

**EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM ON MALE YOUTH SELF-ESTEEM  
IN UGANDA. A CASE STUDY OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN  
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**Abstract**

This study investigates the impact of Instagram on the self-esteem of young men with a focus on the specific forms of content consumed and their effects on the self-esteem. Instagram, as a platform based on visual content, promotes exposure to different luxurious displays of lifestyles in terms of video reels and images. This continuous exposure encourages comparison among its users. This research explores the different categories of Instagram content and how each of them affect self-esteem of young male youth. By using qualitative research methods such as interviews, questionnaires, the study examines the effects of the different forms of content on the self-perception of young males. The findings aim to contribute to a broader understanding of how social media, Instagram, plays a role in shaping the perception of young males in this digital era.

**Student Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is submitted in completion of the bachelor's degree in Journalism, Media and Communication at the Uganda Christian University in my own work and throughout this dissertation, I referenced other people's ideas properly. I have never submitted this dissertation before for any other degree at any other University.

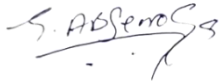
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**Supervisor Approval**

I have read the research project of **PAYESU GLORY CHIMWEMWE** and I agree that it is ready to be examined. I recommend that this research be accepted as a fulfillment of the research requirement for the Bachelor's degree of Journalism and Communication.

Handwritten signature of S. Senoga in black ink.

02. Aug. 2024

**MR. SENOGA GEOFFREY**

**Research Supervisor.**

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction;

Ever since the innovation of the internet in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the launch of social media, it has become the most powerful tool for social networking globally. The major platforms being; Facebook, with over 2.9 billion subscribers and viewed as the most active site, Instagram with over two (2) billion active users, WhatsApp with approximately two billion and YouTube with over 2.5 billion users. (DataReportal, 2023).

50.6% of global Instagram users are male according to the statistics analyzed by Datareportal of which the age group between 18 to 24 contribute the highest number. January 23<sup>rd</sup> statistics from Datareportal show that Uganda is home to over 2.05 million social media users which is equivalent to 4.3 percent of the total population. Instagram's users specifically, a total of 56.1% users are male. (DataReportal, 2023)

Over the years people all over the world have been using social media especially Instagram as a platform to view the lives of others, get inspiration and/or compare themselves with others. They have resorted to constantly seeking approval of themselves from the world such that they obtain a sense of belonging among communities. Instagram is their go-to in order to get that global acceptance. Every day they spend an average of over 2.4hours posting and scrolling through Instagram and sometimes this immense need for approval has got many addicted to the platform. New trends and perceived ideal images of life which have been digitally created on this site have made most people especially the youth, change their perception of themselves as they feel their lives don't measure up to the global popular standards of life. Muqaddas, Ahmad and Soomro (2017, p.330) agree that social media has many negative effects on people because they constantly make comparisons between their life and those that they view on social media which increases social pressure and distress of individuals to fit in, resulting into low self-esteem (Muqaddas et al, 2017). Most of the research findings on Instagram influence point out its deep influence on the female gender however, this research broadly explores how Instagram influences the male gender especially the youth in Uganda, particularly at Uganda Christian University.

## **1.2 Problem Statement;**

A lot of focus is put on the influence of social media, especially Instagram on the self-esteem of the female gender. How Instagram affects the male gender and its self-esteem is hardly researched.

## **1.3 Purpose:**

To find out how Instagram affects the male gender's self-esteem. This research sees how either positively or negatively influential Instagram messages, posts, videos, pictures and the likes, are to the young males.

## **1.4 Research Objectives;**

1. To identify young males consuming Instagram content at Uganda Christian University.
2. To identify the exact forms of Instagram content consumed by the young male gender at Uganda Christian University.
3. To identify the effects of Instagram content on the male gender's self-esteem at Uganda Christian University.

## **1.5 Research questions;**

RQ1. Who are the young males that consume Instagram content at Uganda Christian University?

RQ2. What is the nature of Instagram content consumed by young males at Uganda Christian University?

RQ3. What is the effect of Instagram content on the young males' self-esteem at Uganda Christian University?

## **1.6 Scope of Study**

This study focuses on the male gender narrowing down to those who are between 18 and 35 years. The research is carried out at Uganda Christian University in Uganda. The focus was on participants who used Instagram and how overtime it has shaped their opinions of themselves, others and their behaviour.

### **1.6.1 Geographical Scope**

This study focuses on the population of Ugandan young males. The research was carried out in Uganda Christian University in Mukono. This was such that different experiences and

opinions were obtained depending on their background, course of study, age and their reasoning which also helps limit generalization and promotes representation.

### **1.6.2 Content Scope**

This study focuses on the male gender narrowing down to those who are 18 and above of age but mainly young adult male youth. The focus was on participants who use Instagram and how overtime it has shaped their perception of themselves and others.

### **1.6.3 Time Scope**

This research was done within the time limit of six months starting in January 2023 to July 2024.

## **1.7 Justification**

Most of the studies and research findings indicate on how social media in this case Instagram affects the female gender. The fact that different males think differently and are affected differently is a fact constantly ignored. The issue of mental health in line with self-esteem is a rising concern in today's time, many males are changing their appearances, interactions and communication with others which most times pushes them into uncomfortable living boundaries at times influenced by Instagram and its visual nature.

