

**INSTAGRAM AND SELF-ESTEEM:
Impact on Young Lebanese Adult Females**

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LEA ABOU GHAZALY

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Ghazaly

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Notre Dame University - Louaize
Faculty of Humanities

Department of Media studies

We hereby approve the thesis of

Lea Abou Ghazaly

Candidate for the degree of advertising

Dr. Christy Mady


Supervisor, Chair

Dr. Jessica El-Khoury


Committee Member

Dr. Melhem Rechdan


Committee Member



Dr. Maria Bou Zeid, Chairpeson

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Abstract

A lot of studies have been conducted on social media's role in reducing self-esteem and life satisfaction but none of these studies was conducted on Lebanese women. Using the social comparison and social learning theories, this paper explores the psychological effects Instagram usage has on young adult Lebanese females.

A survey was sent out to a sample of 158 women aged from 18 to 35 years old using 9 different variables to measure how these women think and feel after being exposed to Instagram content related to fashion, beauty and luxurious lifestyle. Variables which formed the survey included mood, envy, upward comparisons, imitation, motivation for self-enhancement and self-esteem.

Results showed that using Instagram did not affect self-esteem but rather formed a motivation for self-enhancement; younger women aged from 18 to 25 felt envious of the content seen on Instagram and experienced mood swings when exposed to such content. Women, who were more financially well-off, were more likely to imitate Instagram content and after exposure to the content, optimistic women had more self-esteem than pessimistic women. Women with a high number of followers did upward comparisons. In sum, the majority of women were motivated to enhance themselves after seeing their Instagram homepage while others still felt jealous, envious and made upward comparisons leading them to a lower self-esteem

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social media is a big part of today's culture, forming an indispensable tool for our daily communication. What is seemingly highly visible on such platforms is content which is directly related to appearance including fit and sexy bodies, flawless skin, beautiful hair and faces.

Nigel Barber (2013) found out that women in general, are more concerned about their looks than men. Their appearance and how others evaluate them is of high importance to them. This is why women are more likely to get affected, in terms of self-comparison, especially when they are exposed to images of ideal women on social media. How can images portraying beautiful rich women with fit bodies and flawless skin, on social media affect another women's self-esteem? Does it make those females feel better or worse about themselves or does it have a neutral effect on them?

Instagram is a magnet for beauty brands, fashion and design. The site's main function is to upload photos enhanced through filters and applications. This is why it places emphasis on how things and people look. People edit and post on Instagram to gain the attention they are seeking. "Effortless perfection" is a term used in 2003 by researchers at Duke University to explain the pressure women are under to feel beautiful and fit without letting people notice that they did an effort, as they want people to think that they were born this way, without image editing. That effort is made invisible as none of these women detail how they prepared for their pictures or selfies. Taking the greatest selfie of the best side, in fact, takes a lot of work (Selingson, 2016).

Many studies by Nigel Barber (2013); Selingson (2016); Aspinwall and Taylor (1993) and Cherry (2018) were conducted on women's self-perception in relation to social media but few have examined Instagram and none has looked at Instagram and its effects on Lebanese women's self-esteem.

1.1 Thesis statement

Due to the rise of Instagram usage, people and especially women are bombarded with content related to beauty, luxury lifestyle and fitness especially since users can check their newsfeeds ever minute and that newsfeed supposedly shares much from the life of bloggers and influencers with normal users.

Using the social comparison and learning theories, this thesis explores the effects Instagram may have on young adult Lebanese women's self-esteem and life satisfaction.

1.2 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters:

In the first chapter of the thesis, the topic is introduced in addition to the thesis statement.

The second chapter of the thesis deals with the literature review and is divided into seven sections that discuss women's self-perception and self-esteem in relation to Instagram; it explains why and how Instagram is used by females, how selfies and attention can boost one's self-esteem and how people are affected by bloggers on Instagram. Instagram usage in Lebanon.

The third chapter deals with the theoretical frameworks used for the thesis which are the social comparison and social learning theories proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura.

The fourth chapter explains the quantitative methodology used for the thesis. The fifth chapter relates the findings of the survey that was done and compares those findings to what had been exposed in the literature review and theoretical framework chapters.

The last chapter, which is the conclusion, brings the entire thesis together and sums up the main contributions that the thesis made along with the encountered limitations during the research study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section surveys the scholarly literature on Instagram's effects on self-esteem among females. It first starts by describing the relationship between social media and how women perceive themselves. Then it explains the reasons why women are more involved in the process than men.

1.1 Social Media and Women's Self- Perception

Social media is becoming more prominent in people's everyday life (Cretti, 2015). Studying the effects that social media has on individuals is therefore important. Many studies have shown that social media use is responsible for eating disorders, body dissatisfaction and life dissatisfaction among young ladies (Ferguson, Muñoz, Garza & Galindo, 2014). Women who use social media and online blogs also have increased feelings of envy and are not satisfied with their life (Cretti, 2015). Social media use causes people to seek negative social comparisons with the ones they follow on social media websites and this leads to negative self-reporting (de Vries, D.A. & Kühne, 2015).

An experimental study conducted in 2015 showed that there was a relation between the use of social media and social comparisons. The sample of the study consisted of 120 undergraduate female students to examine whether or not they compared themselves with ideal media role models (Vogel et al, 2015). Those participants had to look for a Facebook profile from the same gender and age as their own profile. Researchers found out that people with high social comparison scores (SCS) had low self-esteem and negative perceptions about themselves. Another research done by Fleming (2017) surveyed 200 female students with regards to posting online and self-esteem. The research showed that those who considered that their value lied in

their appearance were more likely to post pictures of themselves online in order to seek validation through likes and positive comments (Fleming, 2017).

Viewers can be affected mentally by the content they consume on a daily basis if they are not careful. Lisa Mask, (2014) research assistant in Ottawa University, School of Psychology, conducted a study along with her colleagues Celine Blanchard and Amanda Baker on 91 Caucasian women with a 23.35 Body Mass Index (BMI) with a normal weight. Dividing her sample into two groups, Mask showed the first group a number of ads featuring healthy and fit women, and showed the other group ads that were not focused on the body at all. Results showed that females with a positive feedback about their body were those who watched the ads without any focus on the body, while the other group who was dissatisfied with their physical appearance were the ones exposed to the healthy and fit women (Mask, Blanchard & Baker, 2014).

An article written by Mathilda Gajanan (2015) about young women on Instagram and self-esteem explains the different views 50 different young adult women had about Instagram. One of the respondents, Michelle Linker, for instance was a 24-year-old, who felt insecure because of the pressure to always look good when she wanted to post a photo. Lindsay Correia, a 22-year-old said she liked to have control, by only showing the parts she wanted her followers to see. Summer Andrews, who was 18 years old, stated that whenever a picture did not get enough likes she would take it down. In addition to that, Essena O'Neil, an Australian teenager, who quit Instagram, described it as the “contrived perfection made to get attention” considering it a platform that was created for artificial and unrealistic images (Gajanan, 2015).

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A focus group study conducted on 51 female participants aged from 18 to 25 by Nicole Dion (2016) studied how women felt after being exposed to ideal images about beautiful, rich and popular females on social media. Some had answers such as: “they just show off their money and what they had and how they looked. Made me feel bad about myself and how I didn’t have that kind of money or look like that.” Others mentioned, “some made me feel bad about myself because they were skinny people in little clothes.” Such answers are negative. This showed that after exposure most of the participants felt uncomfortable when asked about what they think about these pictures (Dion, 2016)

Rae Jacobson (2017, February 5) writer and content engagement specialist at the Child Mind Institute wrote an online article entitled “Social Media and Self-Doubt” Jacobson (2017) examined cases whereby people would create pretend profiles that were different from who they really were in life. “It’s important to remember that posting edited pictures online or pretending your life is a little more glamorous than it is not in itself a problem,” says Jill Emanuele (qtd. in Jacobson, 2016) psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. “Social media alone is not the issue, but it can make the situation even harder (Jacobson, 2017). Rae Jacobson (2017) admits that: “People who create ideal online versions of themselves may feel depressed and fall in the gap between who they pretend to be online and who they really are”. Practicing being some fake person eight hours a day makes it harder to accept the less than perfect person one really is and therefore this can lead to having a distorted image of oneself thereby lower one’s self-esteem (Jacobson, 2017).

Even highly rich and famous people feel insecure when it comes to their Instagram news feed. John Legend’s wife, Chrissy Teigen, the American top model with more than 20 million

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Instagram followers, with around 800 thousand likes per post and 2 million views per video admitted that her news feed stresses her out and makes her hate her own body image.

She literally said:

my old ass will go on social media and I will look at the Photoshopping, Face tuning and everything that creates what is now a hit Instagram photo and I feel insanely inadequate because I would just never have that body I dream of (Teigen as qtd. in Borge, 2017).

Another user is Jessica Frelow (2018, April 15), an online blogger and writer, from University of Central Florida, who explained in her article “I Needed to Reclaim my Self-Esteem from Social Media” how Instagram kills people’s confidence especially when it comes to appearance. “Being on the older side of the millennial spectrum—I always designated myself as being immune to the culture. I took pride in having my own mind. Then social media blew up,” she said. Her first ever social media account was on Myspace as a teenager, she used it to upload songs she likes, listed her top 8 friends, and added cute pictures of her.

Unfortunately, social media had shifted from a friendly place into a competition. She describes Instagram by saying: “Over the years, I have witnessed the transition of social networking. It has morphed from a friendly place to engage my friends into the ultimate contest.” Frelow believes that people burry their self-esteem on Instagram.

The platform developed this amazing skill for people to reinforce their self-confidence. She explained that she used social media in the past for emotional purposes such as posting pictures of her and people she loved without focusing on her looks before posting while recently,

she had become her own picture judge when scrolling through her photos; this made a highly critical person out of her and a victim of any perceived flaw. Such thoughts never got out of her mind and she felt herself becoming superficial and always had the urge to look good: “How *does* my hair look? Can you see the acne under my makeup? Is this the best angle to hide my double chin? Jesus, why is my stomach so round!” (Frelow,2018).

Frelow (2018) described the lives of people she used to follow on Instagram and how she was unconscious that her newsfeed was going to affect her mentally. When scrolling through her Instagram posts, she was exposed to more and more beautiful, elegant and rich people. All of them had an almost perfect life anyone could dream of. Most of them were perfectly shown as if they came right out of a magazine.

Unfortunately, she was unable to realize that these were having a psychological effect on her self-esteem and even her personal life. She always felt bad after being exposed to such content but did not know the main cause. Since that time, she had the urge to contour her face before posting but failed. She described her emotional state when she felt out of the box by saying: “I was disgusted with my inability to achieve perfection. I had watched hundreds of videos of other women doing it, but I still couldn’t pull it off. It seems silly, that I felt defeated. But I felt ugly” (Frelow,2018).

Andrea D. Vazzana (2017, September 1), psychologist and professor at NY University specialized in diseases related to self-esteem. She claimed that her patients always felt insecure when it came to social media explaining that some adults who were heavy users act as if they were middle school kids and these types of people criticized themselves because of exposure to Instagram’s curated images and assumed that everyone else was living lavishly. She considered

social media to be a tool that empowered the negative opinions people already had about themselves. When users often compared themselves to bloggers, models or ideal people they were exposed to, they tended to examine, among other things, particular areas of their face, hair, body and lifestyle. This is what is termed as selective attention. For instance, if a woman was always self-conscious about her hips, she might stare at someone's hips through Instagram and would be likely to think that the other woman's hips were better than hers just because of the socially constructed images she was exposed to and which were enforced through social media and more specifically Instagram. Her hips would then be perceived as a weakness and that would negatively affect her self-esteem (Borge, 2017).

Even if some do not live to impress others, the need to feel worthy is significant. In our world today, worthiness is linked to the number of likes a person gets so people constantly reevaluate themselves if they did not get that much appreciation through comments, compliments and likes and this would negatively affect their mood. The main concern here is: Are people changing for themselves or to fit other societal/Instagram standards? (Frelow, 2017).

1.2 High or Low Self-Esteem

A study conducted by Mahita Gajanan (2017), news reporter at *Times* magazine, on 1500 teens and young adults about how several social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram affect people's mind and mood showed that Instagram was the worst platform affecting the respondents' wellbeing and health since its usage was associated with high levels of anxiety, depression and what we call FOMO or the Fear Of Missing Out. Yet, some respondent got positive results related to self-expression and self-identity. YouTube was the platform that was most positively correlated with the

respondents' wellbeing, then twitter came in second place followed by Facebook and Snapchat while Instagram was left at the end of the list with the lowest marks of positive scores by participants.

The United Kingdom's Royal Society for Public Health (2014) surveyed 1479 respondents aged from 14 to 24 years old throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The survey which was done between February and May, 2014 investigated how online platforms impacted respondents' psychological and mental health. Social networking was found to be associated with benefits including self-identity, self-expression, creating bonds and emotional support. YouTube had high scores for raising awareness about other people's health experiences and accessing trustworthy and credible information leading to lower levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness.

