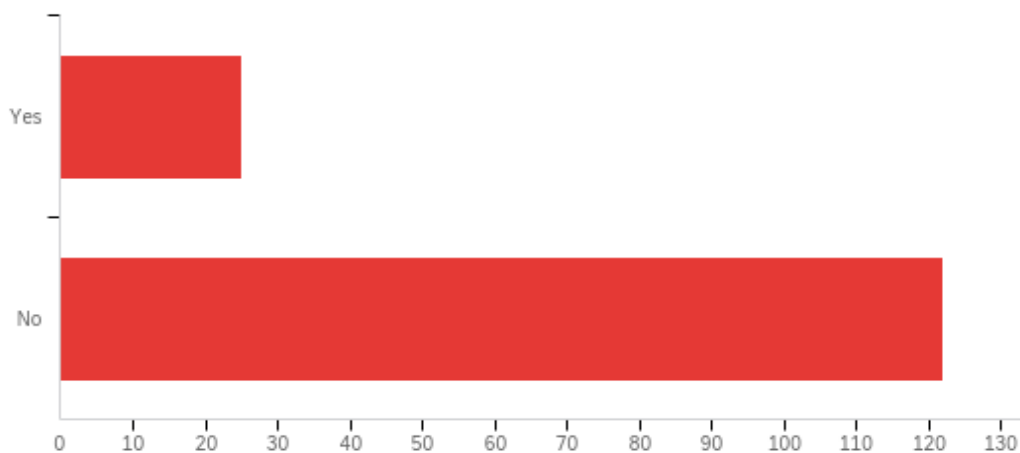
When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z spiritually, 33% said “Somewhat Bad.” When asked “Why,” the categorical reasonings included two answers related to family and friends. There was one participant in this category who stated, “I feel a little jealous of my friends, which is not pleasing to God, and I know I spent time on Instagram when I could have been doing my morning quiet time” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). There were two that experienced anxiety related to what other people are doing and negative situations happening. There were 20 participants who provided reasonings such as distraction from God/quiet time. One participant, in particular, said, “Any amount of time I spend on my phone or Instagram is really a waste of time and cuts into the time I could be praying or reading my Bible” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). There were four not entertained or encouraged due to no positive impact and a misplace of time management. There were five participants for neutral reasoning, with one stating, “It hasn’t specifically brought me closer to the Lord, so that’s why I would say bad. I have felt closer to the Lord today, but it wasn’t because of social media” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). There was one not able to interpret, four with personal issues, and ten participants that spiritual impacted in a “Somewhat Bad” way. One participant in this category said, “I was escaping from reality by using it and I don’t think that’s God honoring” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z spiritually, 7% said, “Very Good (Happy/Encouraged).” When asked, “Why,” the categorical reasonings included one having less distraction from God and quiet time, seven that felt were entertained and encouraged with one participant that said, “One of the influencers I follow has been sharing some great encouragement this week and her post today really made me stop and think about it” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C). One was not able to interpret, and two participants provided spiritual reasons.

When asked how Instagram affected Gen Z spiritually, 3% said, “Very Bad (Sad/Confused).” When asked, “Why,” the categorical reasonings included one having a distraction from God and quiet time, and three neutral where two participants felt that Instagram had not brought them closer to God, and the other participant that stated, “Instagram does not encourage my relationship with God” (personal communication, 2021) (See Appendix C).

Table 10

Q16: Has there been a significant event that happened in your life today that affected the way you scored the above questions?



The dichotomous question provided participants with a “Yes” or “No” option. Out of 151 participants, the majority of participants (83%) answered “No,” and the other participants (17%) answered “Yes.”

All the results from the study lead to conclusions about Instagram and Gen Z’s perceived mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being in the discussion below.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Research Question

Were the messages communicated on Instagram, perceived by Gen Z audience to have a positive or negative impact on their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being?

Overall Impacts on Well-Being

The results indicate that Instagram impacts Gen Z's overall emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. According to their perception, out of the 146 survey responses, Instagram impacts Gen Z's emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

A conclusion can be drawn that the time spent on Instagram during midday from 11 a.m.–3 p.m. (Table 5) will most likely have more of a positive perception (Table 6) if used in 30 minutes or less (Table 4). Another overall conclusion can be drawn about Gen Z and their perception. The amount Gen Z spends on Instagram in short periods will be perceived as positive due to the messages being communicated on the platform, mainly about family and friends.

Emotional Impacts on Well-Being

The results of the participant to reactions suggest that (Table 7) there is a positive emotional perception of Instagram being “Somewhat Good.” A few examples of participants experiencing positive emotions are happiness and encouragement. The most prominent reason Gen Z perceives Instagram to positively affect their emotional well-being is being entertained and encouraged. Even though this study found that the majority of Gen Z Instagram users had a positive emotional perception of their well-being, there were still 23% (Table 7) of users that answered “Somewhat Bad” and “Very Bad.” It is relevant to note that the majority of the users that were emotionally impacted negatively experienced feelings such as feeling left out and feeling discouraged.

Mental Impacts on Well-Being

The results of the participant to reactions suggest that (Table 7) there is a positive mental perception of Instagram being “Somewhat Good.” A few examples of participants experiencing a positive mental perception on Instagram includes not having a fear of missing out and not experiencing negativity. The most prominent reason Gen Z perceives Instagram to impact their emotional well-being positively is being entertained and encouraged. Even though this study found that the majority of Gen Z Instagram users had a positive emotional perception of their well-being, there were still 23% (Table 7) of users that answered “Somewhat Bad” and “Very Bad.” It is relevant to note that the majority of the users that were emotionally impacted negatively experienced feelings such as feeling left out and feeling discouraged.

Spiritual Impacts on Well-Being

The results of the participant to reactions suggest that (Table 9) there is a positive spiritual perception of Instagram being “Somewhat Good.” A few examples of participants experiencing a positive spiritual perception on Instagram includes not experiencing a distraction from God and being encouraged while using the application. The most prominent reason Gen Z perceives Instagram to impact their spiritual well-being positively is being entertained and encouraged. Even though this study found that the majority of Gen Z Instagram users had a positive spiritual impact on their well-being, there were still 33% (Table 9) of users that answered “Somewhat Bad” and “Very Bad.” It is relevant to note that the majority of users that were spiritually impacted negatively experienced a distraction from God and their quiet time or felt that Instagram did not further their spirituality at all.