With this research, we'll contribute to a broader and more refined understanding of the relation between Instagram (social media) engagement and male self-esteem. This research was intent on shedding a light on possible areas for improvement, create better online environments and overall promote positive mental well-being in this digital age, not only among the male.

## **1.8 Significance**

This study will help point out some of the areas needed for improvement in order to achieve positive communication environments. Research has shown that the more time is spent on Instagram, the more authority one gives to the platform to change their perceptions. This study will clearly bring out the evidence indicating the connection between the amount of time spent associating with Instagram away from face-to-face communication and the after effects it leads to. This will help many communicators, youth and elders have more insight on how to control the amount of time they spend on Instagram and other social networking sites as well as regulate the kind of content they expose themselves to. It will also sharpen content creators to be sensitive about the information they post.

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

This research suggests that there is a relationship between the amount of exposure to idealized images on Instagram and the effects on male self-esteem. Over exposure can lead to increased body dissatisfaction, poor self-perception and low self-esteem while limited exposure leads to less of the negative outcomes.

This research relies on the social comparison theory which suggests that individuals evaluate their self-image and worth on the basis of those they feel inferior to as well as those they feel superior to. It also intends to use the self-presentation theory which emphasizes how Instagram users intentionally and strategically present themselves to the other users so as to create a certain positive impression. We also study how the created idealized images and expectations of male appearance and masculinity by the society has influenced male youth self-esteem.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literature Review**

Defining the key concepts;

Self-esteem, Instagram, Social Comparison, self-presentation and body image

### **Introduction.**

A lot of research has shown that females are the most vulnerable gender to influence by social media sites especially Instagram but less research has been carried out to figure out where the males fit in this aspect and how Instagram affects their self-esteem. The little research done indicated that males who view images of other males portraying the ideal body type and male presentation in terms of wealth and status, are more prone to low self-esteem compared to those who view neutral based images (Hobza and Walker, 2007).

### **1. Social media**

Social Media has the most used and powerful social networking platforms globally (Uddin and Wok, 2020). The popular social media sites being Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram in that order (Statista, 2023). These different social media platforms have different characteristics that make them unique from each other, this uniqueness is what makes their effects different varying from individual to individual. Social Media, a platform for social networking, gives room for people to express themselves, build connections as well as give insights and details into their lives which gives them a sense of belonging in a social community (Vogel et al,2014). It has become a big part of people's lives in that many use it to network, build relations, share and gain information (Muqaddas et al, 2017). Social media engagement is dominated by visual communication such as commenting on other user's videos and pictures and text, sharing videos, text and videos (Steinsbekk et al,2021). Due to its advantage and nature of visual communication, social media is dominated by the youth whereby they have about 30.8% in the age bracket of 18 to 24 users (Report by Statista, 2023). Social media platforms have changed the way people communicate with each other in that these systems have allowed people to interact with each other electronically through internet connectivity; its users can interact with each other from miles away as long as they are connected to internet, Wi-Fi or data (Raymer,2015).

We are in the digital times where digital communication has become the prominent method of communication. Virtual communication has become the new normal mode of communicating with one another aside from the face-to-face conversations. Social media sites are now the main means of communicating. Due to this virtual and digital age, social media engagement is increasing daily with people creating and sharing more content (texts, photos, videos, graphical representations among others) as well as interacting with other user's content through comments and likes (Gwiazdzinski, 2022).

The most popular site is Facebook which was launched in 2004, however due to its nature of being mostly affects its users differently (Raymer, 2015). Social media has become a site for sharing experiences, self-education, real time connection as well as forming social communities and faster information sharing. However, it also has its negative side in that it has created more room for cyberbullying and mental issues (Abdullah et al, 2023).

## **2. Instagram**

Instagram was invented and launched officially and fully in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. From then on it has become among the most popular social networking platforms used by mostly teenagers and young adults (Salim et al, 2017). A report by Statista in 2023 found out that individuals within the age bracket of 18-24 contributed 30.8% of the global Instagram population and of over the one billion monthly users (Statista, 2023). It has increasingly become the most popular image-based networking site in the world with more than one billion monthly users and 500 daily users (Uddin and Wok, 2020).

Instagram is a mobile application where users can post videos and photos as well as attach captions and in response get feedback inform of likes or comments which creates an engagement with their interested followers (Trifiro, 2018, Chatzopoulou, 2020). Users can post information about their daily routines, their experiences, their jobs, photos of their positive bodies among others (Chatzopoulou, 2020). It's an application that enables its users to scroll through content on a timeline interface; timeline meaning the recently posted content and similar content recently viewed (Lockhart, 2019). Instagram is known for its visual nature where it's famous for mainly photographic and video posts and sharing rather than text (Thinane, 2020). One of the most common features of Instagram is the stories. This is where users can post their photos and videos which are available for viewing for 24 hours after which they disappear (Statista, 2023). It is also characterized by its use of 'Hashtags' which users communicate with to each other (Salim et al, 2017). This makes it different and unique from other social networking sites. Due to this difference, Instagram affects its users differently compared to the text-based platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Trifiro, 2018). Its visual nature has made it popular mostly among the teenagers, adolescents and young youth (Ligaraba,2023). Due to its image and video-based nature, it has given its users room for posting visual content such as videos and photos as well as editing them using the provided tools on the platform (Ligaraba,2023, Thinane, 2020). This has enabled the users to enhance presentations of themselves thus creating only positive presentations of their life and

experiences to the world. Instagram users have the tendency to express themselves in a way that doesn't reveal their true reality and nature. Neo Ligaraba and Tinashe Chuchu (2023) accent to this giving their view that Instagram gives people a sense of freedom and identity, boosts their confidence and uplifts them during the hard times (Ligaraba,2023).