Other networks including Instagram received negative scores related to sleeping quality, bullying and body image directly associated with more depression and anxiety. The study also suggested that people who spent more than two hours a day on social media sites were more likely to suffer from psychological disorders. For instance, seeing friends constantly on holiday, enjoying nights out and always having the best looks, and clothes made voyeurs feel like they missed out while others were enjoying the ideal and perfect life. Such feelings create upward social comparisons followed by jealousy, negative attitudes and a distorted image of the self.

People use these social sites while promoting themselves with unrealistic posts using filters and editing to look perfect and these create feelings of low self-esteem for the ones

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exposed. This explain the reason behind particular photos becoming the center of the universe for some leading to anxiety (Cretti, 2015).

Dave Bowden (2018, August 9) an online blogger holding a degree in journalism is the author of the Amazon's best-selling book, *Ready to Roar: How Shy, Quiet, Self-Doubting Guys Become Strong, Charming, Self-Confident Men*. Bowden is also the founder of Irreverent Gent, an interactive website that helps guys keep their confidence by supporting their mindsets, bodies, and skill by engaging people with the required information to boost their self-esteem or by inspiring others to take action and create posts that boost their confidence. In his article, "19 Eye-Opening Social Media and Self-Esteem Statistics Guys Need to Know" Bowden (2018, August 9) states that social media use affects self-esteem.

It may be subjective, but from your own personal experience you've probably noticed how easy it is for feelings of insecurity, envy and jealousy to pop up when you scroll through your friends' feeds – and how those feelings can triple when scrolling through the highly curated feeds of influencers (Bowden,2018).

On the other hand, social media use gives people a sense of belonging, comfort and sense of community, especially if those platforms were used to contact long distance friends and family members (Bowden, 2013).

Even if it seems obvious that social media has direct impact on people's self-esteem, it is still hard to measure. However, researchers from the United Kingdom have helped with pointing out at social media's impact. A news article titled "Instagram Ranked Worst for Young People's Mental Health"(2017,May 19) revealed the findings of a survey that was conducted by The Royal Society for Public Health_about people's mental health and self-perception in

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relationship to the use of social media on a sample of 1500 candidates aged between 16 to 25. The results were the following: Instagram was the worst medium for self-esteem, YouTube was the least damaging followed by Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. Four out of five candidates in the UK aged between 16 to 24 had reported that using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat made their anxiety worse, more than two thirds of the candidates wanted platforms to warn users if photos they were exposed to on their news feeds were digitally edited, 20% of young people admitted waking up in the middle of the night to check their social media accounts. This made them 300% more likely to feel tired the day after when compared to others who had slept normally, 70% of respondents reported receiving some kind of kind of emotional support during hard times.

Shirley Cramer, (2017, May 19) chief executive at the Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH), a charity dedicated to people's health and wellbeing said:

Social media has been described as more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol, and is now so entrenched in the lives of young people that it is no longer possible to ignore it when talking about young people's mental health issues. Through our Young Health Movement, young people have told us that social media has had both a positive and negative impact on their mental health. It's interesting to see Instagram and Snapchat ranking as the worst for mental health and wellbeing – both platforms are very image-focused and it appears they may be driving feelings of inadequacy and anxiety in young people (RSPH,2017).

An online article “Is Instagram Ruining your Self-Esteem? Here's How to Cope” written by Jonathan Borge (2017), explained that every month there were 700 million Instagram users

who were exposed to many curated images. Conversely, Instagram might be a fun tool to keep up with friends, educate or inform people about the life of celebrities.

Unfortunately, most users fall into the dark side when they end up envying the ideal life of other rich people such as wishing to check in the most expensive hotel, owning a yacht and wearing fancy designer brands. All of the images were not copies of the actual life. Users filter their own news feeds and accept to be exposed to fake, ideal image even if they were aware.

To illustrate, Borge gave the example of a beautiful white swan floating on the surface of the river. If a person tried to see underneath the water, they would only see the animal's two palmate flapping away so that it would keep its balance while swimming. This type of analogy goes well with Instagram users; the bloggers and famous people show the world what they really want them to be exposed to but not the reality. They might not know what is hidden in one's life since users are only exposed to the surface (living the perfect multibillionaire life, the best images with professional photoshoots, amazing body shapes, the healthy long hair (hair extensions) and the flawless pretty faces with perfect noses, plumped lips and baby soft skin (Borge, 2017).

Jessica Frelow (2015) compares social media in her article "I Needed to Retain my Self-Esteem from Social Media" to an amusement park. Frelow (2015) said that social media was for people with strong hearts and big minds. Users were competing more and more with each other subconsciously to be more pleasing but few were the ones who believed that the risks were also expanding. "I eventually realized that I couldn't compete. I couldn't portray something that I wasn't," Frelow (2015) said. The newsfeeds have the will and power to dictate and teach who individuals want to be. If people failed to be that fake person they dreamed of because of lack of

money, they lose their self-confidence. Once they lose it, they would either no longer post, criticize others by rejecting posts and that would infiltrate their minds and put them in a bad mood. To envy others and feel jealous had become extremely easy since people believed they knew what everyone possessed, how they looked and what they were doing every second in their life. Frelow (2015) clearly said “The life that I was leading felt inadequate. The slope is slippery. If you are not careful, it is easy to fall victim to it” (Apr 15, 2015).

1.3 A Platform for Females

According to Alice Marwick (2017, December 5) social media researcher at Fordham University half a billion users were using Instagram. The platform contains various groups and communities that focus on everything from promoting healthy body images to sports cars. Most users on the platform are focused on the idea of how people should look and live. “With the most mainstream Instagram users, we see very conventional beauty standards and aesthetics,” said Marwick (2017, December 5) who noted that it was the remarkable emphasis on beauty and appearance that seemed to be attracting women to the site (Marwick, 2017).

A study (2012) about social media addiction among youngsters examined the hours spent on social networks and surveyed 400 college students from both genders. The study uncovered that females used social networking 2.8 hours per day compared to males who only use them for 1.81 hours daily (Vemeren, 2016). Moreover, Katrine Tiidenberg (2017, December 13), a sociologist and internet professor at Tallinn University explained that more women were involved in Instagram because historically, mothers were the ones responsible for family pictures in various cultures. She described those pictures as “snapshot photography” which fall under the same reality as Instagram images. She declared that Instagram was a modern incarnation of an

old tradition dating back to the 19th century when upper class women put together and showed picture albums of their family and friends (Tiidenberg, 2017). The study led to the conclusion that Instagram was gender dynamic. This explained why wanting to be recognized became a need for women and this was why they always wanted to capture the ideal shot and put lots of time and effort into their pictures. This also explained the higher number of women Instagram users. According to comScore, a company that measures internet traffic, the April 2016 data showed that out of 108 million accounts, 42% of Instagram users were males compared to 58% females.

Rachael Simmons (2017), a gender researcher who conducted studies on teen girls, concurs that women dominate Instagram and visual platforms which form tools of empowerment as women modify their appearance with beauty apps and filters. Although men use these apps, but girls in particular grew up being told that their value lied in their appearance., the more women were exposed to perfect multibillionaire life and beauty images (fit bodies, flawless skin...) on social media, the more it affected their self-esteem and life satisfaction and the more they were likely to compare themselves to others either in a negative or positive way. It seemed that women were more involved than men in the process because they had a higher tendency towards editing their images and focusing on their appearance (Simmons, 2017). “Young women dominate Instagram and visual platforms in general. Instagram gives you the power to modify your appearance in a way that’s practically on par with makeup and other beauty products”, explained Simmons (2017, August 19).

The beautifying app Perfect 365 with the tagline “Create a World of Beauty” is used by Kim Kardashian whenever she edits her pictures to post to her 72.6 billion followers. Other

applications such as Face Tune, beauty plus and Visage Lab, can all remove pimples, make the skin flawless or tanned, whiten teeth, make the body thinner, and augment breasts among other things. Men also use such apps but women do so more:

Everyone wants to be the most beautiful girl in the room. Instagram provides a platform where you can enter that competition every day... The Internet has been called a great democratizer, and perhaps what Instagram has done is let anyone enter the beauty pageant (Simmons as qtd. in Selingson, 2016).

According to a young woman interviewed in the book, *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenager* by Nancy Jo Sales people should not be surprised if teen girls spend much time and effort trying to have a certain reputation on the site with flattering comments such as “Too hot! Gorgeous! You look great!” on other girls’ selfies (Sales qtd. in Selingson, 2016)

A study by Nielsen (2017, January 24), an international research information and measurement company that conducts market research and provides insights and data about what people watch, listen to & buy, showed that women spend around 10 minutes browsing social sites through mobile web and apps everyday while in contrast, men spend less than seven minutes. Behind every social platform stand billions of women. The diversity was not that surprising, but examining each platform on a specific level might be surprising. Among social media users, a higher percentage of women use Facebook, Pinterest, Snapchat and Instagram (Nielsen, 2017). “It’s no wonder that Instagram has 14 million monthly users, with 45% of its users aged 18-26, a considerably higher percentage of younger users than Facebook”, said Abbie Schofield (2017).

1.4 Let Me Take a Selfie!

People post selfies to get attention as that provides a boost to their self-esteem. This happens through the amount of likes they get (Pounders, Kowalczyk, Stowers, 2016). The ones who have high self-esteem will not let a low number of likes or comments bother them. Alblooshi (2015) studied the relationship between a person's self-esteem and the number of selfies this person posts. Results showed that people with low self-esteem did not take selfies as much as people with high self-esteem because people with higher self-esteem had more confidence and felt more comfortable with how they look (Alblooshi, 2015).

Instagram allows its users to post pictures for other people to see. Teenagers and young adults post pictures to get attention; however, if those users did not receive the attention they needed, it destroyed their self-esteem.

Moreover, there was a wide range of reasons that explained why people posted selfies. According to Hum, Chamberlin, Hambright, Portwood, Schat, and Bevan (2011), people are motivated to use Instagram to enhance their self-esteem and be socially desired. So, people may be more motivated to display pictures of themselves when they looked or were dressed in a certain way to attract others. This created a situation whereby people started comparing themselves to others on social media. Another reason for taking selfies was the need for popularity or doing specific things to look popular (Wang, Yang, & Haigh, 2015, p. 3).

Wang, Yang, and Haigh (2015) conducted a study about the need for popularity. Results showed that participants with high scores in need for popularity posted more selfies. The researchers also tested how viewing a selfie influences self-esteem and the results showed that viewing a selfie did not only have a significant but also negative effect on self-image.

Significantly, the more frequently people viewed selfies on social media, the lower their self-esteem, and therefore a feeling of decreased life satisfaction (Wang, et. al, 2015).

1.5 Bloggers and Instagram

On Instagram, which is basically a photo sharing application it is very hard not to be affected by things or people that look perfect based on imposed societal and media beauty standards such as perfect skin, golden tans, skinny bodies, travel adventures for couples, luxurious places to go out and the hashtag “#goals” list is endless.

While the platform provides a motivation to many when they access such perfect images these voyeurs who are normal people end up comparing themselves to those bloggers while forgetting what this blogger, influencer or famous person had not posted about their real life or the hidden story behind the fake image they are exposing. What is meant by fake is that this image might have been Photoshopped, or taken by a professional photographer who is their friend or simply they had the worse day in their life but they are just covering it up with something happy (Schofield, 2017).

The Australian teenager Essena O’Neil (2016) with 0.5 million followers deleted her Instagram account after declaring that it was all about artificial perfection controlling people’s life and making them obsessed with their virtual popularity, something which ruins their self-esteem. Moreover, the number of women Instagrammers who promote the fact that they feel confident with their body is increasing. No matter what size they are (very skinny, plus-sized...) they just feel in shape and encourage self-love (Schofield, 2017). This type of women is most of the time white, skinny, gorgeous, non-disabled and has more privileges. An exceptional example would be that of Iskra Lawrence an over-sized model with 3.2 million followers who posts self-

pictures in bikinis without retouching them and known with her striking caption: “everyBODY is beautiful”. All in all, this type of bloggers who represent a positive inspiration and realistic image still exists but the number is quite small (O’Neil, 2016)

1.6 Instagram Usage in Lebanon

Worldwide, Instagram has 14 million users monthly with 39% of those users aged between 16 and 24 years old thereby forming a younger target than Facebook users. According to Napoleon Cat (2017, April 11), a website showing statistical data about Lebanese Instagram users, Instagram has 1.1 million users in Lebanon and half of them are females. 34% of these users are aged between 18 to 24, 30% are aged from 25 to 34, 14% are 35 to 44 years old, 9% from 13 to 17 years old, 8% from 45 to 54 and lastly only 5 % aged 55 or above (Instagram Demographic Users in Lebanon, 2017).