Conclusion

An overall positive impact on Instagram is perceived by a Gen Z audience and emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. By using a mixed-method of study of both numerical and non-numerical data, the messages communicated on Instagram, perceived by a Gen Z audience, positively impact their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being through encouragement and entertainment. Through this study, it can be concluded that Gen Z can best be reached on Instagram through encouraging and entertaining content that positively impacts their perception. It can be suggested that when Gen Z uses Instagram, that is not an extended period, but anywhere from one hour or less, there likely will not be any negative impacts overall, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. Gen Z users can be made aware that spending large amounts of time on Instagram could negatively impact overall, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

The results from this study can be used specifically for marketers or advertisers to have a better understanding of how to reach Gen Z. According to Gen Z's perception, marketers and advertisers should provide content on Instagram that is directly related to Gen Z about entertainment and encouragement.

Limitations

Both positive and negative impacts of Gen Z on Instagram were included in the research. For the current research, any other generation was outside of study interests, and any other social media platform aside from Instagram was outside of study interests.

A limitation to the study is gender in that there were significantly more female participants. A study that is equally split or focuses on one gender can potentially change the study.

Another limitation is Gen Z's personal perception of Instagram and the message portrayed positively or negatively. It is only known what they are currently perceiving Instagram to be emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. By studying outside of their personal perception of Instagram, these results have the potential to change the study.

Although this study used terminology related to spirituality, aside from examples provided in question 14 (Table 9), the majority of respondents seemed to associate this with religion. Future studies should attempt to include a more diverse representation of spirituality. It is recognized that participants related this study to God but was not intentional and was voluntary on the part of the participants.

Further Studies

More research could be done to gather in-depth results. For future studies, an advanced study would include conducting a comparative analysis of participants who completed the survey one time and participants who completed the survey over a more extended period to see any differences. This would allow the research to determine if having participants complete the survey consecutively for a more extended period would change any results. Further studies could separate the three emotional, mental, and spiritual categories and ask more profound questions about each. These categories could each be separate studies where only one is focused on at a time, and this would allow for a deeper study along with results and insight into each particular category. The studies could then be compared with each category to determine if there is a consistent positive or negative impact or not. There could be a further study on the statistical difference between the mental, emotional, and spiritual categories. This would determine if the relationship between the three variables is caused by something else and whether that value is high or low.

Further studies could also include comparing various media forms to see the differences and whether one social media platform is perceived as negative and another as positive. This would provide deeper insight into the media platforms themselves and how they are impacting users. Further studies include comparing generations to see any perceived differences within the age groups that utilize social media platforms. This would provide in-depth results that focus on comparing the different generations. Further studies could include more specific questions within the survey related to buyer habits and advertising on social media platforms. Results could look at the messaging on the media platform and how it results in a purchase. This would provide specific research on consumer buying habits which would be helpful for future marketing and advertising. Another further study could focus solely on news content and how it is portrayed through social media platforms. Research would only focus on news content and precisely how it impacts an age group and whether it be positive or negative. Another future study could include a statistical analysis of results that could be run to determine quantitative results. Items within the instrument to survey participants should also determine the number of times a specific IP address completed the survey.

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Appendix A

Pre-Screening Survey Questions

Section 1

- Email
 - Open-Ended Answer
- Are you between the ages of 18-24?
 - Yes
 - No (Form will be submitted)
- Are you an active user on Instagram? (Active User: Participant utilizes Instagram at least once a week)
 - Yes
 - No (Form will be submitted)
- Are you willing to complete the survey every night from Monday–Friday?
 - Yes
 - No (Form will be submitted)

Section 2

By filling out the information below, you are agreeing to take this survey at the end of day from October 25–29, and allowing me to email a reminder to you for each of the 5 days.

- Name
 - Open-Ended Answer
- Date
 - Open-Ended Answer

Appendix B

Qualtrics Survey Questions

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be between the ages of 18-24. You must also actively be using Instagram. Actively using Instagram means that you are currently using Instagram at least once a week. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

The purpose of the study is for Masters research to find out if the content on Instagram has a good or bad effect on users 18-24. The study is being done to also learn more about how Instagram affects users emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete a study containing 11 questions about your experiences on Instagram, and demographic questions. There are five open-ended questions, and six multiple-choice questions that should take less than five minutes to complete.

One benefit of participating in this study is that you will take part in the process of collecting data in the field of communication. You will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with Instagram and how it may affect you. Benefits to society include contributing to research being conducted about Instagram.

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. It is possible you may be uncomfortable answering personal questions, such as those about your well-being and your experiences. You may choose not to participate in this research study.

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations.

After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

The researcher conducting this study is Abigail Hayes. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact her faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

By choosing “yes,” you are signing this document and are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records upon request. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

- Yes
- No (Form will be submitted)
- Please provide your gender.

- Female
 - Male
 - Other
 - (Open-ended)
- Please provide your email.
 - (Text Box)
- I have used Instagram today.
 - YES or NO (If no, they will be exempt from the survey)
- Please provide the day.
 - Monday
 - Tuesday
 - Wednesday
 - Thursday
 - Friday
- Using your device to find your screen time activity, about how much time have you spent on Instagram today?
 - <30 Minutes
 - 30 Minutes–1 Hour
 - 1–2 Hours
 - 2–3 Hours
 - 3+ Hours
- Provide the time of day you have used Instagram. Check all that apply:
 - 6–10am

- 11am–3pm
 - 4–8pm
 - 9pm–1am
 - 2–6am
- Overall, were the messages viewed on Instagram perceived to be positive or negative and why?
 - Positive
 - (Open-ended box)
 - Negative
 - (Open-ended box)
- Based on Instagram, answer the following:
 - How has Instagram affected you emotionally? (ex: sad, happy, confused, encouraged, etc.)
 - Very Good
 - Somewhat Good
 - Neither Good or Bad
 - Somewhat Bad
 - Very Bad
 - Why?
- Based on Instagram, answer the following:
 - How has Instagram affected you mentally? (ex: FOMO, well-balanced, disturbed, stable, insecure, etc.)
 - Very Good

- Somewhat Good
 - Neither Good or Bad
 - Somewhat Bad
 - Very Bad
- Why?
- Based on Instagram, answer the following:
 - How has Instagram affected you spiritually? (ex: Closer to God, distanced from God, etc.)
 - Very Good
 - Somewhat Good
 - Neither Good or Bad
 - Somewhat Bad
 - Very Bad
 - Why?
- Has there been a significant event that happened in your life today that affected the way you scored the above questions?
 - Yes
 - No

Thank you for your participation in today's survey.