### **2.1 Instagram usage**

Instagram provides the room for its users to post as many pictures as they wish with little to no restrictions (Raymer,2015). Instagram posts tend to be only positively biased where by its users only portray the bright parts of their lives and experiences. Through the editing tools provided in the platform, the users are at liberty to edit their photos and videos to make them look perfect and beautify them (Trifiro, 2018). Its users are able to post information about themselves through pictures and status updates and create their profiles on their Instagram accounts that reveal some of their personal information. People usually disclose more about themselves on this site compared to real life in the physical world (Raymer,2015). They also use it for self-evaluation; this is through comparing themselves with detailed information about other users' that are being shared and posted (Vogel et al, 2014).

### **2.2 Instagram users**

Research suggests that males with more emotional instability are the ones who use Instagram more. Other males focus on content about self-promotion and entertainment. Young adult males mostly use Instagram for social compensation and identity seeking (Raymer,2015). There are two types of Instagram users; Passive users and Active users. Erin Vogel, Jason Rose, Lindsay Roberts and Katheryn Eckles as well as Steinsbekk et al (2021) refer to them as self-oriented users and other oriented users (Vogel et al, 2014, Steinsbekk et al, 2021). Active users (self-oriented) are those who directly engage with other users' content for example through liking or commenting as well as posting content of their own. Passive users (other oriented users) on the other hand, are those who simply view and scroll through other users' content without engaging. They mostly view and respond to other user's content without posting their own and in most cases don't receive positive feedback on their self-presentation (Vogel et al, 2014). They neither like, comment or even upload their own content (Trifiro, 2018). Passive users usually just scroll through other users' posts without appreciating or interacting which makes them vulnerable to influence. A times this habit is due to social envy which is jealousy they feel over the perfect lives portrayed by other users. This is usually as a result of social comparison which is the act of comparing oneself to those who are higher or better than them

in different areas such as social capital (more followers on Instagram), social networks, social status among others.

### **3. Self-presentation and self-image/ body image**

Self-presentation is simply how individuals want to portray themselves to others. It is a form of communication and a behaviour of how individuals want to showcase themselves to others (Salim et al, 2017). Kramer and Winter (2008) argue that self-presentation is more about sharing one's personal information to others such that they create an impression; in most cases, a good impression of themselves (Kramer and Winter, 2008). Instagram users have different ways of presenting themselves based on their viewers. When presenting themselves to strangers, they tend to enhance their image more (in a way that is most advantageous to them) while with friends, they present themselves more simply so as to avoid presenting themselves in a way their friends know is false and such that they don't damage the friendship and risk being rejected by them (Salim et al, 2017). After posting their personal information, the user's main focus is on the feedback they receive through likes or comments, which helps them to weigh their worth in the eyes of other Instagram users (Schyff et al, 2022).

Body image is a big part of one's identity and it can affect how they feel about themselves as well as how they behave in society (Chatzopoulou, 2020). It refers to an individual's thoughts and feelings towards their own body (Kruger, 2020). The agenda setting role of mass media comes into play here because the media places certain amount of emphasis on certain content which causes the audience to put a lot of attention on those issues (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This can sometimes cause the users to have doubts about their own body image. This can lead them into unhealthy competition with each other to gain more popularity which makes them feel pressured and anxious due to the fear of missing out, excessive exercise and most likely the use of steroids to maintain a good body shape such that they post their pics on 'Instastories' and get more positive feedback (likes, tags and comments) thus, increased popularity and a sense of fitting in (Chatzopoulou, 2020). Kramer and Winter (2008) affirm that users expect to make positive presentations of themselves by portraying themselves to others in the positive light to gain more popularity (Kramer and Winter, 2008).

### **4. Self Esteem**

This term self-esteem refers to how worthy one feels towards themselves. In other words, a person's positive or negative evaluation of their self. One's positive or negative review about themselves (Vogel et al,2014). Self-esteem is mostly connected to one's confidence in their

physical appearance and their status in society. Self-esteem can develop overtime or it can change with the change in trends and daily events. For example, negative comments reduce one's self esteem while positive comments increase one's self esteem. This simply means the type of feedback matters when it comes to the outcome on self-esteem (Muqaddas et al, 2017). The type of feedback received such as likes, dislikes and comments on one's post also determines the self-esteem levels of the user. They refer to it as the sociometer theory where one's self worth is derived from the amount of feedback they receive from others (Steinsbekk et al,2021).