According to Clouds Media (2016), a digital media company located in Lebanon and the UAE, Instagram has become the most popular online photo sharing platform in Lebanon. In 2016, 400 billion monthly users were active on the app worldwide including more than 950,000 among them in Lebanon. 85% of Lebanese Instagram users accessed the app on average every 90 minutes (How Lebanese Businesses Are Using Instagram, 2016).

Everyleader.net (2018), a website specialized in providing statistical data on media in the Middle East mentioned that there are 4 million active social media users in Lebanon, 2 million out of 4 are monthly active Instagram consumers and 52% of these constitute women while 48% are men (Every leader, 2018).

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According to Arab Social Media report (2017) series which works each year on analyzing social media trends, and growth across 22 Arab countries, Lebanon is ranked as the fourth out of nineteen other Arab countries with 360,000 active users. Saudi Arabia came in the 1st rank with 2,100,000 users, United Arab Emirates was the 2nd with 1,200,000 users and Kuwait was third with 570,000 active accounts (Instagram Arab world, 2017).

Rabih K (2018, May 16), a Lebanese young blogger wrote an online article on lifestyle magazine's website explaining how rich kids of Instagram spend their fortunes. In his article, he reported results from the Business Insider explaining that Lebanon is the 12th country with the most billionaires worldwide and the country's most affluent youngsters show how they spend their family fortunes. A page called "Rich Kids Beirut" was created to show and report on the daily rich people of the Lebanese elite.

From designer brands to expensive cars, this small country has a big share of rich young adults (Rabih K, 2018). The examples of pictures being shared everyday were endless, and have diverse themes: the best views from five star hotels, enjoying Eid/Christmas in style, my personal coach is better than yours, couple goals with a good looking boyfriend, before takeoff in the VIP airport lounge and first class seats, fancy nightclubs, well-presented expensive meals, newest make-up kits, ladies doing their hair/make-up at famous/expensive salons. How would regular users who could not afford all these things feel after endless exposure? Would this motivate them to work harder and get what they desire or would it make them feel bad and hate their current status?

Sarah Zeaiter (2018, February 20) is a Lebanese blogger/comedian with more than 200k followers on Instagram. Her account name is Blogger Wannabe as she constantly criticizes the

Lebanese influencer's scene in funny and short videos. When Sarah was asked about the messages she tries to convey and the purpose behind the content she posted this was her answer (2018, February 20):

I'm trying to communicate that the lives you see these bloggers and influencers lead are not real. Don't get me wrong, a lot of the influencers are my friends, and I know how they live. I'm sitting right next to them when they put up a post. It's all acting. They are professionals, and they're doing their job. They get paid to look great and post what they post. I don't blame them. This is what they do for a living, and they support their families doing it. In reality, these girls are like you and me. They live regular lives – they just happen to pose and take photos of every occasion (Itani, 2018).

1.7 Media Influence

Media plays an important role in social comparisons. Extensive research was done on media's social and psychological effects. When it comes to the social comparison theory, in most cases women tend to engage in upward comparisons with the target they are influenced by on the social media platforms; this results in lower self-esteem and negative feelings. Most women have the opportunity to make upward comparisons on a daily basis by comparing themselves to a societal ideal. "Social comparisons have become a relevant mechanism for learning about the appearance-related social expectations among peers and for evaluating the self in terms of those standards" (Jones, 2001, P. 647).

Even though males tended to do upward comparisons, research suggests that females were the ones who made more upward comparisons and compared themselves with non-real high standard

images they saw in the media (Strahan, Wilson, Cressman & Buote, 2006). Ads, movies and TV portray women as powerful, thin, beautiful, successful, and independent so viewers and especially other women exposed to these images perceive these images as real. The same applies to social media platforms such as Instagram where these images became more widely spread and because social media made it easier for people to compare their self to the ideal.

Women who make upward comparisons may not do so for self-motivation purposes; these comparisons mostly affect their view of self negatively (Wohlford, Kathryn, Lochman, Barry, Tammy, 2004).

Self-perceived comparisons and similar features with role models on social media platforms can also affect both genders' self-esteem. The more a person has self-perceived similarities with a chosen role model the more their self-esteem increases, while having less similarities can decrease self-esteem. Social comparison with people who society appreciates and thinks are better off on social media can lead to a negative emotional state and self-pity. The want for social comparison can cause FOMO (fear of missing out) and obsessive checking of social media accounts and personal profiles on Instagram (Wohlford, Kathryn, Lochman, Barry, Tammy, 2004).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical frameworks that are used for the study of this thesis. It describes the social comparison theory, its types of comparisons derived from the theory and the social learning theory.

2.1 Social Comparison Theory

In our social world, everyone compares themselves to others whether they were famous celebrities receiving exposure in the media, friends, or co-workers. In psychology, social comparison theory explains these evaluations that people make among themselves and others (Cherry, 2018).

The social comparison theory has its origins in the field of psychology and was introduced by Leon Festinger in 1954. The belief was that people have a thirst for accurate self-evaluations. Individuals compare themselves to others to measure their own opinions while defining their true identity and reducing their uncertainties (Festinger, 1954).

Festinger (1954) proposed that people often assess themselves and this assessment is mostly done through comparing themselves to others. Individuals make all types of judgments about themselves. One of the ways of doing it is through socially comparing themselves and evaluating the self in relation to others.

To show what Festinger meant, it would be useful to take the example of a fashion top model. That top model had just signed up for a modelling competition where the one with the

best looks and the finest cat walk would be chosen. In evaluating her skills and looks, she would compare her appearance and performance to other models in the process. She might compare herself to the other members of the competition and in particular, those who she viewed as better than her than those who were worse. She may also compare herself to other fitness models that were more muscular and had different body types (Cherry, 2018).

Festinger held the belief that people fall in this comparison process to evaluate and define themselves. If the top model, mentioned in the example earlier, found that her looks and abilities did not measure up to her peer's talents, she would be motivated to achieve more and improve her abilities or the comparisons might make her feel worse about herself and lower her self-esteem (Cherry,2018).

Usually people compare themselves to others who have similar characteristics (gender, age, background, etc...). These comparisons can sometimes be healthy actions of development to make one motivated to progress. On the other hand, many people make irrational comparisons to others who have achieved a higher level than they have leading them to depression and anxiety about their self-image. The attraction with celebrity's world and the frequency of social media has only worsened the problem of social comparison, leading people to endless possible comparisons, many of which appear flawless online (Nanay, 2018).

2.2 Hypotheses of Social Comparison Theory

In a book called *Social Comparison Processes*, Festinger (1954) proposed a number of hypotheses pertaining to the Social Comparison theory (SCT) such as people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing their opinions and abilities to others. With the absence of resources to measure one's skills, the person will then just simply base his evaluations by

subjectively comparing himself with others; people who compare themselves with similar subjects produce accurate judgments of their capabilities. Festinger further suggested that social comparisons result in uniformity meaning that differences can be reduced between the evaluator and comparison group if others were persuaded with their personal beliefs to achieve uniformity.

The first one states humans have an urge for evaluating others. The way a person thinks resides inside his/her ideas and abilities. Consequently, this explains that people's behaviour, attitude and actions is an outcome of beliefs or whatever they might think of (Festinger, 1954). A dancer student can evaluate his/her dancing ability by comparing himself/herself with someone who has more experience in the field. Evaluation of dancing ability is based on how close and similar this dancer can get to the one who is considered to him/her as the best dancer (Festinger, 1954).

Another hypothesis states that people cannot evaluate their opinions and abilities without comparing them to other people's opinions and abilities. In reference to the actual situation they are in, people tend to compare opinions but if that physical scenario is unavailable, there is no way an individual can validate his/her opinions and abilities. This can simply result in a biased or subjective opinion (Psychology notes, 2017). To clarify, let's say you would want to assess how rich you are. You must at least have a big revenue, luxurious house, nice car, and travel to expensive destinations and to go to fancy restaurants. However, with the absence of materials to really measure these criteria, we cannot but base this assessment and opinion to other people who might be on one hand richer or less rich on the other hand (Psychology notes, 2017).

Much criticism emerged regarding Festinger's theory when it comes to similarity in comparisons. Deutsch and Krauss (1965) claimed that individuals actually seek out others who

are different when comparing because in this way the person will have a valued self-knowledge, as demonstrated in research. There was also uncertainty about the importance of similarity as Goethals and Darley (1977) suggested that people prefer to compare those who are similar only on related traits such as thoughts, characteristics or abilities so that their confidence will increase for value judgments, however those different attributes are preferred when validating one's beliefs.

2.3 Types of Social Comparison

There are two types of social comparison: downward and upward. First, the downward comparison was introduced by Willis in 1981 (Willis, 1981). As its name indicates, downward social comparison is when a person looks down on others as being worse than themselves. It is considered as a self-protective excuse that people use to evaluate themselves and feel better about their personal current situation.

On the other hand, upward comparisons are made when one looks up at others and will therefore feel inferior. In their book *Some Affective Consequences of Social Comparison and Reflection Processes: The Pain and Pleasure of Being Close* Tesser, Millar and Moore (1988) proposed that social comparisons with people who were superior or also called upward comparisons, could lower self-esteem whereas downward comparisons elevate one's self-esteem (Gibbons, 1986). Downward comparison has a positive effect in increasing one's subjective well-esteem (Willis, 1981).

While social comparison theory suggested that upward comparisons can lower self-esteem, Collins (1995) indicated that this is not always the case. Collins explained that individuals make upward comparisons when they compare themselves with someone or a group

that they perceive as better than themselves in order to improve their self-perception and be motivated to create a better positive image about themselves. Upward social comparisons are made to evaluate one's self image and improve themselves hoping that self-enhancement would also occur.

It was also suggested that upward comparisons might be a motivation for people to improve and progress. A study found that people who were on diet used upward social comparisons most of the time by posting pictures of fit people on their refrigerators. These images served as both a reminder of their weight and as an inspiration in their quest towards their goal (Collins, 1995). Simply, downward comparisons can make people feel better about themselves while upward comparisons make people motivated to achieve more or reach higher goals.

2.4 Concepts of Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's original theory has undergone several changes. However, many fundamental aspects remain so it is very important to understand the motivations that cause social comparisons, and their particular types. These motives include: self-enhancement, maintaining a positive self-evaluation, high or low self-esteem and the mood the subject is into (Psychology notes, 2018).

2.4.1 Self-Evaluation

According to Thorton and Arrowood (1966), one of the functions of social comparison is self-evaluation because it is through this process that a person engages in social comparison. Each person's goals differ from the other; this is why people choose a comparison target that has

specific characteristics that resemble them (Wood,1989). Research suggested that most individuals think that choosing a similar target helps ensure that self-evaluation is accurate. However, the accuracy of self-evaluation may not be the main goal of social comparisons since people do not always act as balanced self-evaluators (Wood, 1989).

2.4.2 Self-Enhancement

Certain individuals may seek self-enhancement to improve their self-esteem. They might eliminate the information gained by social comparison to view themselves more positively and further set their self-enhancement goals. They may also choose to make upward (comparing themselves to someone better off) or downward (comparing themselves to someone worse off) comparisons, depending on which strategy would further their self-enhancement goals. They may also avoid making comparisons, or avoid making certain types of comparisons.

Moreover, when a person believes that their skill is low in a certain place; they will avoid upward social comparisons. People engaging in social comparison with the goal of self-enhancement are different than those engaging in comparison for self-evaluation goals. In this case, people may not seek a target that is similar to themselves. For instance, if a similar characteristic between the person and its target is seen as a risk because of the target's higher achievement, the individual may regard the similarity with less importance (Wood, 1989). Leon Festinger also introduced the notion of cognitive dissonance which is related to this same idea:

Cognitive dissonance is the mental discomfort (psychological stress) experienced by a person who simultaneously holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values. This

discomfort is triggered by a situation in which a person's belief clashes with new evidence perceived by that person. When confronted with facts that contradict personal beliefs, ideals, and values, people will find a way to resolve the contradiction in order to reduce their discomfort (Festinger, 1962).

Thus, to reduce the cognitive dissonance, one is willing to change the cognitive representation of the target, so that the belief remains intact (Festinger, 1962).

2.4.3 Self-Esteem and Mood

Aspinwall and Taylor (1993) looked at self-esteem as a moderator that makes individuals choose between upward or downward social comparisons. Downward comparisons in cases where individuals feel their self-esteem is threatened produced more favourable self-evaluations.

2.4.3.1 Instagram and Self-Esteem

According to Aspinwall and Taylor (1993) upward comparisons are good only if the individuals making the comparisons have a high self-esteem, because such comparisons gave them more motivation and hope than the downward social comparisons. However, if these individuals have a threatened self-esteem, they reported that upward comparisons had more negative results than downward comparisons. The ones with a low self-esteem or who were experiencing some sort of risk in their life (such as doing bad at work, or people with cancer) tend to favor downward comparisons over upward comparisons. The only way to improve their mood is by making downward comparisons. For those with low self-confidence, downward social comparisons improved their bad mood and gave them a feeling of hope and motivation (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1993).