Your response has been recorded.

Appendix C

Q9: Why?

| ANSWER | WHY | CODE |
|----------|--|----------------------------------|
| Negative | They were negative because a few of my friends posted about death in their family and being in the hospital with their newborn baby. | Family + Friends |
| Negative | I felt left out of social events. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Negative | A lot of clickbait and unencouraging messages | Not Entertained/ Unencouraged |
| Negative | It was mindless, uninteresting entertainment | No Entertained/ Unencouraged |
| Negative | Biased Information | Neutral |
| Negative | They did not add value to my day. | Neutral |
| Negative | Nothing specific but I couldn't remember any positive things off the top of my head or when I thought about it which means I did not see any relevant content to my own personal growth. | Neutral |
| Negative | . | Not able to interpret |

| | | |
|----------|--|--|
| Negative | So many innapropriate [sic] Halloween costumes | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | i tapped thru [sic] a lot of annoying stories | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | I compared myself to hours . | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | Saw some weird posts that were hateful | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | Because there was a lot of hate and arguing about politics | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | Mehhh just innapropriate [sic] halloween costumes | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | The messages were negative because I felt envious toward other people's lives. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |

| | | |
|----------|---|--|
| Negative | Negative due to Liberty trending on social media in a negative light | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | I scrolled through the explore page and found some rude, political things | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | Political statements | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | Lot's [sic] of random people in swimsuits & inappropriate memes :/ | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | There is a lot of negativity on insta [sic] in general with politics, body image, and general despair?? | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | It was also negative in a way because I want on to forget about some of my stressors. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Negative | Negative because they weren't uplifting | Spiritual |
| Positive | Mostly just friends' photos | Family + Friends |
| Positive | The messages on Instagram were positive because people were showing love towards their family and their friends | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------------|
| Positive | it was sports and friends related | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Most were positive because they were friends and influencers sharing fall activities again. Some posts about COVID were more prominent from political groups I follow. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Sweet life updates | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Many were posts of people in grades below me for spirit week. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | People having fun | Family + Friends |
| Positive | The messages i received today were positive in that it was mostly positive posts about the holidays or friends | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Most posts were positive messages from friends | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Art inspiration, happy friends, dog pictures | Family + Friends |
| Positive | They were similar messages as previous in the week of my friends sharing things they were doing for fun and influencers sharing some sponsored posts. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | It was a lot of catching up with his friends are doing! | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|----------|---|------------------|
| Positive | There were happy people posting happy things | Family + Friends |
| Positive | There were a lot of happy memories I saw today | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Saw friends | Family + Friends |
| Positive | People happy | Family + Friends |
| Positive | People were only posting their favorite summer pictures. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | People being nice | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Just posts from friends and about upcoming local events | Family + Friends |
| Positive | I saw a lot of posts from my school. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | People having fun | Family + Friends |
| Positive | They were mainly posts from friends I follow from friends I follow and | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Things posted by friends and activism against sexual assault | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Got to see some of my friends engagement pictures | Family + Friends |
| Positive | People were smiling | Family + Friends |
| Positive | I use IG for work and to keep up to date on my friends. And a friend got into a relationship today. :) so super positive! | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|----------|---|------------------|
| Positive | No negative posts on feed | Family + Friends |
| Positive | positive, there were a lot of activist accounts that I saw and today was the anniversary of three students' death at my high school so everyone was posting about them | Family + Friends |
| Positive | I saw just a few posts of my friends sharing happy life updates. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | The messages were positive because I saw lots of exciting life updates from people. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Just liking friends posts and stuff like that! | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Positive because I saw some Birthday posts and other positive posts. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Saw stories of friends and posts from friends/celebrities portraying positive things the way that social media usually does - you typically only see the best things that someone chooses to post | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Lots of nature and fall themes today. Pics of friends both local and back home that made me smile | Family + Friends |
| Positive | I like what family friends are up to and following wholesome Christian content | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------------|
| Positive | There's a lot of celebration that I'm seeing in other people's lives via Instagram right now | Family + Friends |
| Positive | All positive- lots of cute fall posts from Friends and applicable ads | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Today's [sic] posts included positive announcements from friends and influencers | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Birthday post and family pictures | Family + Friends |
| Positive | I wasn't on Instagram a ton but I saw people posting happy pictures with their friends or in support of friends. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | They were mostly posts from my friends/influencers I follow about what they did over the weekend for fun. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | My friends posted about their weekends and experiences [sic] | Family + Friends |
| Positive | The only posts I had were friends who had been going to concerts and doing other things that I wasn't jealous about. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Positive related to seeing friends photos | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Family pictures | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------------------|
| Positive | Mostly positive, the majority are just posts by my friends with other people or visiting places or funny memes | Family + Friends |
| Positive | There were pictures of my friends. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | mostly positive because I was just seeing my friends post about their weekends. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | positive because as I scrolled through, I saw my friends uplifting each other. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Most were positive because I mostly follow puppy videos and friends posts | Family + Friends |
| Positive | I had positive communication with friends and family. | Family + Friends |
| Positive | Played John Mark Comer IGTV videos while getting ready this morning! So good! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Fairly positive: News stories, informative about others [sic] lives | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Disney and LU | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Saw a lot of funny memes | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | The things I saw posted either included happy people or funny memes | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | I follow meme pages and funny accounts | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------------------|
| Positive | I saw a lot of fun Halloween graphics and costumes today. Creativity is almost always positive | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Overall positive. I used it mostly for IG DMs so good communication. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Disney and LU | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | I saw a lot of sports related post today and the comments were really funny | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Used to look up information | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Overall cute and fun | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Lots of fun memes | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | positive because I was generally planning things to post for my club account that I run | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Got a lot of good content today | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | They were helpful, distracting, and fun things I viewed on IG today. I'd consider it educational and entertaining. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Funny memes, posts from friends, educational posts related to my career | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Positive, I saw a lot of things that made me smile and brought joy | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Disney, LU, and writing tips | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|----------|---|------------------------|
| Positive | I mainly saw memes and pictures of dogs so it was a good day | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | I saw cute video of animals | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Since Instagram figures out an algorithm for each person, my feed has been overall positive. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Many of them were horse competition posts | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Disney and LU | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | I saw more happy posts today and I also saw some memes. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | i follow encouraging people | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | everyone seems to have encouraging words :) | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | The messages viewed were positive because I try to follow people that are encouraging in their captions and daily life. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | They were encouraging for the season of life I am in and what I was experiencing today! | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|----------|---|------------------------|
| Positive | They were positive. I try to follow people who will uplift and encourage me as I scroll! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | I saw mostly just memes that made me laugh, and Halloween stuff, which is kind of weird but Idk if that's considered negative besides general scary/spookiness of the holiday | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | They were all pictures of my friends or the sports teams I follow | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Positive because my feed is curated specifically to my interests. So I would say 9 of 10 things are art, friends, and hobbies | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Cute fall photos and tons of engagements! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | They were mostly funny memes or skits. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | My feed is still happy things | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Lots positive infographics today | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Affirmations | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | Disney info and LU memes | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Positive | I didn't have a lot of posts come up on my feed. | Neutral |
| Positive | Overall positive which was good | Neutral |