The amount of time one spends on Instagram also influences one's self esteem, too much time spent on the platform can alter one's esteem due to over exposure of social comparison content. Karl van der Schyff et al (2022) refers to this as excessive Instagram use; whereby an individual uses a platform for prolonged hours or frequent use in shorter periods (Schyff et al, 2022). In the research conducted by Kristen Raymer, she suggested that the more time spent on Instagram is equal to low self-esteem (Raymer,2015). As one's self-esteem increases, their social media activity decreases and as their self-esteem reduces, their social media engagement increases (Gwiazdzinski, 2022). The more time spent on Instagram, the more vulnerable they become to the ideal posts which in turn lowers their self-esteem. Low self-esteem is also somewhat attributed to the high amount of time spent scrolling through Instagram and overuse increases exposure to upward social comparison content (Vogel et al, 2014). This is because when an individual spends more time scrolling through online posts, it reduces their face-to-face communication with peers, friends and family which usually results in feelings of loneliness and depression. This causes them to spend even more time on Instagram to cover up the lonely factor and the cycle continues. The case is different for those with high self-esteem. They spend less time on Instagram and usually use it as a way of connecting with peers and spending leisure time. They use it to grow and maintain their social ties. They do not feel the need to over expose their personal information as a way to promote themselves as much as those with low self-esteem. They use more of their social skills to promote themselves. Compared to those with low self-esteem, users with high esteem tend to have more positive experience on Instagram and spend time interacting with friends rather than increasing social capital the way users with low self-esteem do who often have negative experience on social media (Raymer,2015).

Research suggests that a person's self-esteem informs their reasons for using Instagram. People with low self-esteem expose themselves more on Instagram in order to get acceptance and approval from other users while those with high self-esteem expose themselves to specific

circles of friends and are only concerned about their popularity. Those with low self-esteem try to compensate by making themselves active online such as spending more time logged into Instagram, scrolling through other user's posts hoping to get noticed and make more friends online even without posting their own content. They try to forge ties with users who they do not know very well. They try to socially compensate for their low self-esteem by making more friends online so as to have a sense of belonging (Raymer,2015). Despite the fact that females are more concerned with their body image and self-presentation, there is certain content on Instagram that impacts the male gender. (Kruger, 2020). This will be highlighted in the next paragraphs.

#### **4.1 Negative impact**

Photos of ideal men on Instagram especially those advertising male products have created an exaggerated form of the male image. The perception developed is that men are supposed to be wealthy, physically masculine such as big chests, abs and lean stomachs and fit within the societal expectations of men. This has resulted in low body esteem of young males (Hobza and Walker, 2007). This can result into pressure for males who don't meet such standards to feel inadequate and not 'man enough' because they don't adhere to the expectations of the ideal man.

Instagram poses as a threat to one's self esteem and wellbeing. People tend to have negative feelings towards themselves but this does not cause them to reduce time spent on Instagram. More exposure to social comparison content on Instagram can lower one's self satisfaction with their bodies. This causes them to develop unhealthy habits so as to gain the ideal body type or image such as use of steroids and eating disorders. More consistent exposure to other user's positive presentations on Instagram leads to feelings of inadequacy in that those individuals tend to form opinions that others have better lives than them (Raymer,2015). It also causes some individuals to forget about their true self. (Steinsbekk et al,2021) refers to this as the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) which is that gap between true self-perception and idealized self-perception which may result into negative emotions like disappointment, sorrow and negative self-esteem (Steinsbekk et al,2021).

The more they use Instagram, the more they become less satisfied with their life. People use this networking site to overcome their loneliness but end up being less satisfied with their lives (Muqaddas et al, 2017). This less satisfaction causes them to detach themselves away from relationships in the physical world which creates feelings of loneliness. Rather than fighting it,

they opt to spend more time on Instagram trying to grow their social capital as a way of social compensation to create a sense of belonging and involvement in the online society. However, Instagram users who spend their time passively scrolling through other user's posts and updates without engaging with them actively, tend to have low social capital and this increases the sense of loneliness. The more time is spent on Instagram, the more they fade out from face-to-face communication with real physical people. This social isolation negatively impacts their esteem levels and often results into depression. This can lead to long term mental problems which require medical assistance (Lockhart, 2019).

Frequently involving one's self in social comparison can cause damage to one's mental health. They end up hating everything about themselves, feeling worse about their appearance and withdrawing completely from the physical world. They develop the concept of not belonging and 'not fitting' in their minds. Thus, getting involved in unhealthy habits such as unhealthy and excessive competition with other males, use of steroids to form the ideal body types among others. This feature of sharing photos and videos of idealized presentations has created appearance related biases and expectations for each gender (ideal appearances for the different genders) (Steinsbekk et al,2021). For example, men are expected to be lean and muscular, have strong muscles and a large upper body. This has generated pressure among the male youth especially young males who try to conform to these expectations no matter what it takes.

This excessive use of Instagram can make these young male adults vulnerable to cyberbullying. Kristen Raymer approves this in her research stating that these social media sites pose a threat to the wellbeing of adolescents due to an increase in cyberbullying which negatively impacts them psychosocially. These cyberbullying acts such as name calling, threatening, false rumors among others can cause significant effects like depression, suicide attempts and social isolation (Raymer, 2015). Tobi B. Goldfus (2023) identifies young users as more a target for victimization, soliciting, and bullying and in most cases, they end up becoming passive users due to this victimization hence are highly sensitive to negative comments and rejection from others due to the emotional pain and trauma experienced. This emotional pain causes them to shut down and hide themselves from the world by becoming silent and isolating themselves as a coping mechanism. They are most likely vulnerable because when using social media, they become disconnected from the real life and are mostly absorbed in the platform. Their emotions shift abruptly in accordance with the content they are viewing which at times causes mental distress (Goldfus, 2023).

Even with these negative impacts of Instagram on the male self-esteem, it has its perks and can be used as a platform for individual development. The next paragraph goes onto to explain this further.