2.4.3.2 Mood

People with a negative affect or mood improve it through the upward comparisons they do so regardless of how high their self-esteem is. Moreover, individuals with high and low self-esteem, with a positive mood, would further elevate their mood more by making upward comparisons. However, for those who have recently experienced setbacks in their life or have a low self-esteem, making upward social comparisons results in a more negative affect.

Self-esteem and the presence of a threat in a person's life are two moderators that influence whether an individual does upward or downward comparisons (Wood, 1989).

2.5 Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory which is closely related to the social comparison theory was proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura. The theory posits that individuals learn through observation and social behaviour. To be able to understand what drives people to feel jealous and the causes affecting their self-esteem when exposed to images on Instagram, it is important to understand the basic tenants of social learning theory. Individuals, according to the theory, learn new behaviours and actions by simply observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1986). Learning, then, is a mental process which occurs in a social context and can happen through observation or direct teaching, even in the absence of motor reproduction which is imitating the model's behaviour or looks (Bandura 1977). In addition to behaviour observation, learning can occur by observing rewards or punishments, also known as the process of vicarious reinforcement; a tendency to reproduce actions that society is rewarding.

When society rewards a specific behaviour, it would continue and be duplicated but when a specific behaviour is punished, it would most likely end (Bandura 1977). This idea is closely related to Instagram and posting images. When people appreciate Instagram content posted, that content gets more likes and positive comments. When users are exposed to a certain type of content through observation and realize or learn this is the one which is being appreciated, they would post similar content to gain attention from others. So, people start reproducing and imitating others to get rewarded by a number of likes, followers and pleasing comments. Once they fail to do that, they feel punished for not getting a certain amount of expected attention and will feel excluded especially if they fail for any reason (financial, beauty...) to be like and have the life of the desired model they wanted to reach of the platform.

Bandura proposed four mediational processes for the social learning theory:

- The first one is *attention*; it is to what extent one pays attention to and notices being exposed to the behaviour. Behaviours that grab the attention are remembered (Bandura 1986). This is important to understand how since a behaviour may be very influential to the extent that people start imitating it.
- The second process is *retention*, which explains how far a behaviour can be memorable. Most behaviours are noticed but not all are remembered and therefore may not be imitated later on (Bandura 1986). Therefore, when a behaviour is observed, memory is highly important when speaking of retention because social learning is not instant, and needs to refer to a memory.
- The third process is called *reproduction* which is being able to achieve the same behaviour that the model had just made. People are exposed to many behaviours each

day, but it is not possible to imitate and reproduce all of them O (Bandura 1986). An example is a 90-year-old lady who can barely walk, but likes to watch a dancing ice show. She may like and appreciate the act/ behaviour but she is would not be capable of doing it physically. This certainly influences the decision of whether or not to imitate the behaviour.

- Last but not least, motivation: or the extent to which people are willing to do the behaviour and the reasons that motivate them to reproduce desired behaviours. The answer is simple: rewards and punishment that come after a behaviour which are considered by the observer.

According to Bandura, if the rewards are balanced with the perceived costs (if there are any), then the behaviour will be more likely to be imitated by the observer. If the vicarious reinforcement (imitating when the behaviour has rewards) is not important enough to the observer, then the behaviour would not be imitated (Bandura 1986).

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Instagram's usage can have both positive and negative effects. Making upward social comparisons when exposed to content on the platform doesn't always lower self-esteem, create feelings of envy and bad mood. Some women might feel excluded if they do not reproduce or imitate the content they see on Instagram which is why they do so to gain social acceptance either by monitoring the attention they get as in likes and followers or by reproducing the looks or behaviour they like. On the other hand, making upward comparisons can result in feelings of motivation for women's self enhancement which will elevate women's self-esteem.

Taking the discussion in the literature review and theoretical framework chapters into consideration, the following hypotheses and research questions for the thesis were developed:

Research Questions

RQ1: Does Instagram use affect women's self-esteem?

RQ2: Do Instagram images form a motivation for self-enhancement?

RQ3: Do people evaluate themselves more positively or negatively when making upward social comparison with regards to Instagram images?

Hypotheses

H1: The younger a woman is the more likely her mood will change with Instagram content.

H2: The younger a woman is, the more she is likely to envy the content seen on Instagram.

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H3: The older a woman is, the less she compares herself to others.

H4: Upward comparisons are made by women who have more followers

H5: The richer a woman is, the more likely she is to imitate

H6: Instagram is a motivation for self-enhancement

H7: Optimistic women have more self-esteem than pessimistic ones.

H8: The more a woman uses Instagram, the more her self-esteem decreases.

H9: The more likes and followers a person receives, the more their self-esteem increases.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter discusses the research design, the sample used, the different variables to examine along with the data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Design

The research design used for the thesis is the quantitative approach that deals with numerical analysis and statistical data collection either through questionnaires and surveys or by looking up at existing statistical data with the usage of computerized techniques (Mesly & Olivier, 2015). This type of research focuses on gathering numbers and data to generalize across groups of people to provide analysis about a specific phenomenon. The goal when conducting a quantitative research study is to determine the relationship between two things: an independent variable and dependent variable for a specified sample. Quantitative research designs can be either descriptive or analytical (Mesly & Olivier, 2015). Descriptive subjects are usually measured once and correlations and relationships are established between two or more variables. Experimental subjects are measured before and after the research and the study establishes causality.

This thesis deals with descriptive subjects to determine the relationship between being exposed to Instagram's news feed, self-esteem and life satisfaction.

3.2 Variables

The variables used for this thesis were drawn from the hypotheses which were formulated based on the literature review and the theoretical frameworks. The variables of the study are:

- **Mood** is a temporary state of mind or feeling. After spending time on their Instagram account viewing posts related to beauty, fashion, fitness, luxurious life, travel & leisure, the respondents were asked how they were most likely to feel. Three items were used to measure mood using a Likert-type scale from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and included items such as “Fitness posts make me feel anxious about my body image” and “The more followers I receive, the more satisfaction I get ($\alpha=.751$, $m= 2.99$, $s d=.84$).
- **Envy** is the ultimate desire to have someone else’s qualities, possessions or belongings. This variable was measured by asking respondents if they wished they had a better life like another person, or if they felt jealous. Four items were used to measure envy using a Likert-type scale from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and included items such as “I wish to have the life of other people I follow on Instagram” and “I feel jealous when I see other people’s posts” ($\alpha=.86$, $m= 2.96$, $s d=.98$).
- **Upward comparison** is when people compare themselves to people who are better than they are while downward comparisons is when people compare themselves to people who they think are worse than them so they feel that they are higher than others. A set of eight statements were used asking respondents after spending time on their Instagram account viewing posts related to beauty, fashion, fitness, luxurious life, travel & leisure how they are most likely to feel using a Likert-type scale from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and included items such as “I might take down a picture with an

unexpected number of likes”, “I think that famous women on Instagram(influencers) have more privileges than normal ones”, “I need to look like pictures I see on Instagram to gain acceptance from others” ($\alpha=.904$, $m= 2.97$, $s d=.98$).

- **Imitation or reproduction** is the action of attempting to copy someone because this person might be an ideal or better person in the eyes of the one who is copying. This variable was measured by asking respondents to specify how likely they were to imitate posts related to beauty, lifestyle and the way a person takes pictures in relation to Instagram usage. Four items were used to measure imitation using a Likert-type scale from 1= very unlikely to 5 = very likely and included items such as “I am willing to imitate others to gain more popularity and appreciation” and “I usually imitate (or try to imitate) people I follow on Instagram in terms of how they post their own images” ($\alpha=.926$, $m= 2.67$, $s d=1.11$).
- **Motivation for Self-Enhancement** is a type of motivation that works to make people feel good about themselves and to maintain self-esteem. It is something that drives people and gives them energy/power to improve one self. Five statements were used to measure motivation using a Likert-type scale 1= very unlikely to 5 = very likely and included items such as “I need to change my lifestyle to gain more attention”, “Instagram motivates me to become a better person” ($\alpha=.742$, $m= 3.22$, $s d=.78$).
- **Self-esteem:** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a self-report instrument for evaluating an individual’s self-esteem. It was developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg and is widely used in social-science research (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem is closely related to self-confidence and reflects a person’s general personal and emotional assessment of their own value. The decision is made by this individual as an attitude towards

him/herself. It includes a set of four statements adapted from Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale (1965) about the respondent's feelings and opinions about themselves, such as "I am perfect the way I am" and "My life is good with what I have" ($\alpha=.837$, $m=3.60$, $s d=.70$).

3.3 Research Tool

The research tool used for this thesis is the survey which was divided into three main parts. In the first part, respondents were asked to fill out demographic information including their gender and age and if they were Instagram users or not.

The second part asked psychographic information about respondents such as the amount of time they spent using Instagram during 24 hours, the number of followers they had, the average number of likes they received per post, if they tended to be more optimistic or pessimistic and if they had a rich life or not. Both open ended and closed ended questions were used.

The third part of the survey measured mood by asking respondents if they felt ugly, anxious about their body image or satisfied with themselves after viewing content related to beauty, fitness, fashion, luxurious life, travel and leisure if they feel ugly when seeing women's flawless faces This part also measured another variable which is envy by asking women if they wished to have the life of others or if they envied other people's looks. Upward social comparison, imitation, motivation for self-enhancement and self-esteem were also examined using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

Google forms was used to collect the data and analyse it. The variables were all measured using a 5 scale Likert-type scale except for self-esteem. Respondents were asked how likely they

are to do or feel something and how well do they agree about a set of statements related to Instagram usage.

3.4 Research Sample

The survey was available to fill on google forms and was posted the whole month of March 2019. The purposive sampling technique was used whereby the researcher chose a sample based on a number of criteria or certain characteristics that the population should be, in this case females with an age range from 18 to 35 years old (Christensen, Burke Johnson, Larry, 2012). To make the sample study bigger and have enough data to use, snowball non-probability sampling was used; participants in turn send the link to some of their WhatsApp contacts.

Snowball sampling is when participants recruit other participants in the study. It is used where potential participants are hard to find. It's called snowball sampling because once you have the ball rolling; it picks up more snow along the way and becomes larger and larger (Kamarudin, 2017).

158 Lebanese women aged between 18 and 35 with an average age of 25 were surveyed ($m= 25.55$, $SD= 4.185$). This particular age was chosen because the age for Instagram users mainly ranges between 15 and 45 (Dion, 2016). Women were chosen because the literature review has shown that women's self-esteem and self-image was more affected by Instagram than men (Simmons, 2017). The sample was asked to describe aspects of their lifestyle and personality traits in terms of wealth and if they considered they had a lavish life or not. The time

spent using Instagram on a daily basis and if they tended to be more of an optimistic or pessimistic person.

The sample had an average of 2,735.47 number of followers ($s d=10,248.048$) ranging from 150 to 115k followers and an average 289.41 number of likes per post ($s d=523.70$) ranging from 30 to 4700 likes. 35.4% of them spend 3 to 4 hours daily on Instagram, 32.3% spend 1 to 2 hours, 10.8% spend 5 to 6 hours, 5.1% spend 7 to 8 hours, 1.9% spend 9 to 10 hours and finally also 1.9% spend 11 hours or more (Figure 1). So the majority of users spent between 3 to 4 hours daily on Instagram; this means that Instagram use takes up a considerable portion of their daytime activities.

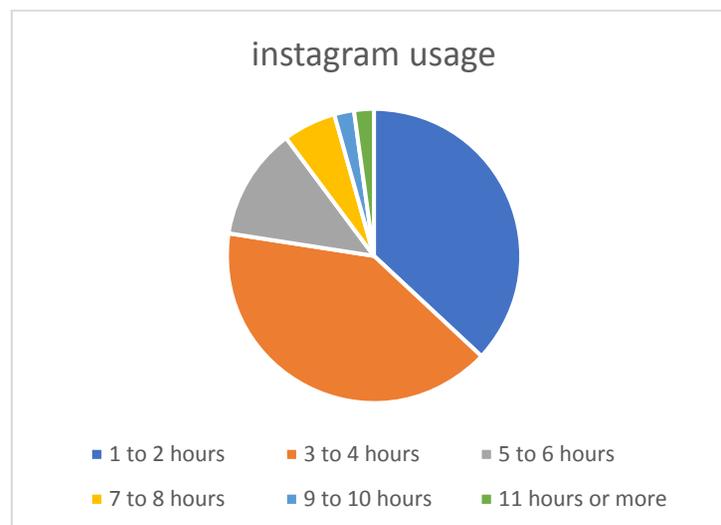


Figure 1 Instagram time daily usage

3.5 Data analysis

The data from the surveys was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS is one of the most popular statistical software performing with highly complex data and analysing it in a simple and easy manner.

Men and women not aged from 18 to 35 and who were not users were automatically withdrawn or asked to exit the survey. The target sample was initially 200 but 42 surveys were discarded because they did not meet the criteria required for the survey and those included male respondents, outlying subjects, non-users and people who did not meet the required age. The surveys that remained were 158 in number.