| | | |
|----------|--|---------|
| Positive | I didn't have a lot of posts come up on my feed. | Neutral |
| Positive | nothing damaged me | Neutral |
| Positive | No negative posts | Neutral |
| Positive | Neither | Neutral |
| Positive | positive | Neutral |
| Positive | It was neutral | Neutral |
| Positive | It was positive | Neutral |
| Positive | Positive, I saw nothing controversial or that I didn't agree with | Neutral |
| Positive | Neutral messages | Neutral |
| Positive | Everything I saw was pretty average so I can't it was negative or positive | Neutral |
| Positive | Nothing bad came up | Neutral |
| Positive | i didn't see any negative comments or videos | Neutral |
| Positive | Positive | Neutral |
| Positive | Positive | Neutral |
| Positive | It was positive I was only on there for a couple minutes | Neutral |
| Positive | Because I tend to mute those that are negative | Neutral |

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------------------|
| Positive | Positive so people can feel good about themselves. | Neutral |
| Positive | There wasn't anything bad that popped out | Neutral |
| Positive | I feel my instagram [sic] is positive. | Neutral |
| Positive | dwd | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | Did not use today | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | N/A | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | Haven't been on it today | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | I did not use Instagram today. | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | I haven't gotten on Instagram today. | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | Didn't use | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | f | Not able to interpret |
| Positive | It was positive, there were a lot of uplifting Christian messages that I saw! | Spiritual |
| Positive | lots of Bible verses, life updates, and good content | Spiritual |
| Positive | Today I saw more spiritual posts! | Spiritual |

Note. The tables above were categorized based on responses from a Likert scale where answers are grouped together based on categories.

Q11: Why?

| ANSWER | WHY | CODE |
|--------------|--|----------------------------|
| Somewhat Bad | Seeing the girls on my hall make plans without inviting me kind of hurts. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Bad | Misleading Info with zero science | Misc |
| Somewhat Bad | After scrolling for so long I feel like I wasted time that would have been better spent doing something productive | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | FOMO | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | don't feel trendy enough | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | I feel like I'm missing out | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Sad: A friend posted about her sexual assault | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Just wasting time. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Kind of discouraged me to see what was going on in the world | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | I feel bad for those who are stuck in such worldly living at parties | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |

| | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| Somewhat Bad | There's just a lot to take in on the internet | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | Wasn't an uplifting distraction | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | My feed was filled with more news than social aspects of people's lives. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | Just kind of impartial! | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | ddf | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Bad | I have felt frustrated. | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Bad | I compare myself to others unrealistic realities. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I would honestly say it's been good and bad. I have been able to connect with new people and start a side hustle on there as well. But it also takes a toll on my mental health. Wasting hours of a day on Instagram to constantly seeing the highlights of people's lives and even wanting to compare my body to someone else's on there. It's like I struggle at school with these things only to struggle with them on social media too. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Because I feel myself comparing myself | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |

| | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| Somewhat Bad | It creates a lot of comparison. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | i still have fomo | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Makes me question myself and with what I am doing with my life | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Seeing all the hate made me annoyed/angry | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I feel less present in the daily life when I'm more active on instagram | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Seeing the weird posts made me sad and somewhat angry. I don't understand why people can get away with posting such stupid things for the entire world to see and not have to answer for it | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Instagram has negatively impacted my body image. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| Somewhat Bad | Made me feel gross and like I missed something | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | annoyed at people's stories today that think they're influencers | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I am sad for the life events that some of my friends are going through. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | My ex posted a picture of him and a girl. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I see impossible body image standards | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Comparing myself | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Good | I have been encouraged by friends and family. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Happy puppy videos | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | It makes me feel more connected to people | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Keeping up with friends and family | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|---------------|---|------------------|
| Somewhat Good | I am feeling happy for others who are enjoying their relationships and fall outings. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Saw puppy's | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | It makes me laugh sometimes and happy that I can connect with my family and friends | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Happy for my friends and to know what they are doing. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I like seeing career advice and posts about teaching (I follow a lot of teaching accounts!) and seeing posts from my friends I haven't seen in a while. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I'm getting excited for my friends getting to watch their lives through Instagram | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Seeing friends and family | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I love connecting with my friends over insta [sic] | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Happy due to good new- friend has a new relationship | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I saw pictures of my friends happy | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Cute couples getting married | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Good to hear from friends, sad to hear heavy topics discussed | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|---------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | I enjoy communicating with friends across the globe! | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Positive stories from friends | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | A lot of my friends sent me funny memes | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I was laughing watching some videos with my mom | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I was able to see videos that my girlfriend sent me! | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Saw a friend get engaged | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I got to message my friends who i miss because we live in different states and i don't see them a lot | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I laughed and shared with friends | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | It didn't have a huge impact on my day but it feels like a nice way to connect with people I know | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | I enjoy seeing my friends post on their stories with the random things they are doing | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Good times with friends | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Escapism | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |

| | | |
|---------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | Naturally I feel like there is an element of FOMO or something similar when viewing some peoples stories so depending how I feel and what I see- the affect can vary. I'd say somewhat good overall though. With FOMO I'd say sad or discontentment is a fair emotion to contribute to it. | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | I didnt [sic] have fomo today | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | The messages were positive but still a bit overwhelming to view that much at once. | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | Happy for friends no FOMO | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | I feel encouraged | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Found funny videos | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I enjoy seeing my friends have fun and I like the flow of Instagram so I am generally happy/entertaine [sic] when I use the app. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I wouldn't say the messages I saw today had a significant effect on my emotions, but I did feel happy at some of the posts I saw. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It makes me happy seeing others happy | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Encouragement | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | No one posted anything sad today | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | They helped encourage me in regards to my situation today! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Some post I see make me laugh or entertain me in some way | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Encouraging messages | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw some funny memes today that made me smile | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Positive encouraging vibes! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It distracted me from my academic stress. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw stuff that made me laugh | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I just quickly scrolled through & it was uplifting quotes today | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I was encouraged by what I saw | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Lifted my mood, gave me something to do during my lunch break, helped me relax after work. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I mean I don't think it had a negative affect [sic] on me today. I used it to watch sermons | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I enjoy creating content and this was primarily why I was on Instagram | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Happy people | Entertained/Encouraged |

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|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | Funny reels and positive outdoor influencer content | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I wasn't totally encouraged today, but I was happy seeing people's memories on IG | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw some good memes that lifted my spirits | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It's encouraging to see old friends doing well. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Got some good laugh on watching cats | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Inspiration! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It was nostalgic [sic] looking at people's photos of high school. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It was good there was a sad moment seeing my friends post about losing her baby but she had a great outlook so it was encouraging | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | The positive posts were encouraging, but the negative ones were confusing. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | they were all very happy doing what they were doing and it made me happy | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It made me smile a couple of times | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It made me laugh | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|---------------|--|---------|
| Somewhat Good | I feel very neutral today with Instagram so I didn't pay much attention. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't think about it today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It was mostly neutral. It helped me wake up this morning. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I didn't spend as much time on it today, but I also felt more encouraged because I didn't spend too much time on it. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Was not super happy or encouraged but nothing terrible | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It didn't greatly impact my mood today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Well it didn't affect me negatively, I was just scrolling and didn't see anything bad today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing I saw made me sad. So it was neutral | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I don't think I was on it long enough for it to affect me either way | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing made me feel to the extremes, but nothing made me feel anything negative, so that's good. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | i wasn't on for very long | Neutral |

| | | |
|---------------|--|-----------------------|
| Somewhat Good | I didn't feel super encouraged or discourages today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing particularly made me sad | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | honestly fairly neutral today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Not noticeable difference today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I was only on for like 2 minutes to wake my self up in the morning | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Moderate feeling! Didn't really impact me | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It didn't really affect me one way or another. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing to either extreme but nothing put me down. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | it didn't make me experience any negative feelings so i'm good | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It was a very dry day for my instagram, there wasn't a lot of new things | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing major | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't impact me that strongly | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It didn't really have anything that would affect me. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It has not had a negative impact on me today | Not able to interpret |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Somewhat Good | I lean more happy because of the people I follow, but sometimes I will see a post that is negative. | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | Not on it today yet | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | N/A | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | N/A | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | Not used | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't use today | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | In the short amount of time I spent on there it was good. I think had I let myself stay on longer it would start to decline as issues with jealousy and comparing would set in | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Good | I saw a lot of sad things, but the app itself does not make me sad | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Good | I saw a lot of faith based posts that made me happy | Spiritual |
| Very Bad (Sad/Confused) | I felt sad because I was missing out on social events. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Bad (Sad/Confused) | My communication on Instagram has not encouraged me. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | My friend had her baby! | Family + Friends |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | It has lots of art and funny videos | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | I feel like most of the people I decide to follow are encouraging. I do not follow people that post discouraging and mean things. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | Happy to see friend's engagement post | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | I saw happy things happening for friends | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | Got to see what ppl are up to. Explore page brought me fun info on my interests. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | This morning it has been encouraging. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | Saw good news | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | Cute videos of people surprising their loved ones | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | Great convos | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | Instagram encouraged me because I saw there are so many people in the world that are trying to tell people about God. | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | I haven't been on it today. | Not able to interpret |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | I did not use Instagram today. | Not able to interpret |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | The biblical accounts I follow had good, encouraging scriptures | Spiritual |
| Very Good (Happy/Encouraged) | I saw mostly encouraging things, like bible verses and uplifting captions. | Spiritual |

Note. The tables above were categorized based on responses from a Likert scale where answers are grouped together based on categories.