#### **4.2 Positive impact**

However, despite the negative impacts of Instagram on Male esteem, research has shown that there are significant positive impacts of their self-esteem. This upward comparison with other users can push them into self-improvement in terms of adopting healthy habits such as healthy eating habits and exercise to build an ideal body image (which is not only about their body but also how other see them), developing their creativity and talent by posting their content and getting positive feedback from their friends which can boost their social self-esteem levels and online friend group (Chatzopoulou, 2020, Muqaddas et al, 2017). Instagram also gives room for forming and building meaningful relationships, boosting their social confidence and the chance to belong to a community as well as find their identity (Muqaddas et al, 2017). It also opens doors to new opportunities such as jobs and business advertising and growth (Lockhart, 2019). Individuals rely on photos and videos for self-presentation; they post ideal photos and videos to maximize their positive self-presentation which at times increases their creativity and gains them more friends online (Steinsbekk et al,2021).

Uddin and Wok (2020) suggest that when individuals compare themselves as a way of evaluating their development, they tend to build a stronger and more constructive mental self-image (Uddin and Wok, 2020).

#### **5. Social Comparison theory**

This theory was identified by Leon Festinger a psychologist in 1954 who states that human beings are naturally driven to compare their own opinions with others to track their worth and abilities which in turn affects their behaviour. (Festinger, 1954). It explains that people always have comparison thoughts floating through their minds. They often engage in comparing themselves to others in various areas such as wealth, status in society, physical appearance among others (Uddin and Wok, 2020). It is considered a natural phenomenon and human behaviour where individuals involve themselves in comparisons with others everyday whether

consciously or unconsciously (Zuo, 2014). Research shows that social comparison can go in two ways and affect someone either positively or negatively (Hene, 2015).

This theory suggests that people gain knowledge of themselves through personal comparisons with others. They engage in comparison with persons who are better than them which is referred to as 'Upward Comparison'. This makes the users compare their real physical self with the 'fake life' created on Instagram of other users which usually results in them think less about themselves (Vogel et al, 2014). Despite there being positive outcomes of upward social comparison, this act tends to lean more into the negative side. They often compare themselves to those who they perceive as better than them and use it as a form for self-evaluation but end up feeling like they don't fit in or develop feelings of inadequacy and self-dissatisfaction (Vogel et al, 2014). Due to Instagram's nature of visual communication through photos and videos as well as a provision for editing tools, its users are able to edit their photos and videos before posting them on the platform (>>>). They are also able to post detailed and filtered information about themselves on their accounts. They have the option of intentionally and selectively posting videos and photos that make them appear to have the perfect life. Due to the filtered information, other users and followers see on their accounts only their best and most desirable characteristics. This gives room for social comparison by other passive users on Instagram. This makes them believe that other users are happier and more successful than them, especially those who they don't know properly on a personal level or off the internet.

Instagram users also tend to engage in 'Downward comparison' where they compare themselves to those who they consider to be inferior to them. This comparison triggers them into imitating other users such that they too can be like them and resemble the life of the popular Instagram users which they hope will increase their popularity (Chatzopoulou, 2020). Zuo (2014) argues that there is a relationship between social comparison and self-esteem, however, it is a bit complicated in that there is no clarified difference on whether self-esteem is an outcome or an anticipator (Zuo, 2014).

### **5.1 Relationship between social comparison and self esteem**

Studies have shown that there is an existing connection between the type of social comparison content on Instagram and one's self esteem (Hene, 2015). Due to Instagram's image-based nature, it provides the perfect bias for social comparison information. Its users often post positive photos and videos on their stories which gives other users a certain impression of life. Frequent exposure to related content can influence these users to engage in comparisons with

their own experiences and of others (Hene, 2015). This usually has negative outcomes on the individual (Zuo, 2014).

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

Due to the nature of the topic and the information needed, the researchers decided to use the Qualitative research method so as to observe the participants' reactions and get to know and judge from their real-life experiences.

### **3.1 Research design**

#### **3.1.0 Research approach**

This research uses the qualitative research approach to discover the male youth perceptions and attitudes. This enables and eases one on one interactions with the participants in order to get a depth understanding of their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes influenced by Instagram posts. This method enabled the researchers to gather enough representative information and gave an advantage of being able to divide the participants in terms of age, course of study, accounts followed, time spent and intentions of using Instagram.

#### **3.1.1A case study design**

The research focuses mainly on male university students from Uganda Christian University.

##### **3.1.1.0 Advantages of a case study**

Using a case study provides a context that helps the researcher to fully understand the situation and relate them to real life experiences as well as provide room for testing the social comparison theory applied in this research. Using a case study for this research also gives future researchers reliable information that they can reference to in their research as long as it's within the framework of the topic.

##### **3.1.1.1 Disadvantages of a case study**

Case studies usually are liable to influence and bias by the researcher because their subjective view might outweigh their objective view. This can highly affect the researcher's interpretation of the obtained data. Case studies can be time consuming and at times analyzing the interview data and other information can be a bit complex.

### **3.2 Participants**

We focused the research on young male youth in Uganda who were between the ages of 18 to 35 who have Instagram accounts and access to them whether through smartphone or any digital device. The participants were university students since they were the common people within the age bracket of 18 to 35. These students were from Uganda Christian University in Mukono.

### **3.3 Sampling method and sample size**

This research used the random sampling methods where the researcher selected male students randomly from the university and after selection, created sub groups of the selected sample dividing them in form of age, time spent, accounts followed, intentions and course of study.