The tests used to measure each of the hypothesis are detailed below:

- **H1: The younger a woman is the more likely her mood will change with Instagram content.**

A woman's age versus her mood while using Instagram was measured using an independent sample t-test.

- **H2: The younger a woman is, the more she is likely to envy the content seen on Instagram.**

The second hypothesis measured 2 variables: age and envy. An independent sample T-test was used to measure this hypothesis. To be able to measure age, the sample was split into 2 groups classified as younger aged from 18 to 25 years old ($m=3.14$, $SD=0.899$) and older aged from 26 to 35 ($m=2.84$, $SD= 1.02$).

- **H3: The older a woman is, the less she compares herself to others.**

the relationship between the two variables age and upward social comparison was measured using Pearson's correlation statistical test.

- **H4: Upward comparisons are made by women who have more followers.**

To measure the relationship between the number of followers and upward comparison, an independent sample T-test was also used to test H4.

- **H5: The richer a woman is, the more likely she is to imitate**

Being rich in relation to imitation was tested using an independent sample t-test.

- **H6: Instagram is a motivation for self-enhancement**

To measure the relationship between Instagram usage and motivation for self-enhancement, a Univariate ANOVA Test was used

- **H7: Optimistic women have more self-esteem than pessimistic ones.**

optimistic versus pessimistic characteristics in relation to self-esteem were measured using an ANOVA test.

- **H8: The more a woman uses Instagram, the more her self-esteem decreases.**

This hypothesis examined the relationship between the time spent using Instagram and self-esteem and was measured using a Univariate ANOVA test.

- **H9: The more likes and followers a person receives, the more their self-esteem increases.**

Self-esteem was measured in relation to the number of likes a woman received per post on one hand and the number of followers she had on the other hand using a Univariate ANOVA test for both cases.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

This chapter reports the research results, numbers and percentages obtained of the different variables used in this study. The findings will then be compared to the literature review and the theoretical framework.

4.1 Variables

4.1.1 Mood

- **H1: The younger a woman is the more likely her mood will change with Instagram content.**

In order to measure the mood variable against exposure to Instagram content, three different questions were addressed to the participants.

first, the participants were asked whether posts related to women's flawless faces made them feel ugly, 157 out of 158 responded, and 75% of them (117/157 participants) agreed or strongly agreed that posts related to women flawless faces make them feel ugly, while only 25% (40/157 participants) were neutral or disagreed.

Almost the same results occurred when participants were asked whether the fitness posts made them feel anxious about their body image with a slight difference where 74% (116/157 participants) agreed or strongly agreed that fitness posts make them feel anxious about their body image while only 26% (41/157 participants) were neutral or disagreed. This result came to confirm what Chrissy Teigen, the American Top Model with more than 20 million Instagram

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followers, and around 800 thousand likes per post and 2 million views per video admitted that her news feed makes her hate her own body image and this stresses her out (Borge, 2017).

In addition to that, participants were asked about whether they feel unattractive because of the content they see on Instagram, and 58% (91/157 participants) agreed with that, while only 42% (66/157 participants) were neutral or disagreed.

Figure 2 below, shows the distribution by percentage for the responses to all of the three above asked questions.

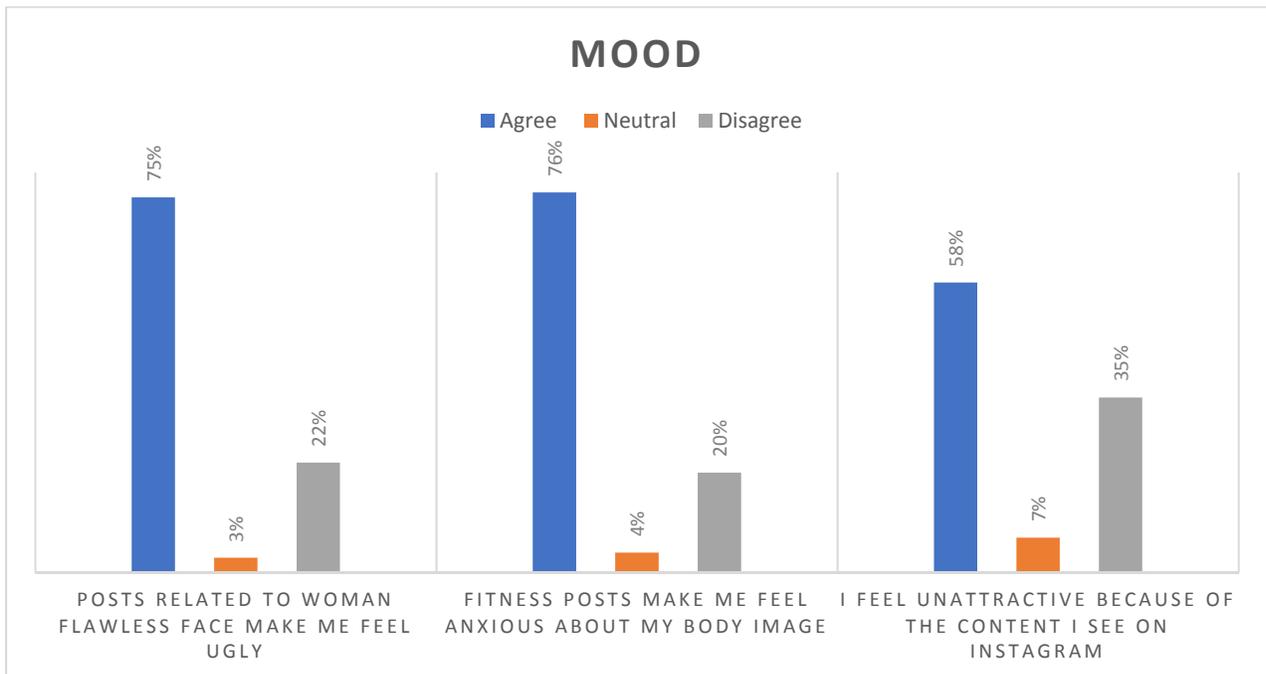


Figure 2 Mood and age

Hypothesis (H1) “The younger a woman is the more likely her mood will change with Instagram content” measures the mood relatively to woman age. And in order to check whether this is valid or not, the responses to the three questions above, and a T-Test conducted divided

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the participants into two groups, the younger one was aged 18 to 25 ($M=3.33$, $SD=0.62$) were more likely to have a bad mood when exposed to Instagram content (Figure 03). The older ones aged from 26 to 35 were still affected but not as much as the younger group age ($M=3.11$, $SD=0.46$). There was significance ($p<.05$) so it was supported ($t=2.37$, $df= 107.590$).

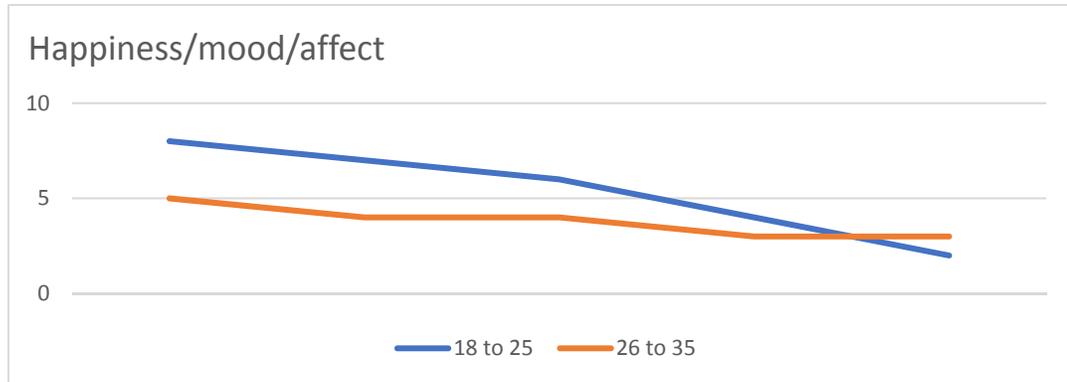


Figure 3 Age and mood

The results achieved that when it comes to age, the younger group aged 18 to 25 were the ones whose mood was more negatively affected with Instagram usage.

The results came to match with the study of Nicole Dion (2016) about how woman feel after being exposed to ideal images and beautiful, rich and popular females on social media. That study was made on 51 female participants aged from 18 to 25 and the results were as such: “they just show off their money and what they had and how they looked. Made me feel bad about myself and how I didn’t have that kind of money or look like that.” Others stated, “Some made me feel bad about myself because they were skinny people in little clothes.” Such answers are negative (Dion, 2016). Dion’s respondents echo the answers of the survey conducted for this study as women felt ugly when exposed to more beautiful women, anxious when exposed to physically fit women and in a negative mood because of those feelings.

The literature detailed Mathilda Gajanan's study conducted on 1500 teens and young adults with regards to the effect of social media platforms including Instagram on people's mind and mood. It was revealed that Instagram was the worst platform affecting the respondents since it was associated with high levels of anxiety, depression and what we call FOMO meaning the *Fear of Missing Out*. (Gajanan, 2017). The findings of this study corroborate those of Gajanan in showing the negative effect that Instagram can have on women's own self-image and mood.

4.1.2 Envy

- **H2: The younger a woman is, the more she is likely to envy the content seen on Instagram.**

Women who use social media and online blogs also have increased feelings of envy and are not satisfied with their life (Cretti, 2015). In addition, envying others and feeling jealous had become extremely easy since people believed they knew what everyone possessed, how they looked and what they were doing every second in their life. Frelow (2015) clearly said, "The life that I was leading felt inadequate. The slope is slippery. If you are not careful, it is easy to fall victim to it".

In order to test the Hypothesis (H2) "The younger a woman is, the more she is likely to envy the content seen on Instagram", four (4) questions were addressed to the 158 participants.

First, the participants were questioned whether they wished to have the life of other people they follow on Instagram, and out of the 158, 67 participants had that wish (42%) while 38 participants (24%) were neutral and the rest 53 participants (34%) totally disagreed with that and were satisfied with their life.

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50 out of the 67 participants who wished to have the life of other people they follow were below the age of 25, which makes it 75% of the participants.

The second question was whether beauty posts make the participants envious to look like them, and to that, 43.6% (69/158 participants) agreed that the beauty posts make them envious and wishes to look like them, while 27.8% (44/158 participants) were neutral and only 28.4% (45/158 participants) totally disagreed with that.

55 out of the 69 participants who were envious to look like those in beauty posts were below the age of 25, which make it 79.7% of the participants.

The third question was about whether they feel jealous when seeing other people's posts, and to this question, the number of participants who admitted feeling jealous when seeing other people's post was less than those who disagreed. Only 22.2% (35/158 participants) agreed, while 31% (49/158 participants) were neutral and 46.8% (74/158 participants) totally disagreed with that.

However, among those who agreed being jealous 28 out of 35 (80%) were below the age of 25.

the fourth question was whether participants felt like they wanted to do things like those on Instagram but could not, and 36.7% (58/158 participants) were the ones who responded that they wanted to but could not, 26.6% (42/158 participants) were neutral while 36.7% (58/158 participants) totally didn't want.

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Just as in the three previous questions, the majority of the participants (50 out of 58) who wanted to imitate the things done on Instagram but could not were from the younger age, or the age below 25.

The below figure 04 summarizes the responses obtained to the four questions related to envy. From the results it's clear that the younger a woman is, the more likely she is to envy the content seen on Instagram.

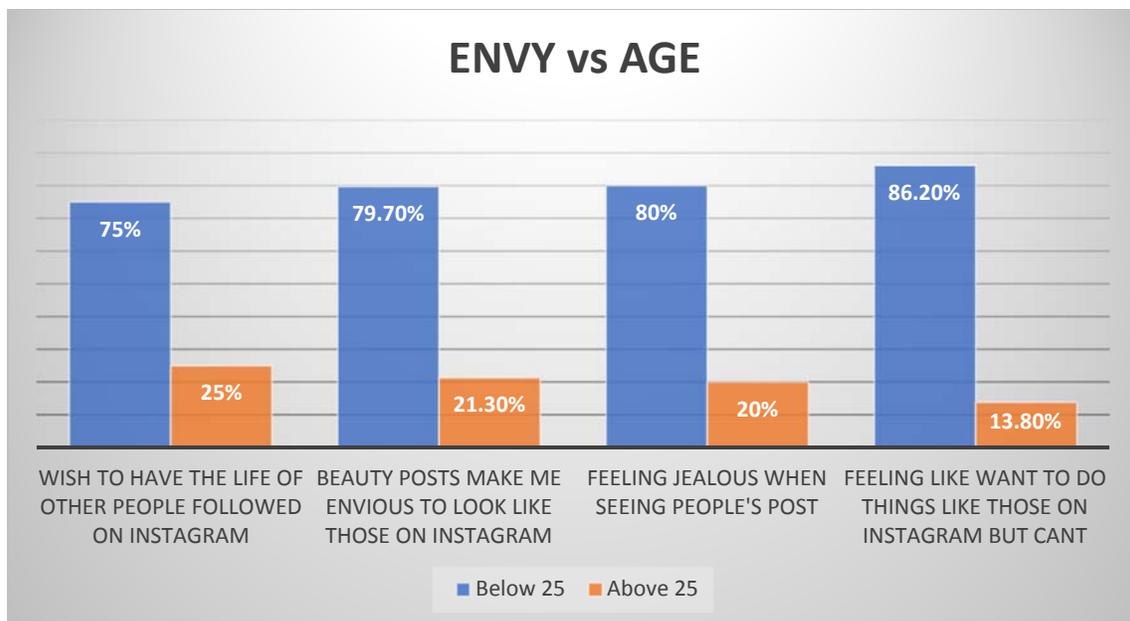


Figure 4 Envy VS. age

The results showed that while around 40% of all Instagram users felt jealous and wanted to have a life similar to that they saw on Instagram, almost 75% of these users belonged to the younger age group or that below 25 years of age. These results are very telling since they show that the younger woman is more affected by Instagram images than the older woman. It shows that younger women were less satisfied with what they had and were affected by what other women were doing and what they possessed. The older women seem to have more satisfaction and were less shaken by what other women possessed.