Q13: Why?

| ANSWER | WHY | CODE |
|--------------|---|----------------------------|
| Somewhat Bad | I see everyone having a good time at college and making friends but i'm still struggling. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Bad | There is no real gain from it except for immediate gratification. I don't use it to connect with friends or anything like that. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Bad | Sometimes it's hard to be grateful when people post with friends all the time | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Bad | Seeing all the summer photos made me miss home and my friends. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Bad | This is very shallow of me but I wonder why I get less likes on certain posts and I wonder what I could do to change that. I used to get a certain amount of likes and now I am getting 100 less so that makes me insecure. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | It does make me feel that sometimes I am missing out on things and I feel the need to post every so often so I'm not viewed as inactive. But it does affect | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |

| | | |
|--------------|--|----------------------------|
| | me positively as I enjoy staying updated on what my friends are doing via the app. | |
| Somewhat Bad | Instagram usually reminds me that compared to my friends, maybe I'm not as happy as i think | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | I definitely felt FOMO when seeing my friends post about going on fall outings while I did homework all weekend. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | It is distracting and feels like wasted time. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Definitely some FOMO | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Sometimes I compare myself to other, I'm sure like a lot of people do. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Everyone is having fun | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | FOMO | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | It creates an unhealthy mindset of wanting what others have | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Over time: comparing, insecurity, FOMO, etc | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |

| | | |
|--------------|--|----------------------------|
| Somewhat Bad | FOMO | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Instagram allows me to see other's activity and feel left out. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Definitely a little FOMO | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | I find myself comparing myself to others more often when I'm on instagram more | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | My school is being blasted on social media for very sad and negative things. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | I have felt slight fomo. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Using it as a distraction from doing school | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Made me a little sad and overwhelmed | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Feel insecure in what my life looks like | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | I feel more insecure. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | The FOMO can be real with seeing all the fun random things people are doing | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |

| | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| Somewhat Bad | I've missed out on being productive today because I have spent too much time on Instagram | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Same as above | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Bad | I compare myself to others. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I answered this question a little the first time but overall just comparison and wasting hours of the day on Instagram can become upsetting | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | It can make you have negative body image | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I spend way too much time on it so that is a problem. I always see the models with the perfect faces and bodies, so that makes me self conscious about myself | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | i see all these girls my same height but im [sic] so much bigger & it takes a toll on me. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |

| | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| Somewhat Bad | Saw what they are doing to poor animals | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Mentally upset & frustrated | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | While it felt good emotionally, I don't like the time I wasted. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | Felt unproductive | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I was disturbed on how much hate and negativity people can post and say towards other people | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | It just makes me madi [sic] | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I found myself just mindlessly scrolling through instagram | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |

| | | |
|---------------|--|--|
| Somewhat Bad | People always put on Instagram what people should look like and how they should act. They try and set a picture for us to be like. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | While I enjoy staying up to date with peoples' lives, it can sometimes be overwhelming because of hard situations that you hear about online in addition to what you are personally going through. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | I continued to just mindlessly scroll through it instead of being productive. | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Good | It has help me keep in stable communication with friends | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Good | Given a low amount of use of day today's use affected me somewhat good because I was able to enjoy it without FOMO or comparison. | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | Naturally I feel like there is an element of FOMO or something similar when viewing some peoples stories so depending how I feel and what I see- | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |

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|---------------|---|-------------------------------|
| | the affect can vary. I'd say somewhat good overall though. | |
| Somewhat Good | Today's [sic] insta feed didn't make me feel like i was missing out on anything | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | I don't have a fear of missing out and I'm not feeling insecure! But uplifted | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | I didn't feel as much FOMO today as earlier in the week, perhaps because I've been busy and I'm content with that now as opposed to coming off the weekend when I wished I could have more fun. | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | No fomo!! | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | I am feeling pretty good! Recently have been finding a lot of good memes on my explore page that make me laugh | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | All the posts I saw were cute | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I can control who I follow and keep accounts who I don't feel discouraged by | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|---------------|--|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | The accounts I follow I choose very intentionally and I try to only follow positive, uplifting accounts to positively impact me. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It's been a good reminder that there's more to this life than just what's happening in my own | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I am constantly manipulating the algorithm to cater to my interests | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It hasn't really affected me mentally, I guess just boosting my mood a bit. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It has been encouraging to see others doing well despite having a hard week myself. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | There were all good pictures | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I have had a great day! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Pt 2 of it distracted me from my stress | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | the quotes made me feel better today | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I feel stable | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Eye opening to reality | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | The posts i saw made me happy | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|---------------|--|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | Happiness through thoughtful interactions | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Spreading joy | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | The usual good quotes | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I am stable and appreciate my life | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I was pretty well balanced today. I was on Instagram for like 30 minutes today so I couldn't see anything that would detrimentally ruin my mental health | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | i laughed from a lot of posts and that boosted my mood | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It helped me calm down during a busy day | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Feeling good that I am not celebrating the holiday the way that others are | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | After a long day, it's nice sometimes to scroll and see how others are doing and what they're doing. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I try to follow positive accounts | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Spreading joy | Entertained/Encouraged |

| | | |
|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | I'd say well balanced given everything. :) very short time today | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | today i was very busy and so when i checked it didn't bother me | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Laughed a lot so I felt happy | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | i feel good about my life and my posts | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Instagram has not negatively affected my emotions. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I'm not on it that much and I really just bide [sic] it as a source of information | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Keeps up to date with news | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I find that I don't really follow people who influence my mental state. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I don't think I have noticed how it has affected me honestly. It has just been an in-between break for me during homework! | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It hasn't really affected my mental emotions, maybe just a little bit helpful today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Somewhat good and somewhat bad. The more time I spend on Instagram | Neutral |

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| | away from the people I follow, like the explore page, the more I find myself having a negative outlook. | |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing too extravagant happened that it affected me mentally today, I didn't pay much attention | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Don't think it's really affected me today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It helped wake me up and focus on something. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Again, what I saw was positive but I also felt better not spending time on it as much today. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing bad was on my feed | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I purposely avoid content that would make me feel unsettled | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Good time control and healthy use of it. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Depends on the day, today it was fine. Didn't see anything bad nor overly good | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Seeing the political messages did not really affect me mentally | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Hasn't had a strong noticeable impact | Neutral |