For the sample size, the researcher calculated using the sample calculator and opted for a number of 40 male students in total. A percentage of them were interviewed using an online survey, others were physically interviewed as well as given questionnaires. These 40 male students stood in as a representative of the total population of Uganda males within the age of 18-35.

### **3.4 Research techniques**

This includes the different data collection tools and methods that were employed throughout the research.

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

Interviews are conversations that researchers have with participants in order to obtain certain information from them regarding their topic of research. It is when a researcher asks the participant designed questions that will help retrieve the information relating to their research topic (Thinane, 2020). The interviews composed of open-ended and close ended questions that were related to the topic of study. These interviews were both oral and written interviews. With oral interviews, the participants had one on one sessions with the researcher whereby they were asked questions by the researcher and were required to voice out their answers. Their responses were recorded using a recorder on the phone. The written interview entailed a list of questions which were answered by the participants on a paper. Another written form of the interview was questionnaires.

#### **3.4.2 Questionnaires and surveys**

Online surveys via links and physical questionnaires were given out to random male participants around the university. These contained both open ended and close ended questions which required the participants to answer by ticking the circle and giving a deeper insight through paragraph writing.

### **3.5 Data collection methods and tools**

The researcher used structured interview with both open ended and close ended interview questions and an oral interview in line with the topic of research. The open-ended questions were used to acquire 'yes' or 'no', 'I agree' or 'I disagree' answers and the close ended questions were used to acquire elaborative experiences from the participants, all in line with the topic of research (Hene, 2015). These helped the researcher obtain more information and a deeper understanding of the participants' attitudes. The oral interviews were recorded using a sound recorder on a smartphone for purposes of future reference.

The researcher used questionnaires that had a section for the participants' characteristics, another section for Yes or No answers and another section for the amount of time they spend on Instagram and on the posts that they mostly viewed on the platform (adopted from Uddin and Wok, 2020).

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

While conducting research, it was important to adhere to the ethical guidelines provided otherwise consequences would be faced. As a researcher, it's important to emit good ethical conduct while carrying out the research (Thinane, 2020). Before seeking interviews and information from the participants, a permission and a consent form was given to them which a few signed and worked as permission to use their contribution in the research and also permission for other researchers to reference to their participation. In addition, in case the participants were not comfortable with sharing certain information, their privacy was respected and protected.

### **3.7 Validity and Reliability**

Validity is about how factual or trustworthy the data collected is (Kruger, 2020). In order to show that the data that was collected is accurate, the researcher involved only those who were readily willing to take part in the research. This was to ensure that their answers were honest and not forged. In addition, the data that was analyzed from the participants who actively took part in the research.

## **CHAPTER 4: Findings and discussion of findings.**

## 4.1 Findings

This chapter includes the research findings from qualitative research methods done in July 2024. This study was carried out to find out whether the self-esteem of young male adults is affected by Instagram and how, either positively or negatively. Online surveys were sent out via links and 12 of the 40 participants responded through this. Physical questionnaires were handed out to random participants in Uganda Christian University and 19 out of the 40 responded this way. One on one audio recorded interviews were conducted with 9 of the 40 participants which were transcribed into written results. There was a total 100% response rate as 40 out of 40 participants were involved in the research study.

Out of the 40, 32 of them were between the age of 18-25, 6 were between the age of 25-30 and 2 were above the age of 30 years. 19 of them use Instagram daily but with limited hours between 3-7 hours per day, 2 use it hourly on a daily basis. 5 use it weekly and 14 of them use it once it a while. 14 of the participants said that Instagram is a positive environment that caters for the male self-esteem, 10 of them disagreed saying it was negative, 12 argued that Instagram is both a positive and negative environment for the male self-esteem and 4 of them said they has no idea. 12 participants say that Instagram has influenced their self-esteem positively, 10 say it has done so negatively, 4 of them say it has done so both positively and negatively while the other 14 say Instagram has had no impact on their self-esteem at all.

The biggest number of them use Instagram to follow accounts such as Football, Men's Fashion, Music, memes and Fitness.

When the participants were asked if Instagram was a positive or negative space for the self-esteem of young male youth, 14 of the 40 replied that the platform provided a space for encouragement, motivation and inspiration, hence a positive space for the male self-esteem. 10 of the other 40 participants replied that Instagram provided a negative space for male self-esteem saying that it provided room for feelings of insecurity, body shaming which lowers the esteem of most young male users. 12 of the 40 participants replied that Instagram is both a positive and negative space, depending on the content viewed, the intentions of the user when scrolling through the platform and their mood as they consume Instagram content at that particular time. Lastly, 4 of the rest of the 40 participants replied that they did not know the nature of the space provided by Instagram.

**i) Table presenting the statistical results obtained from the research about Instagram's effects on the young male gender's self-esteem.**

Age	Number of participants	Time spent on Instagram	Number of participants	Impact on self-esteem.	Number of participants
18 - 25	32	Hourly	2	Positive	12
26 - 30	6	Daily	19	Negative	10
31 - 35	2	Weekly	5	Both positive and negative	4
		Once in a while	14	No impact	14

ii) Table showing the number of participants and what they think of the Instagram environment in relation to self-esteem of male youth.