4.1.3 Upward Comparison

- **H3: The older a woman is, the less she compares herself to others.**
- **H4: Upward comparisons are made by women who have more followers**

In order to test the two hypothesis (H3) “The older a woman is, the less she compares herself to others” and (H4) “Upward comparisons are made by women who have more followers”, we had to check the Upward Comparison variable in relation with age and number of followers. For that, participants were requested to rate their feeling from 1= Strongly disagree to 6 = Strongly agree in response to after spending time on Instagram viewing posts related to beauty, fashion, fitness, luxurious life, travel and leisure, how they were most likely to feel, with option statements such as:

- Anxious when not receiving likes as other users
- Might take down a picture with an unexpected number of likes
- Feel that my closet is always missing or outdated
- Think famous woman on Instagram have more privileges than normal ones
- The more I see posts about rich people’s lifestyle, the more I feel my life is useless
- I feel like I’m not living my life up to the standards I see on Instagram
- I need to look like pictures I see on Instagram to gain acceptance from others
- I compare my pictures to other famous people and influencers

Out of 158 participants, 126 or 80% compared their pictures to other famous people and influencers, only 102 or 65% agreed that they needed to look like pictures on Instagram to gain acceptance from others.

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142 participants or 90% felt like they do not live to the standards they see on Instagram.

Only 63 participants or 40% felt that the more they see posts about rich people's lifestyle, the more they feel their life is useless. 105 or 66% think women on Instagram have more privileges, 141 or 89% participants had a feeling that their closet is missing and outdated.

110 or 70% said they might take down a picture with an unexpected number of likes, while only 100 or 63% felt anxious when not receiving likes as other users.

The results above showed that the majority of the participants were affected in one way or the other and compared themselves to the Instagram influencers or famous people on the platform. Most of them wanted to match the Instagram standard for photographs and felt inadequate if they were unable to do so. This feeling was prominent to the extent that 70% of these users felt compromised and took down their pictures if they did not receive enough likes.

In order to check the relationship between age and the upward comparison, we used the Pearson Correlation test and a result of $P=1$ was obtained showing a direct relation with age and upward comparison.

Figure 5 shows the relation between the responses and the age to each of the responded questions.

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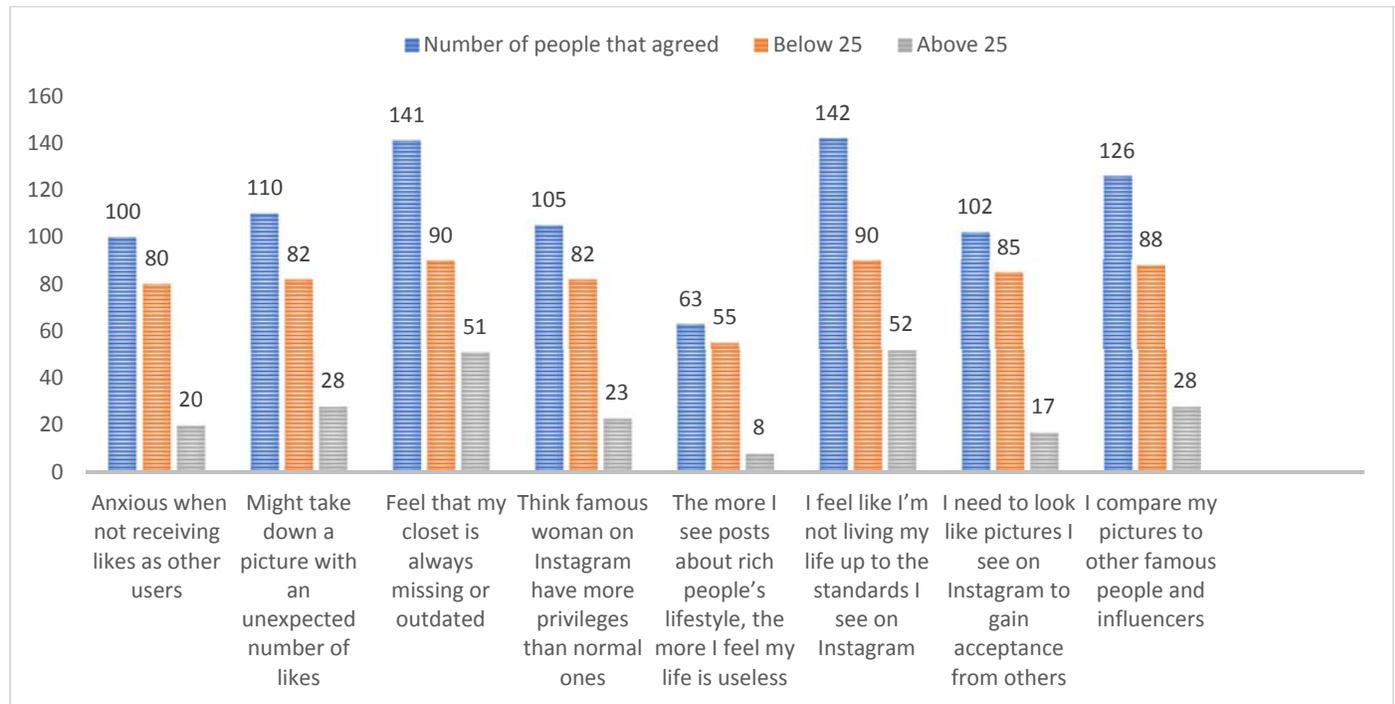


Figure 5 Age VS. upward comparison

Again here, age appears to be a critical variable as it can be seen that the majority of those affected by the image of others on Instagram and felt that it compromised their own image were in the younger age group. That group reported feeling useless, inadequate, outdated and anxious. Other than copying others who were more successful on Instagram that group also did not feel confident enough if they did not receive a certain number of likes. This is a serious finding that shows the extent to which young women base their self-image on Instagram posts, which, more often than not, are not as truthful as they seem.

Additionally, the 158 participant's responses, whom 132 have less than 2000 followers and only 26 have more than 2000 followers (figure 11), were tested using ANOVA TEST and showed a significance relation between the number of followers and the upward comparison.

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($p < 0.5$), with ($m = 2.97$, $s d = .98$). Figure 07 shows the distribution of responses in terms of number of followers.

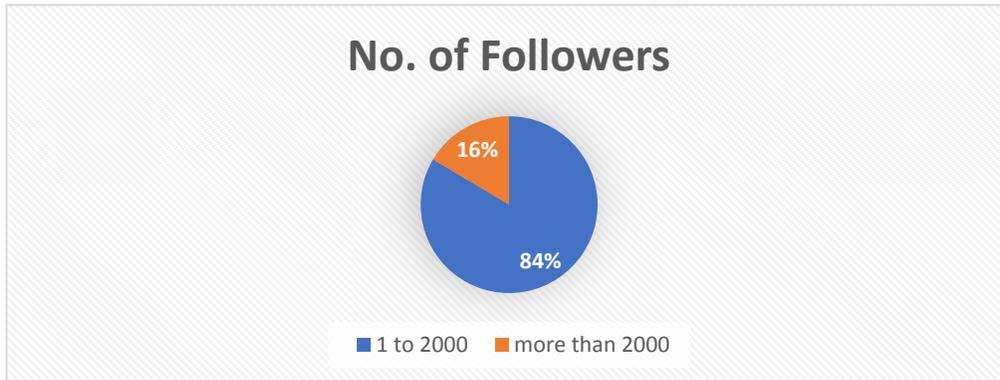


Figure 6 Number of followers

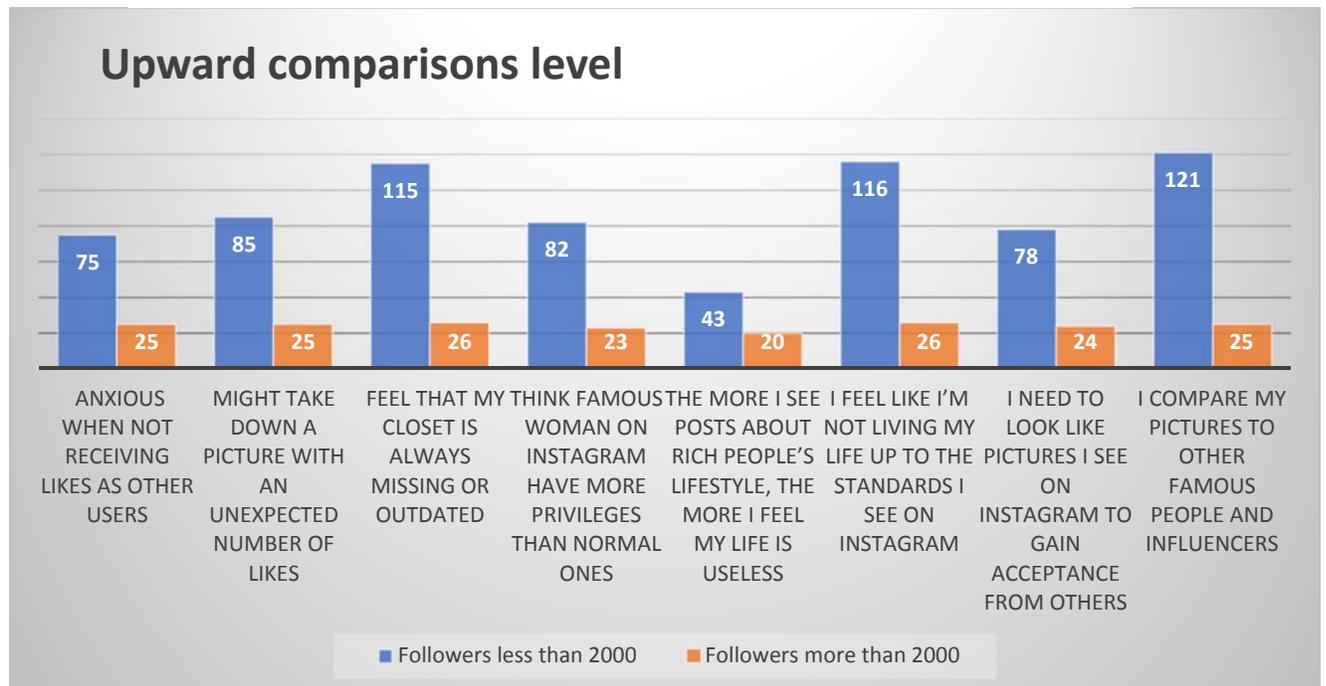


Figure 7 Upward comparisons and number of followers

It is noticeable that out of 26 participants who had more than 2000 followers, more than 95% were affected and perform the upward comparison.

These findings came to positively confirm what had been discussed in the literature review. The reason could be related to the respondents' activity on the platform. The more active respondents were on the platform, the more they posted, the more they appeared in home pages and suggestions, and the more they received followers and likes. These respondents cared about upward comparisons because the number of followers did not remove one's insecurities and jealousy when seeing others' content.

According to Sharma (2016), people concentrate on posting what appeals to the masses since a lack of popularity is a form of weakness online. People tend to compare themselves to people they see as strong and successful. So people subconsciously monitor the trends and trendy people in the process criticize their own looks and lifestyle, becoming jealous due to making upward comparisons.

Simons (2017) found that people used to compare themselves with other people who were similar in terms of age, gender, abilities and others. Borge (2017) also mentioned that people compared themselves in specific areas such as looks and lifestyle. Simmons (2017) did not dismiss that people could also compare themselves to the subject they thought was better off at any age. Apparently, when women are exposed to luxury life and beauty posts on social media, their self-esteem gets affected and they were likely to do both downward and upward comparisons.