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|---------------|---|-----------------------|
| Somewhat Good | Didn't have time to get on it today so my brain could focus more | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | For today I can't say it affected me in a good or bad way | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I've kept myself off my phone | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I didn't be anything that me noticeable upset. Very neutral | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | it provides a pause from schoolwork | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | There wasn't much affect [sic] on me today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | noticeable difference today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | didn't affect me | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Haven't been on it so I'm sure it hasn't affected me badly today yet | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I feel stable and happy | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't deeply affect me | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't impact me that strongly | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Same as previous | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | . | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | same as previous | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | N/A | Not able to interpret |

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| Somewhat Good | Not used | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't use today. Too busy with work | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | I watched short sermons on it | Spiritual |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | I saw a friend of mine post a picture with a girl who cut me out over her life so that really hurt and caused me Insecurity | Family + Friends |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | Makes me feel like I am missing out | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | insecure | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | Feel like I'm doing something wrong | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | Recently I've had a bit of FOMO because it seems like the world is opening up a lot | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | I used it to distract myself instead of working on homework and now I am stressed more than I was because I lost time. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | I definitely felt left out and like I missed out | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |

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| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | fsad | Not able to interpret |
| Very Bad (FOMO, Disturbed, Insecure) | I haven't been able to focus because I have been distracted. | Not able to interpret |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I get to share cool posts with my friends | Family + Friends |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Positive stories from friends | Family + Friends |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | No one was really posting today so I didn't see anything I was missing out on | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | No FOMO today. :) | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I would say I didn't feel any FOMO or anything and just have accepted things as they are in my own life so seeing someone else's on social media doesn't affect me as much. | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I usually follow people that I know personal and things that bring me joy | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I feel like today it has affected my mental health and made it pretty stable. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Affirmation | Entertained/Encouraged |

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| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Since I get to talk and interact with people I like and are positive, my mentality has been very stable. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Balanced "diet" of memes and tips | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Good content | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I just saw sports posts | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Not impacting me much | Neutral |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I was pretty well balanced the entire day, There was nothing too big that heavily influenced my mental health today | Neutral |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | No mental health effect | Neutral |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Didn't impact me! | Neutral |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Instagram has not effected [sic] my at all today | Neutral |

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| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | A little bit of everything | Neutral |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Didn't feel the need to open today | Not able to interpret |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I haven't been on it today. | Not able to interpret |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | I did not use Instagram today. | Not able to interpret |
| Very Good (Well-Balanced, Stable) | Spiritual reminders | Spiritual |

Note. The tables above were categorized based on responses from a Likert scale where answers are grouped together based on categories.

Q15: Why?

| ANSWER | WHY | CODE |
|--------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Somewhat Bad | I feel a little jealous of my friends, which is not pleasing to God, and I know I spent time on Instagram when I could have been doing my morning quiet time. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Bad | Many of my friends don't know God so their posts are not godly. | Family + Friends |
| Somewhat Bad | Instagram has gotten in the way of my walk with the Lord because I fee [sic] like I should always be ok it seeing what other people are doing. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | It can be hard to read about so many life situations that are happening to others even if you still know that God is good. | Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Bad | Distracts from quiet time | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | I spend more time online than in the Bible | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | It took time away that I could have used to spend with God | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |

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| Somewhat Bad | It takes up a lot of time, and I know that doesn't help or leave a lot of time to spend praying and reading my Bible | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | A lot of times I find it distracts me from my quiet time. | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | Sometimes I can allow Instagram or social media in general to slip into my God time | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | Distracting | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | Distraction from spirituality | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | Affecting my quiet time | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | Any amount of time I spend on my phone or Instagram is really a waste of time and cuts into the time I could be praying or reading my Bible | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | I dont [sic] think instagram itself distances me from God always but I do think its [sic] the time I put towards it that I could be giving to God | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | I feel like if it doesn't push me toward God it's pushing the world to me which means away from God | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |

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| Somewhat Bad | Distanced from God, nothing really spiritually encouraging came up. | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | Not very close to god at the moment | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | It can be very distracting sometimes | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | It distracted me from spending time with God | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | I use it as a distraction | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | A distraction from God | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | I have focused on myself more than God | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | i wasnt on it much today and had more time to reflect and be with God | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Bad | I wouldn't say it has been significant in encouraging me today. | Not entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Bad | Even though I follow many Christian accounts the same scrolling style is used. I only stop very briefly and move on. | Not entertained/Encouraged |

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| Somewhat Bad | I spent time on the app instead of doing my devotional, but I do follow a Christian influencer who shared an encouraging verse today. | Not entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Bad | Even though it made me laugh...it took up a lot of time that I could have used better | Not entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Bad | there was nothing that drew me away from God. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | It didn't bring me closer to him in any way | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | I would say it was more neutral, but that isn't an option | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | I did not see any spiritual content today so that did not draw me closer to God | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | It hasn't specifically brought me closer to the Lord, so that's why I would say bad. I have felt closer to the Lord today, but it wasn't because of social media. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Bad | Not used | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Bad | Don't see a ton of Christian influences on Instagram | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | A lot of the posts I saw today were about the Liberty title IX sexually assault cases which | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |

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| | makes me feel distanced from an institution that proclaims high Christian standards | |
| Somewhat Bad | It seems like others are bragging a little | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | When I get mad I can't really focus on reading my Bible | Personal Issues (Body, confidence, conflict with others) |
| Somewhat Bad | There's nothing drawing me closer to God, but I do find that it pulls me away and distracts me from time I could be spending with God or in prayer | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | Instagram has a lot of information and most of that is not biblically centered. | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | No real spiritual gain. | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | Not drawing me closer to God | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | I saw no christian content today | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | It has been slightly distracting from practicing my spiritual walk | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | I was escaping from reality by using it and I don't think that's God honoring | Spiritual |