Nature of Instagram space for male self-esteem	Number of participants
Positive space	14
Negative space	10
Both negative and positive space	12
I don't know	4

## 4.2 Discussion of findings

The main aim of the current research was to evaluate the effects of Instagram content on the self-esteem of the young male users. As mentioned in the literature review, Instagram offers a wide variety format of content from videos, text, graphics, audios and photos. Young males are particularly drawn to specific kinds of posts of which they vary in terms of impact on their self-esteem. They include the following.

**Fitness Content:** When scrolling through Instagram, a significant number of the content revolves around gym workouts, body building plans and methods and advertising of the idealized male physical appearance. Fitness models and fitness accounts mostly share video or reels on workout routines, photos showing muscular bodies, texts with recipes for shakes, drinks or diet foods to eat so as to achieve a muscular body type.

This has both negative and positive outcomes of it. Positively, the young males are motivated to adopt healthier lifestyles such healthy eating and diets, proper sleep routines and exercising which boosts their self-esteem. Negatively, they are pushed and pressured to look a certain way. They become uncomfortable or dissatisfied with their own body which in turn lowers their self-esteem.

**Humor and Memes:** When scrolling through Instagram feeds, stories and reels, there are memes and jokes either in video style with funny sound effects or a photo with text explaining the photo in a humorous manner. This specific kind of content is considered to be lighthearted and entertaining which evokes laughter in young male users. 22-year-old male participant said, “Most football clubs create their most interesting reels on Instagram. This is a good source of sports entertainment.” Thus, releasing some of their tension and boosting their self-esteem. However, these memes can promote masculinity stereotypes and promotions of negative agendas. This toxic masculinity being promoted creates pressure for the young make users and a fear of not fitting in or missing out on popular trends making them feel left out in community. This pressure lowers their self-esteem because of the immense need to conform to standards pf masculinity being set by the Instagram community.

**Men’s Fashion and luxury:** Another common form of content consumed by the young males is the display of fashion items for men such as shoes, jackets, men’s jewelry or overall men’s wear and luxurious materials such as cars, dream vacations, among others. These can be presented in video reels, feed or photo style. On the positive side, display of such luxury motivates the young males to work hard, get money and afford these luxurious items. In addition, they also get inspired or get fashion advice such that they dress better. 20-year-old

participant said, “I have a better fashion sense now because of the Male fashion accounts I follow. I really good about myself and I’m also very confident in how I look. I make heads turn everywhere I go”. This helps to boost their self-confidence which also boosts their self-esteem. However, on the negative side, the young males are left with feelings of being inadequate and low self-worth for those who might not contain the means to attain such items or lifestyles. This low feeling can mess with their self-esteem, hence lowering their self-esteem.

**Business Ventures and accounts:** Investment ideas, plans and advice is another form of content young males Instagram users consume. They follow accounts that offer business classes and training, development of business ideas and ways to make money. Most young males venture and enjoy this particular type of content. Aside from growing a business mindset, they are given the chance to formulate ways of using their Instagram accounts and presence for commercial purposes. This gives them a sense of purpose which in turn boosts their self-esteem.

As mentioned previously, the visual nature of Instagram presents opportunities for comparisons which a number of young male adults engage in, mostly upward social comparison. This can negatively affect their self-esteem in the following ways.

**Dissatisfaction with Body Image:** The frequent exposure to idealized body images on Instagram can lead to body dissatisfaction among the young males. They might be pushed to resort to unhealthy practices such as extreme dieting or excessive exercise to achieve these ideals, further harming their physical and mental health.

**Increased Anxiety and Depression:** The constant upward comparison to others and the pressure to live up to the standards promoted on Instagram can lead to anxiety and depression. Young males feel that they are constantly being judged or are not living up to the expectations set by their peers, role models and influencers. This often leads to feelings of inadequacy and isolation, thus, lowering their self-esteem. Additionally, the young men might feel like they are missing out on life experiences, portrayed on Instagram which can contribute to anxiety and a feeling of being incomplete and inferior.

**Self-Worth Issues:** The portrayal of success, popularity and attractiveness on Instagram can cause young males to constantly seek external approval. Their need for likes, comments and followers can drive behaviors that are not authentic, leading to a fragmented sense of identity and lower self-esteem when they are not approved.

#### **4.2.1 Conclusion**

These negative effects can be overcome. For example, by engaging the young males in media literacy education and promoting realistic content on Instagram which can help balance out the negative effects. In addition, we can build social networks online that provide a space for young males to discuss their feelings and experiences which can help them process and cope with the negative effects of Instagram.

According to the research and the data collected from participants, it is evident that Instagram has significant effects on the male self-esteem. The young male users of this social media platform find inspiration and motivation to become better versions of themselves. On the however side, the platform is a space that encourages feelings of inadequacy driven by upward comparison and the fear of being left out.

## **CHAPTER 5: Recommendations, limitations and conclusions.**

### **5.1 Limitations of the research**

Due to the nature of the research, a limited number of 40 participants was used. This, however, is a small number for statistical representation. This small number doesn't generalize the entire male population of youths in Uganda and the results are not entirely conclusive. Additionally, the long term and long-lasting effects of Instagram on self-esteem were not captured. It became difficult to measure whether the replies of the participants were determined by emotional factors such as their mood at that particular time of being interviewed.