Simmons (qtd. in Selingons, 2016) found that the Internet became an equal space of access where anyone could post – as if in a beauty pageant. Simmons' statement is logical since Instagram, as a platform is a space where women in their 20s as well as women in their 40s could post images showing their beauty. It is also a platform, as revealed in this study, that affected

women of all ages – more so the younger age group than the older ones, but it had an effect on all of them, nonetheless.

The more followers' users have, the more they are active and the more tendency they will have to do upward comparisons. This agrees with Schofield's findings (2017) who mentioned that Instagram voyeurs or users compare themselves to bloggers or other who have highly liked posts. Schofield remarked that such famous people might not be truthful or transparent in their posts.

In addition to that, it seemed that some also do horizontal comparisons with people who are alike on Instagram and this is done out of curiosity and not a result of envy or jealousy feelings.

4.1.4 Imitation

- **H5: The richer a woman is, the more likely she is to imitate**

The psychologist Albert Bandura in his social learning theory that was explained in the literature review discussed the process of reproduction or imitation, and according to him "People are exposed to many behaviours each day, but it is not possible to imitate and reproduce all of them (Bandura 1986). An example is a 90-year-old woman who can barely walk, but likes to watch a dancing ice show. She may like and appreciate the act/ behaviour but she would not be capable of doing it physically. This certainly influences the decision of whether or not to imitate the behaviour."

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In this thesis, testing Hypothesis (H5) “the richer a woman is, the more likely she is to imitate”, will give an understanding of whether the financial status of a woman, influences the decision to imitate the Instagram posts.

From the survey results, out of the 158 participants, 69 considered that were living a lavish life while 89 responded negatively when asked if they consider themselves living a lavish and luxurious life.

All the 158 participants, including the ones who were living the lavish life and those who were not, were questioned to specify how likely (1= very unlikely to 6 = likely) they were to do the following in relation to Instagram usage.

- I am willing to imitate others to gain more popularity and appreciation
- I usually imitate (or try to imitate) people I follow on Instagram in terms of looks,
- I usually imitate (or try to imitate) people I follow on Instagram in terms of lifestyle
- I usually imitate (or try to imitate) people I follow on Instagram in terms of how they post their own images.

Most of the participants, slightly more than 75% (120 out of 158), were willing to imitate others to gain more popularity. From the 120 participants, 65 out of 69 (94%) were from those living a lavish life while 55 out of 89 (61%) were from those not having a lavish life. These numbers dropped to 65% (102 out of 158) and from the 102 participants, 60 are out of the 69 (87%) who are living a lavish life, while 42 are out of 89 (47%) who were not living a lavish life but still imitate or try to imitate people on Instagram.

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The numbers dropped even more when it came to imitation in terms of lifestyle where only 60% (94 out of 158) had positive responses. From the 94 participants, 62 were from those who lived a lavish life, and only 32 were from those not living a lavish life. Notwithstanding that, the numbers dropped but the number had increased when 62 out of 69 (89%) of those living a lavish life tends to imitate Instagram posts in terms of lifestyle.

At the end only 56% (88 out of 158) confirmed that they usually imitated others in terms of how they posted their own images. From the 88 participants, 56 were from those living a lavish lifestyle, while 32 were from those who were not living a lavish and luxurious life.

It is noticed that those who were financially well off were more likely to imitate the content seen on Instagram. Women who answered that they considered themselves rich or well-off (Figure 08) had a mean score $M= 2.94$ ($SD= 1.09$) while people who did not scored $M= 2.48$ (1.08). There was significance at this point ($p= 0.09 < .05$), so the hypothesis was highly supported.

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence ... Lower
Imitate	Equal variances assumed	.009	.46652	.17563	.11956
	Equal variances not assumed	.009	.46652	.17571	.11924

Figure 8 Being rich and imitation

It is understandable that women who were well off were more likely to imitate content seen on Instagram because most of the time, they have the means to do so while people with few resources did not have those means.

4.1.5 Motivation for Self-Enhancement

- H6: Instagram is a motivation for self-enhancement

Since “Social comparisons have become a relevant mechanism for learning about the appearance-related social expectations among peers and for evaluating the self in terms of those standards” (Jones, 2001, P. 647), testing Hypothesis (H6) “Instagram is a motivation for self-enhancement” gave a significant result ($P < 0.5$) which supported the Hypothesis.

Participants were asked to specify how likely (1= very unlikely to 6 = likely) they were to do the following in relation to Instagram usage.

- Posts showing fit women bodies give me motivation to work on myself
- A well-styled woman on Instagram gives me good ideas for what to wear
- Instagram motivates me to be a better person
- I need to change how I look to gain more attention
- I need to change my lifestyle to gain more attention

The results showed that 44 participants (28%) & 49 participants (31.4%) felt they need to change how they look or their lifestyle to gain more attention, yet 37 out of 158 participants

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(23.4%) felt unlikely to be motivated by Instagram to be a better person. These results were even more confirmed by the 107 participants (67.5%) who were likely to be motivated to work on themselves when seeing posts showing fit women bodies and by the 114 participants (72.7%) who got good ideas of what to wear when they see well-styled woman on Instagram.

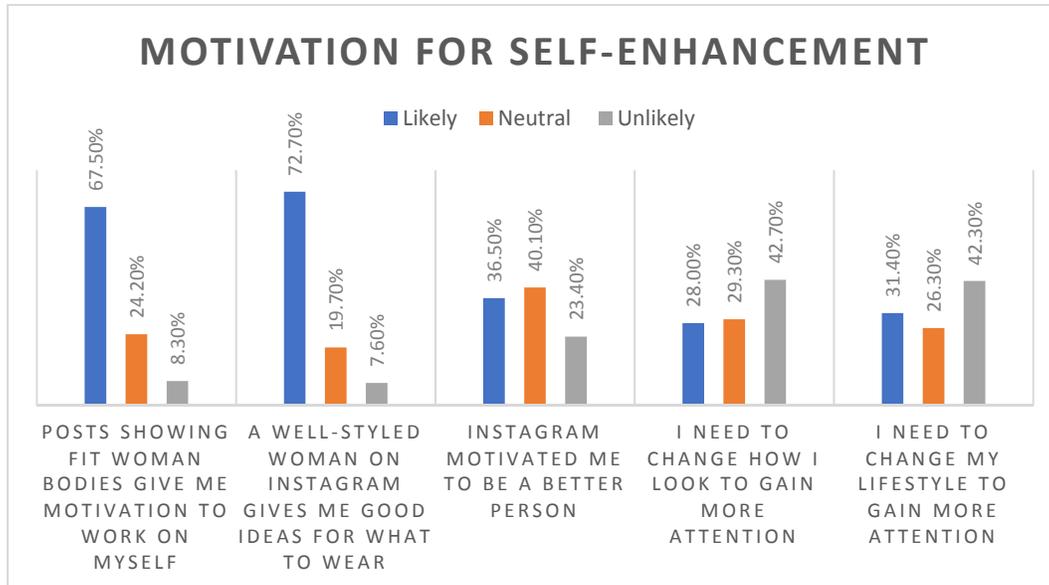


Figure 9 Motivation for Self-Enhancement

Instagram might not be always a tool that ruins women's self-esteem but a way to motivate ladies to enhance themselves giving them ideas on what to wear, the latest beauty trend. This will give them confidence and make them gain their self-esteem rather than losing it. The social comparison theory suggests that upward comparisons can lower self-esteem; Collins indicates that this is not always the case. It has been also suggested that motivation for people to improve and progress are the result of making upward comparisons and his study found that people who were on diet used upward social comparisons most of the time by posting pictures of fit people on their refrigerators. These images served as both a reminder of their weight and as an inspiration in their quest towards their goal (Collins, 1995).

Moreover, this is what Instagram is capable of doing nowadays in playing the role of a motive. So despite the fact that a majority of the younger women in this study felt compromised by the images they saw on Instagram, around a third of the total number of women surveyed used these images to enhance their own self-image. It is important to note here that feelings of inadequacy or anxiety that the women were feeling do not necessarily mean that they would not act on improving that image.

However, self-enhancement might not always be related to motivation. It could also be the result of a lack of self-confidence or a weakness in a certain area of the subject that they would like to enhance and which can also result in a lower self-esteem.

4.1.6 Self-Esteem

The findings of a survey that was conducted by The Royal Society for Public Health about people's mental health and self-perception in relationship with the use of social media on a sample of 1500 candidate aged between 16 to 25 showed that Instagram was the worst medium for self-esteem.

In order to check whether the same applies to Lebanese woman, and whether this Instagram effect is related to the time spent, or action on the Platform (such as likes, follows) or to the participant view for life in general (optimistic or pessimistic), three hypotheses were tested.

- **H7: Optimistic women have more self-esteem than pessimistic ones.**
- **H8: The more a woman uses Instagram, the more her self-esteem decreases.**

- **H9: The more likes and followers a person receives, the more their self-esteem increases.**

For that, the 158 participants were asked to rate their feelings from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree after spending time on Instagram account viewing posts related to beauty, fashion, fitness, luxurious life, travel & leisure.

The results showed that 98 participants (62%) would had positive attitudes toward themselves while only 13 (8.3%) would not. It also revealed that 111 participants (70.3%) felt that they had



Figure 10 Self-Esteem

good qualities while only 14 (8.8%) did not. However, only 53 out of the 158 participants (33.5%) thought they were perfect the way they are, while 35 (22.2%) felt they were far from being perfect and 92 participants (58.3%) strongly agreed that the life they had is good.

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When comparing these results with the time spent on Instagram from each participant (figure 10), there was no significance, as those who agreed and disagreed were split almost equally irrelevant of the number of hours spent on Instagram. Hypothesis (H8) was invalid as the more a woman uses Instagram, does not necessarily decrease her self-esteem.

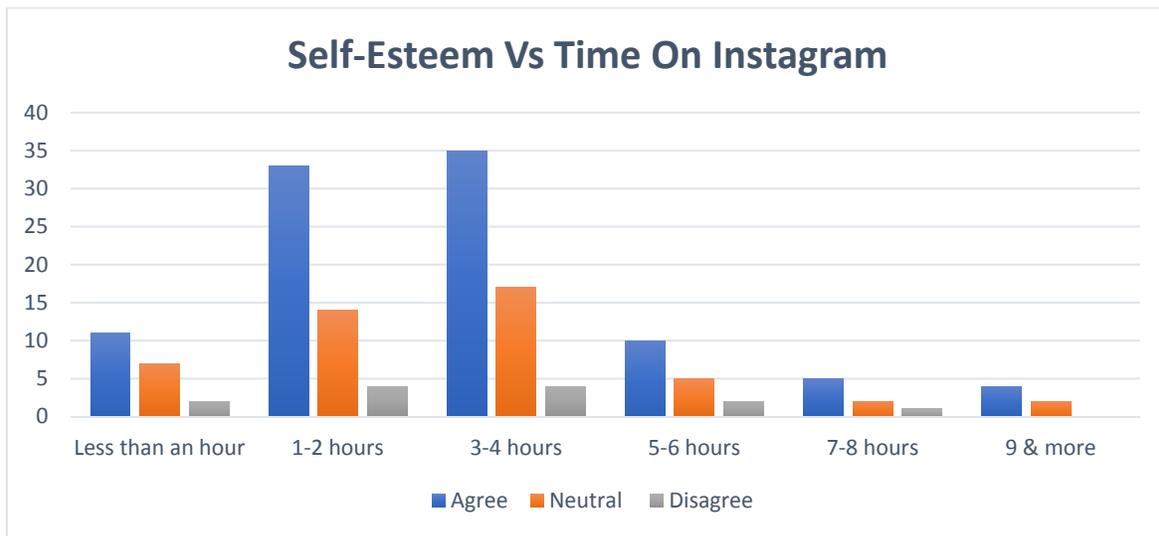


Figure 11 Time Spent on Instagram relatively with Self-Esteem.

Going back to the UK's Royal society for Public Health study (Cretti, 2015), it was suggested that people who spend more than two hours a day on social media sites are more likely to suffer from psychological disorders and having a low self-esteem and this may ultimately lead to mental problems. The time spent on social media may not have been significant to Lebanese participants since Lebanon is a much smaller country and the conversation or the image found online may seep into offline conversations as people meet. Therefore, the effect may be propagated through conversation – whether live, on the phone or through social media.

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The same results were compared to the number of followers & likes a participant had, and the Hypothesis (H9) “the more likes and followers a person receives, the more their self-esteem increases” was not supported. There was a strong correlation with the number of likes and followers as those who had more followers were the ones with the most likes.

The 26 persons who had more than 2000 followers were the ones who had more than 399 likes per post. However, those who had more likes were not necessarily those who had an increased self-esteem.

46% (6 out of 13) of those who didn't agree that they had positive attitude toward themselves; 35.7% (5 out of 14) didn't feel that they had good qualities, 28.5% (10 out of 35) weren't perfect the way they are; and 42.8% (6 out of 14) didn't feel that their life was good with what they had were from those 26 participants who obtained more likes and followers than others.

