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Instagram and Negative Mental Health

Social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter are very convenient and attractive media for many people. In fact, we will not be able to talk about this modern society without social media. This is because they became an integral part of our lifestyle in the past several years. Many years ago, we did not have much choices to collect information such as global news. However, now we can get many information from our phones even if we do not watch TV news or read the newspaper. Particularly, Instagram has grown so rapidly in the past few years. People who use Instagram mainly post their pictures such as selfies and share them with their friends. According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/), there are nearly 1 billion active users all over the world. Comparing to the most popular social networking service Facebook, the number of active users is still small, but Instagram keeps growing and has a great influence especially among teens. On the other hand, according to [Young Health Movement (YHM) and RSPH’s survey](https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/instagram-ranked-worst-for-young-people-s-mental-health.html) of almost 1,500 young people (aged 14-24), Instagram has the most negative effects of social media on young people’s mental health although YouTube has a positive effect. From this information, Instagram represents an American zeitgeist of social media’s negative side effects now and the future because it has a strong relationship to a negative mental health for teenager.

On [Health.com](https://www.health.com/depression/multiple-social-media-sites-depression-anxiety), Amanda MacMillan, a freelance health and science writer, reported that young adults who use social networking services for a long time are likely to develop depression and anxiety. Now we know how social media affects mental health of young people, but we do not know why they have depression and anxiety while using social media. There should be some specific causes and reasons. The first reason why Instagram users have mental health problems is their low self-esteem. According to [Merriam- Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-esteem), self-esteem can be defined as a confidence and satisfaction in oneself. On [Cosmopolitan.com](https://www.cosmopolitan.com/health-fitness/a8601466/why-dont-i-look-like-her-how-instagram-is-ruining-our-self-esteem/), Olivia Fleming, the Features Director at *Harpers- BAZAAR.com*, states many people post their selfie retouched in order to show themselves in the best possible way on Instagram. However, most of them compare themselves to other users and have an inferiority complex toward popular Instagramers. At the worst case, they try to be like another person. This is because they do not like their physical features such as their figure and face. Making an effort to be beautiful is not bad thing, but overthinking about beauty sometimes drives them crazy. Almost all people have any problems, so they do not have to try to become perfect. In “[Smartphones and Social Media](https://childmind.org/report/2017-childrens-mental-health-report/smartphones-social-media/),” Jean Twenge, a psychologist of San Diego State University, reports smartphones appeared in 2007, and the rise in depressive symptoms correlates with smartphone adoption during that period. In the decade, a lot of people came to have smartphones. At the same time, many teenagers started to compare with other people and have a low self-esteem. Therefore, it can be said that Instagram is the social media which captures the spirit of time.

Second, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is the other cause of young Instagram users’ mental health problems. According to [Time.com](https://time.com/4358140/overcome-fomo/), the word, FOMO was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013, and it means a feeling of anxiety or insecurity over the possibility of missing out on something, as an event or an opportunity. Maybe it is a little difficult for some people to understand this feeling. This is because in the past, there was not many ways to contact with family members or friends who lived far away, but now we can easily check their accounts on social media or talk by a videophone even if they are in different countries. Thus, many people will think people in this time period do not feel lonely compared to people in old times. In fact, it is not so simple. On [Time.com](https://time.com/3748090/friends-social-health/?iid=time_speed), Markham Heid, a freelance health and science writer, reports the number of Americans with no close friends has tripled since 1985. Furthermore, the average number of people feel they can talk to about "important matters" has fallen from three to two. In “[How Your Cell Phone Hurts Your Relationship](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-your-cell-phone-hurts-your-relationships/),” Helen Lee Lin, a social–behavioral scientist, reported “simply having a phone nearby, without even checking it, can be detrimental to our attempts at interpersonal connection” (13-15). Many teenagers are struggling with new technology and too much information. Both of them keep changing constantly, so teenagers need to check screens of their phones many times not to miss them. Unfortunately, unless they choose not to check their phones, information flow is endless. Also, their phones cannot fill the void in their hearts. Instagram includes both FOMO and loneliness as a problem. Thus, it can be said that Instagram represents an American zeitgeist.

Third, bullying is the other cause of teen Instagram users’ mental health problems. These days, bullying is not only problem in a classroom. On the internet, teenagers insult each other with rude and thoughtless words. This is because there are many websites that they can post anonymously. Although all of them need to register and make their accounts to post comments on Instagram, a lot of people who you do not know can visit and see your account. Therefore, there is a possibility to be hurt with thoughtless words. According to a 2017 survey conducted by [Ditch the Label](https://www.ditchthelabel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-Annual-Bullying-Survey-2017-1.pdf), more than one in five 12-to-20-year-olds experience bullying specifically on Instagram. Moreover, in “[Teens Are Being Bullied ‘Constantly’ on Instagram](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/10/teens-face-relentless-bullying-instagram/572164/),” Taylor Lorenz, a former staff writer at *The Atlantic*, mentions most bullying happens in direct message, Instagram Stories, or in the comments section of friends’ photos. It looks impossible to check all comments and prevent bullying. In fact, on [Instagram](https://instagram-press.com/blog/2019/07/08/our-commitment-to-lead-the-fight-against-online-bullying/), Adam Mosseri, a head of Instagram, stated that Instagram made a new AI comment filter to detect offensive comments. If this system works well, they may be able to decrease the number of bullying. Nowadays, cyber bullying is one of new social problems, and Instagram is a major social media which many teenagers are bullied mentally. Therefore, it can be said that Instagram represent the spirit of the time.

Of course, I know some people will disagree with my opinion and tell me several advantages of Instagram. For example, Instagram is good for business or building one’s network. However, social networking service particularly Instagram is too early for young children. They should learn about the fear of Internet and how to protect their personal information. This is because once they post their selfie or pictures including personal information on the internet, they stay forever as a *digital tattoo*. At the worst case, it eliminates a possibility of their future. For instance, some teenagers lost their jobs and future because of their thoughtless Instagram posts.

Instagram represents an American zeitgeist of social media’s negative side effects now and the future. This is because it has a strong relationship to a mental health for teenager. In my opinion, even if technology keeps developing quickly, the number of people who have mental health problems will not decrease. In fact, according to [2019 State of Mental Health in America report](https://www.mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america), the percentage of American adults, have a mental health condition, slightly decreased from 2015. However, the rate of teens experiencing a mental health issue continues to rise. Moreover, 62% of teens and children with a major depressive episode received no treatment. Adult should think about it more seriously because this is no longer a problem only for teenagers. In addition, teenagers should find people whom they can trust and talk about anything. It is very important to see not only advantages but also disadvantages of new technology in today’s world.