Also, the subjective viewpoints of each participant. Where one interprets the effect as positive, another will interpret the same effect as negative. Defining a concrete conclusion proved to be a challenge.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

As per the limitations of this research, we therefore recommend future researchers to involve a larger number of participants for better statistical representation and generalization. Also, use diverse participant groups, from different universities, various backgrounds or different geographical locations. This will help in providing a more comprehensive understanding of who Instagram affects, why and how it does. Besides this, future researchers can make comparisons with other social media platforms to figure out if certain features, trends or cultures affect the young males differently as well as studying how Influencers are impacting the self-esteem of young male youths either negatively or positively.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The types of content consumed on Instagram play a significant role in shaping the self-esteem of young men. While the platform offers opportunities for connection and self-expression, it also presents challenges related to body image, lifestyle expectations, and peer comparison and pressure. By understanding these dynamics and implementing strategies to foster healthier online behaviors, the negative impact on self-esteem can be mitigated, leading to a more positive and supportive social media experience for young men. As media practitioners and communicators, it is upon us to be mindful of how we structure our content on Instagram taking into consideration and being mindful of how different demographics are affected and what exact forms of content affects them. Before posting content on Instagram, we should take into account the audience's characteristics and behaviours, the format of the message and how it

will affect the viewer, the language being used to pass on the message, among other critical considerations.

## APPENDIX A

### A few quotes from participants.

“For me, I was affected negatively for a long time and I deleted my Instagram account but later I redownloaded it and changed what the algorithm recommends. If you aren’t making money or using it as a stress relief, delete Instagram.”- 22-year-old participant.

“Instagram does not impact me at all. I customized my timeline in such a way that I regulate which accounts give me information. If not for this, I would probably be dealing with the esteem issues that a number of youths could be suffering from using the app”-22-year-old participant.

“Instagram honestly impacts me positively. I feel motivated each day. My algorithm is designed to bring me things I love. If you can’t be motivated by them, then you simply don’t want to.”-23-year-old participant.

“Most times, Instagram shows me that others have their lives figured out. I’m forced and pushed to work harder for myself.”-22-year-old participant.

“I saw a reel of a man gifting his very beautiful woman a luxurious car and I said to myself, I can’t manage that so will I ever get a beautiful woman. Sometimes I feel like a still have a long way to go to make it in life.”-23-year-old participant.

“It makes me feel like I’m being put on unnecessary pressure to have good things.”- 23-year-old participant.

“There are a lot of amazing things shared on Instagram especially by my agemates that make me feel I have not worked so hard.”-23-year-old participant.

“Instagram offers me motivational quotes and reels about inspiring achievements that boost my esteem.”-21-year-old participant.

“I am now more serious about my fitness because of Instagram.”- 20-year-old participant.

“My algorithm sometimes brings me depressing quotes. At some point it seemed like being depressed was a trend.”-20-year-old participant.

“To me, I don’t see how Instagram is adding much value to me. What I was interested in seeing is initially shifted. In every five reels when I scroll, only one of them is what I’m interested in

like football. The rest are of half-naked women or totally different unnecessary things.”-26-year-old participant.

“I have met a lot of people and friends on Instagram, in fact, I met my girlfriend through Instagram”-21-year-old participant.

“One time I had to pretend to be someone else because I wanted to fit in the group that I had joined in Instagram.”- 25-year-old participant.

“A few years back Instagram messed with my mental health. I had to delete it and take some time off it because I felt depressed most times. But then I redownloaded it and I now use it only when I really need to.”- 22-year-old participant.

## APPENDIX B

### Structured Questions for the printed questionnaire.

Title: Instagram's effects on male gender self-esteem.

My name is Pavesu Glory Chimwemwe and I am studying for a bachelor's degree in Journalism, Media and Communications at Uganda Christian University. I am conducting a research study as per the academic requirements for my bachelors'. I am kindly requesting for a few minutes of your time to fill out this form. There have been a lot of studies stationed towards understanding how the female gender's esteem has been influenced by Instagram. However, in this research we would like to understand how Instagram affects the way the male gender perceives themselves placing the focus on male youth. Your participation in this research study is fully voluntary and your feedback will strictly remain confidential and anonymous. Your responses will be highly insightful in helping us understand how Instagram posts have affected the esteem of the male gender.

\* Indicates required question

1. How old are you? \*

Below 18

18-25

25-30

Above 30

*Mark only one oval*

2. What is your course of study? \*

Social Sciences

Law

Agricultural sciences

Education

Divinity and Theology

Engineering, Design and Technology

Journalism, media and communication

Other

3. How often do you use Instagram? \*

Hourly

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Occasionally but not always

4. Do you follow any specific accounts on Instagram? If so, name a few.

5. Have you ever felt pressured to look or act a certain way based on Instagram content?

Yes

No

6. Have you ever felt pressured to abide by certain standards of masculinity on Instagram?

Yes

No

7. If yes, what pushed you to obey those standards?

8. Do you think Instagram fosters a positive or negative environment for male esteem? Explain why.

9. How do you think Instagram could be improved to promote healthier self-esteem among males?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Structured Questions for the one-on-one interviews.**

What is your name?

How old are you?

What course do you do at Uganda Christian University?

Do you have an active Instagram account?

How often do you use Instagram?

What form of content do you usually engage with on Instagram?

Do you think the content you engage with affects your self-esteem? Explain how.

Have you ever compared yourself to the individuals you see on Instagram?

If yes, how did it make you feel and what was your after-reaction?

Do you think Instagram fosters a healthy environment for male self-esteem? Explain how.

How do you think Instagram content could be improved to promote a healthier environment for the male self-esteem?

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