When it came to testing Hypothesis (H7), “Optimistic women have more self-esteem than pessimistic ones”, there was a significance ($p < .05$) and this hypothesis was supported.

Out of the 158 participants, 130 were optimistic while 28 were pessimistic as they responded in the survey when being asked if they consider themselves an optimistic or a pessimistic person.

When compared to the results of the Self-Esteem, 100% out of those who agreed to the questions asked whether they had positive attitude toward themselves (98/98), feel that they have good qualities (111/111), perfect the way they are (53/53), and life is good with what they have (92/92), were from the optimistic participants.

Pessimistic participants were either among those who disagreed or neutral.

A study of individual well-being conducted by Myers and Diener (1995) showed that optimistic people had four traits: self-esteem, a sense of self-control and extroversion. This thesis also showed that optimism and self-esteem were correlated thereby supporting the Myers and Diener (1995) study. The findings also support the study of Lyumbomirsky, Tkach and Dimatteo (2006) who found that people who were pessimistic had lower self-esteem and developed feelings of envy, jealousy and tend to do upward comparisons. Figure 12 below demonstrates all the results.

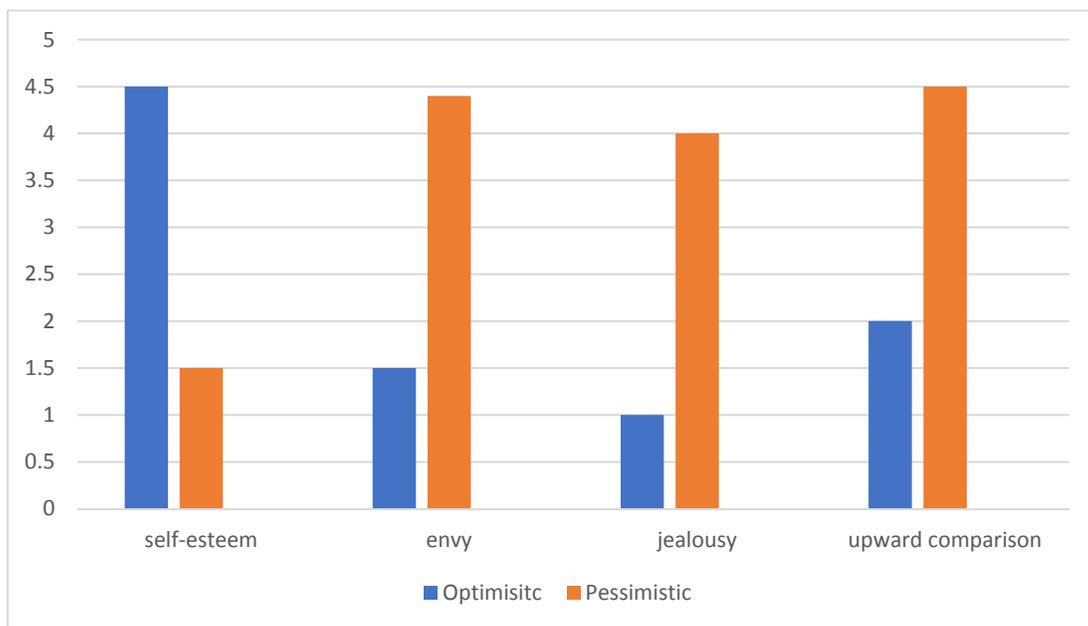


Figure 12 Optimistic vs pessimistic on Self-esteem, envy, jealousy and upward comparisons

4.2 Implications

Three research questions were raised in the previous part of this study.

1- Does Instagram use affect women's self-esteem?

75% of the participants are affected by the Instagram posts showing flawless women and making them feel ugly. Moreover 58% of the participants feel unattractive because of what they see on Instagram. On the other hand, 62% have positive attitude toward themselves in general after spending time on the platform. So, whether the effect is positive or negative, Instagram use affects women's self-esteem.

However, many factors cause that effect. As the testing of hypothesis has shown, for an optimistic woman Instagram was more likely to increase her self-esteem while it may play a negative role toward a pessimistic woman's self-esteem.

At the same time, the results have shown that the time spent on Instagram did not have much effect on neither increasing nor decreasing women's self-esteem while age played a major role as a direct factor to mood changes and envy for women using the platform. Those who were younger were significantly more affected than those within the older age bracket.

2- Do Instagram images form a motivation for self-enhancement?

The Hypothesis "Instagram is a motivation for self-enhancement" was a straightforward test to this research question, and since it was validated, then it is confirmed that Instagram can form a motivation for self-enhancement.

Instagram provides easy access to a world full of luxury, fame, beauty and in many occasions, it is filled with fake posts. Those who are richer as the study has shown, are more likely to imitate posts they see on Instagram than those who do not have the facilities to do so. Even though 80% of the participants compared their posts to those of

famous people and influencers, not all of them are capable of doing what is necessary to look like those they compared themselves to.

3- Do people evaluate themselves more positively or negatively when making upward social comparison with regards to Instagram images?

Results have shown that the younger the woman is, the more likely she is to envy Instagram posts, and the older she is the less likely she is to compare herself to others. At the same time, those who had more followers than the rest did the upward comparison. This study shown that people evaluate themselves more positively as 70.3% of the participants felt they had good qualities, after spending time on Instagram and only 31% felt a need to change their lifestyle to match with what they see on Instagram and to gain more attention.

The Lebanese mentality in general is optimistic. It is no wonder the Lebanese are, historically, as people of Phoenician origins, compared to the phoenix, as they are believers in renewal and manage to see the good in bad situations they encounter. Lebanese woman usually have high self-confidence specially when they mature and grow older as their life puts them in many confrontations and experiences and that may be a reason why the majority were positive when making upward comparisons.

At the same time, the majority of the participants tended to imitate and compare themselves in terms of looks more than in term of lifestyle. it is easier for a woman to imitate looks than to imitate lifestyle which is more expensive. Imitating looks would not

give her a negative feeling. When it comes to costs, those who can spend will not find it hard to imitate, while those who cannot already know that they cannot and follow such pages only because of curiosity more than the tendency to imitate and this is why only 8% were not satisfied with the life they had.

The main goal or as we call it practical implications of this paper is to spread awareness about what is hidden behind the screens on Instagram by publishing it in university book libraries and to introduce it to schools where students will be advised to read it by their in especially that it is a new topic discussed which will grab their attention more and make them aware of the danger they might fall into. This will highlight the real life of bloggers and influencers which is quite different from the one they expose on social media seen by women each and every second on social media.

Chapter 6-Conclusion

6.1 Limitations

This study faced few limitations. The sample size could have been bigger and there could be confounding variables that interfered in the survey such as the inadequacy of answers related to participants not being totally truthful. Another limitation is that the time of the study; had there been more time, more surveys would have been distributed and other factors (such as traditional advertising) affecting women's on Instagram would have been studied.

There are a number of drawbacks for conducting online surveys. The answers might not be very honest. Some people buy followers and likes and yet report that number, which is false; some others not only edit but pay to edit their own pictures and yet they deny it while admitting that they have a very high self-esteem.

Future studies or theses related to this topic may have investigated males on Instagram as well. It would be useful, then, to conduct gender comparison when it comes to Instagram usage related to various variables such as mood, self-esteem, imitation, envy and upward comparison.

A relationship between upward comparisons and self-esteem or mood maybe more significant than that of the number of followers.

Finally, a qualitative study such as an interview with specialists would have added in-depth valuable information to this thesis.

6.2 Conclusion

With the social media rising more and more each day, people should learn to value who they are with all their imperfections, to realize that everyone has a blessed life, to admit that we are all uniquely different. Those differences should not be used as a platform for self-criticism. Even when I reach 80 years old, I have to remind myself that it is all just a facade and that no one is perfect. I strive to love myself more in my real life and not just to pretend to, online”, claims Jessica Frelow in her article “I Needed to Retain my Self-esteem from Social Media”. (Frelow, 2018).

Instagram has a direct effect on self-esteem either as a destructive factor of the self or as a motivating inviting people to make better decisions such as eating healthy food and exercising in order to look like healthy and fit. This is good but to a certain extent. Wanting to look like the other is, to a certain extent, self-destructive in itself as we ignore our real identity to look like those we envy either consciously or unconsciously. Are we still able to mention motivation in such cases?

To conclude, I would like to sum up the findings of this thesis. First, Instagram usage in general affects women’s self-esteem; it is the usage itself and not the time spent using the platform. Second, some Instagram posts are a motivation for self-enhancement since that self-esteem was not that much affected by the usage especially for optimistic people. Third, people evaluate themselves depending on their character when making upward comparisons with regards to Instagram posts. Optimistic people form feelings of motivation to enhance themselves in the future while pessimistic people evaluate themselves more negatively leading to feelings of envy, a tendency to imitate others and a low self-esteem.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to voluntarily participate. Your time and responses are valuable. The survey is about Instagram usage. You will be anonymous throughout and your answers will remain strictly confidential. The results will only be used for academic purposes. The survey will take about maximum 5-10 minutes to complete. Pressing next indicates that you are voluntarily consenting to fill out the survey.

1- Gender

- Male
- Female

2- How old are you? _____

3- Do you have an Instagram account?

- Yes
- No

If no, thank you for participation. You may X out or close this survey.

4- If yes, how many hours on average do you spend time on Instagram per day?

- Less than an hour
- 1 to 2 hours
- 3 to 4 hours
- 5 to 6 hours
- 7 to 8 hours
- 9 to 10 hours
- 11 hours or more

5- Approximately how many followers do you have on your Instagram account?

6- How many likes do you get per post on average? _____

7- Are you more of an optimistic or pessimistic person?

- Optimistic
- Pessimistic

8- Do you consider yourself living a lavish, luxurious life?

- Yes
- No

After spending time on your Instagram account viewing posts related to Beauty, fashion, fitness, luxurious life, travel & leisure how are you most likely to feel? Rate the below feelings from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

Mood

- Posts related to women’s flawless faces make me feel ugly
- Fitness posts make me feel anxious about my body image
- I am happy with how I look

1= strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 =somewhat disagree	4 = somewhat agree	5 = agree	6 = strongly agree
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Envy

Specify how much you agree (1= strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree) with following statements in relation to Instagram usage.

- I wish to have the life of other people I follow on Instagram
- Beauty posts give make me envious to look like them
- I feel jealous when I see other people’s posts
- I feel like I want to do things like them but I can’t

1= strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 =somewhat disagree	4 = somewhat agree	5 = agree	6 = strongly agree
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Upward comparison

After spending time on your Instagram account viewing posts related to Beauty, fashion, fitness, luxurious life, travel & leisure how are you most likely to feel? Rate the below feelings from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

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- I feel anxious when I don't receive likes as other users
- I might take down a picture with an unexpected number of likes
- I feel that my closet is always missing or outdated
- I think that famous women on Instagram(influencers) have more privileges than normal ones
- The more I see posts about rich people's lifestyle, the more I feel my life is useless
- I feel like I'm not living my life up to the standards I see on Instagram
- I need to look like pictures I see on Instagram to gain acceptance from others
- I compare my pictures to other famous people and influencers

1= strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 =somewhat disagree	4 = somewhat agree	5 = agree	6 = strongly agree
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Imitate

Specify how likely (1= very unlikely to 6 = likely) you are to do the following in relation to Instagram usage.

- I am willing to imitate others to gain more popularity and appreciation
- I usually imitate (or try to imitate) people I follow on Instagram in terms of looks,
- I usually imitate (or try to imitate) people I follow on Instagram in terms of lifestyle
- I usually imitate (or try to imitate) people I follow on Instagram in terms of how they post their own images.

1 = very unlikely	2 = unlikely	3 = somewhat unlikely	4 = somewhat likely	5 = likely	6 = very likely
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Motivation for Self-enhancement

Specify how likely (1= very unlikely to 6 = likely) you are to do the following in relation to Instagram usage.

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- Posts showing fit women bodies give me motivation to work on myself
- A well styled woman on Instagram gives me good ideas for what to wear
- Instagram motivates me to be a better person
- I need to change how I look to gain more attention
- I need to change my lifestyle to gain more attention
- Instagram motivates me to become a better person

1 = very unlikely	2 = unlikely	3 = somewhat unlikely	4 = somewhat likely	5 = likely	6 = very likely
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Self-esteem

After spending time on your Instagram account viewing posts related to Beauty, fashion, fitness, luxurious life, travel & leisure how are you most likely to feel? Rate the below feelings from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

- Everyone is better than me
- I am better than others
- I take positive attitude towards myself
- Sometimes, I think I'm not good at all
- I feel useless sometimes
- I feel that I have good qualities
- I am perfect the way I am
- My life is good with what I have
- In general, I am satisfied with myself
- I need lots of improvements

1= strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 =somewhat disagree	4 = somewhat agree	5 = agree	6 = strongly agree
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