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| Somewhat Bad | I felt pushed away from God, but because of that I jumped off Instagram and into my Bible | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | I was focused on Instagram and not my relationship with God | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Bad | Definitely not supporting my relationship with the Lord | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Good | i still see God posts & so it reminds me to not compare but it's so hard not to. | No Anxiety (FOMO, Not enough) |
| Somewhat Good | I haven't spent much time on it today, so I fully had my quiet time with god. | Less distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Somewhat Good | I follow some encouraging accounts | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | There are so many accounts that praise Jesus and it encourages me to read my bible. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I follow a lot of christian accounts that are uplifting. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I would not say that using the app brings me closer to God in comparison to reading my bible/quiet time. However, I do follow a lot of Christian people and they constantly post scripture and sermons and reminders to live for Jesus so that helps me stay surrounded in the Lord a lot. | Entertained/Encouraged |

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|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | I like to look on Christian pages | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I follow Christian accounts and mostly Christian friends who post inspirational verses and stories. This is encouraging in my own walk with the Lord. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I follow a lot of good accounts that point me back to God | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I follow a lot of encouraging Christian accounts that have actually encouraged me multiple times. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I love seeing Bible verse posts and testimonies | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Listened to some singing at a church | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It has challenged me to remember what is important and where my happiness comes from | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Bible verses and affirmations | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I frequently get encouraging quotes and verses | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I occasionally see posts with encouraging spiritual messages | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I follow several biblical accounts that remind me of scriptural truths | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I see Christian content that helps me to think about new ideas | Entertained/Encouraged |

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| Somewhat Good | There are so many good people or pages to follow on Instagram that do encourage spiritual growth so when they come up while I'm scrolling it's awesome | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Lots of ppl [sic] I follow post uplifting captions or repost spiritual accounts with quotes or insights or verses. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I see encouraging posts that help me | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | follow christian accounts | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw some things today that were great lessons for me to learn spiritually. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I follow a lot of accounts that post biblical encouragements! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | The messages I saw included short devotionals or verses from influencers that encouraged me today. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Bible verses from church (The Summit) | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Encouragement posted | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw a Christian page today | Entertained/Encouraged |

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|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | Seeing others post verses is a reminder to me | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Listened to a sermon | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I have recently seen my friends post a lot of encouraging messages | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Seeing content from Christian accounts | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Very encouraging scripture came up on my feed today. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw some cool quotes related to Christian topics that led me to think contemplatively | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | a lot of the quote shown were of scripture | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | There where lots of spiritual posts that I spent time on today | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | The difficult situations and news bring me to lean into the Lord more. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Today good because I watched sermons on it | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | My feed shared with me devotional or topical posts that were informative and encouraging. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Verses posted | Entertained/Encouraged |

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| Somewhat Good | One of my favorite accounts posted something that has made me think about God all day | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw good Christian content to fill the time of Instagram | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | The good messages Liberty posted | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I saw another friends Bible verse posts and those are always encouraging | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | I did read one positive post about faith this morning. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | There wasnt [sic] anything distracting me from God it reminded me how amazing He is to give us the abilities to play sports | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Bible verses | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | It was good but all content was wholesome | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | engaged in some christian content | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Made me grateful for the friends and place that He has given to me in this season of my life! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Instagram affected me spiritually because I was able to find new Christian music to listen to | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Bible verses | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Great songs found | Entertained/Encouraged |

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|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | I saw a lot of God related posts and it made me so happy! | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Somewhat Good | Makes me run to God more | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Good | I was able to prioritize time with God in addition to this and the content was clean and positive so I think it didn't impact me negatively from God. | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Good | Closer to spirituality and farther from modern day religion | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Good | Not focusing on the world helps me to focus on God | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Good | Instagram honestly reminds me that i need to stay near to God in order to have a healthy relationship with him. Mainly because Instagram is a window into a very broken world | Spiritual |
| Somewhat Good | I would say neutral | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Doesn't counter what I believe | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Different perspectives | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I think it can be both good and bad. A lot of my content in my feed is encouraging and inspiring content, but I also have a mixture of content that | Neutral |

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| | is the opposite. Also sometimes I put social media over my time which is SO bad ! | |
| Somewhat Good | It subtracted time out of my day but not in a negative way. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It hasn't affected me today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't spend time on it today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Today I didn't have time to spend get on today so I had more time for other things | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | I feel like it neither hindered nor helped in this area today | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | didn't affect me | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing noteworthy | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing specifically "spiritual" in nature | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | It was just neutral, didn't really help me but it didn't really harm me either | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Very neutral today. | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Neutral here :) posts were positive. No inherent value but seeing peoples [sic] faces definitely reminds me to pray for them. :) | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | Nothing in particular | Neutral |

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|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Somewhat Good | Didn't impact me that strongly | Neutral |
| Somewhat Good | wf | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | perspective | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | Same as usual | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | N/A same old same old | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | noticeable difference today | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | Not on it so have more time | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | N/A | Not able to interpret |
| Somewhat Good | Didn't use today. | Not able to interpret |
| Very Bad (Distanced from God) | I have been distracted from God quite a bit | Distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Very Bad (Distanced from God) | Instagram has not brought me closer to God. | Neutral |
| Very Bad (Distanced from God) | Instagram hasn't brought me closer to God. | Neutral |

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|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Very Bad (Distanced from God) | Instagram does not encourage my relationship with God. | Neutral |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | I haven't been on it today :) so that has helped with my quiet time being less distracting! | Less distraction From God/Quiet Time |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | I follow a lot of encouraging influencers that post often uplifting posts. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | It is encouraging for me to view peoples encouraging Godly posts. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | Following Bible pages affects me positively. | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | I saw a post from a friend today that was encouraging about the Lord and his goodness and it made me thankful | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | There was a post that that inspired me to to [sic] pray more | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | Collingsworth family all over my feed with good Christian music | Entertained/Encouraged |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | One of the influencers I follow has been sharing some great encouragement this week and her post today really made me stop and think about it. | Entertained/Encouraged |

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|------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Very Good (Closer to God) | I did not use Instagram today. | Not able to interpret |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | Today was the anniversary of three high school boys who died in a car accident at my high school. I felt closer to God by praying for the boys and their families | Spiritual |
| Very Good (Closer to God) | I run to God after seeing these messages | Spiritual |

Note. The tables above were categorized based on responses from a Likert scale where answers are grouped together based on categories.