

Analysis of Instagram use Cultivates a Show-Off Culture Trend that Contributes to Mental Disorders

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to deepen the understanding of mental health issues prevalent in society, particularly among higher education students, resulting from the show-off culture on social media. Technological advancements, especially on highly visual platforms like Instagram, have reshaped how students perceive and experience mental well-being.

Methods: Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this research analyzes the lived experiences of two college students in North Jakarta, Gladys and Viola. The use of social media, particularly Instagram, has become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives, as reflected in the experiences of Gladys and Viola, who have both used Instagram for over five years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews structured with theoretical frameworks related to mental health to understand their psychological responses to social media interactions.

Findings: The interviews revealed that both informants initially derived satisfaction and validation from likes and comments. However, this evolved into a source of significant distress when engagement declined. Both subjects experienced symptoms of anxiety, inferiority, and social withdrawal due to upward social comparison and the pressure to maintain a curated online persona. The study found that their recovery required professional psychological intervention and a conscious restriction of social media usage to regain emotional stability.

Originality: This research contributes to the Social Comparison Theory by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, specifically highlighting how the aestheticization of life on Instagram accelerates the transition from validation-seeking behavior to diagnosed mental health disorders among youth, underscoring the urgency for digital literacy and authentic content creation.

Keywords: Mental Illness, Show-Off Culture, Higher Education Students, Instagram.

Introduction

Humans are creatures that are shaped according to the environment and communication patterns that occur in their communities (Gkargkavouzi et al., 2018). In the modern era like today, humans are faced with significant changes in behavior, especially regarding communication patterns, which automatically also shift people's lifestyles towards the development of digital media (Widyati, 2020). These changes not only impact the way humans interact with each other, but also redefine the way individuals view themselves and others. Digital transformation has brought about major behavioral changes that affect the behavior of the younger generation. Constant and smooth access to digital platforms has created new norms and expectations about how individuals should behave, present themselves, and interact socially (Whitney, 2019).

Article History: Received December 18, 2023; Revised April 20, 2025; Accepted December 13, 2025; Published December 29, 2025.

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According to Isabel Zorn (Zorn, 2017), in the previous era there were communication media with limited connections such as television, telephone, letters and in early development there were also other communication media that developed, namely message communication such as BBM, SMS, which were still very limited (Zorn & Seelmeyer, 2017). Then along with the advancement of technology and the increasingly massive presence of the internet, it allows humans to be more free and flexible in spreading information, news, or whatever they want, on the social media they want. The emergence of the increasingly massive and affordable internet has brought many changes, especially in the ease of accessing information. The internet has opened the gates for a large number of content on social media, created by users and as a place to share in real time. The effect created by technological developments is that people are no longer passive recipients of information; they become active participants, content creators, and influencers in their own right (Hynes et al., 2023). However, behind all that, there are impacts that have been created. there are other things that also create new problems, such as how society forms their own perceptions of the ideal life, and these perceptions are often adopted from the internet or social media (Fadhlan, 2019). When individuals consume curated and idealized versions of other people's lives online, they may unknowingly internalize these depictions as normative or aspirational. The line between authenticity and performance is starting to blur. Over time, social media platforms like Instagram have evolved from a space for social connection to a stage for personal branding, where success is measured by likes, followers, and engagement (Sarikakis & Winter, 2017).

The massive information and communication on social media makes social media users have certain behaviors when using it (Masood Ahmed & Noreen Aleem, 2021). According to Putri, behavior itself is an action that is actually carried out by someone in order to want something or carry out a certain action. In the context of utilizing social media or information technology users, behavioral change refers to how someone actually uses the technology. For example, someone might use technology for their existence, which means that the person has the behavior of wanting to show their existence when using social media as a form of their identity (Putri, 2024). This sense of self-existence in the digital world is often motivated by the desire to gain visibility, recognition, or even validation. Users consciously or unconsciously create content that only highlights the best aspects of their lives, which then perpetuates the performance culture. In Indonesia, 79.5% of internet users are teenagers aged 10–19 years, and their main motivation for using social media comes from the fact that the internet has become an inseparable part of their daily lives (Rizkinaswara, 2021). Their lives are closely related to the use of social media for entertainment, socializing, and self-expression. This demographic group is still in the formative stage, where identity construction is fluid and heavily influenced by external input.

In the use of social media and changes in behavior, according to a journal written by (Mahendra, 2017), adolescents are individuals who are starting to enter adult society. In terms of age, they do not feel inferior to adults but instead feel equal or even superior. Adolescents are in the age range between children and adults, which is why they are often said to be in the identity search phase (Sasongko & Wahyono, 2019). This search for identity makes adolescents very vulnerable to external influences--especially those reinforced through social media.

The age group of social media users is almost the same age as the age group that is vulnerable to mental disorders on social media. According to the 2018 Basic Health

Research conducted by the Ministry of Health, 19 million Indonesians aged over 15 years suffer from emotional mental disorders, and more than 12 million people aged over 15 years also suffer from depression (Setiawan et al., 2024). From these data, it is undeniable that the majority of social media users are in the age range that is vulnerable to mental disorders. This convergence raises an important issue: when the platforms most frequently used by young people also contribute to their stressors, it becomes important to evaluate the role of these platforms in their mental well-being. In this age range, social media has many negative impacts and also fosters habits that, over time, develop into negative behavioral patterns (Hidayatul Rachmad, 2020).

The habit of constantly informing and getting attention on social media ultimately becomes a pattern that can damage and destroy the individual user. This includes behavioral changes such as compulsive comparison, performative posting, and excessive sharing of intimate details. According to information on social media, one of the negative impacts is that individuals may engage in oversharing--posting everything they do and experience, including abnormal things like speeding, showing off wealth, or even showing mental illness. As a result, many social media users experience dehumanization, where people care more about the internet than their real-life environment (Kho, 2022).

The broad impact of the dehumanization phenomenon on a number of social media users has affected interpersonal relationships, amidst the many people who need recognition, and build identities that may be far from their true selves (Hardiman, 2020). From a deeper perspective, it can also be explained that most social media users act based on mood, namely actions related to their mood, and the many pseudonyms used indicate a lack of accountability. Social media has become an integral part of everyday life, and the problem of mental illness is growing especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of mental illnesses has increased to millions (Lee et al., 2023).

According to a journal written by Speer, self-deprecation is another form of interpersonal communication on social media, namely excessive jokes that contain self-evaluation, but in a negative context (Kho, 2022). This communication strategy can act as a shield, deflecting criticism by making oneself the subject of ridicule before others do. Self-deprecation is done so that others judge the person who does it as a humble or not arrogant person. This is done to humble oneself in order to create a better self-image. This practice may seem harmless or even cute on the surface, but it can have deeper psychological effects over time. According to Rosenberg in a journal written by Owens, self-deprecation that occurs continuously can have negative effects, such as feeling unworthy of anything and constantly feeling inferior. Self-deprecation is also often used as a joke so that people around can laugh at it, this can also affect mental health on a wider scale (Rahmiana, 2019).

Over time, these repeated expressions of low self-worth can become internalized beliefs. According to a journal written by Lykov and Kuzmin, someone who continuously engages in self-deprecation may be associated with mental illnesses such as anxiety disorders and depression, as achievements made so far seem meaningless due to the constant belittling of oneself. As a result, happiness becomes easily lost because individuals who repeatedly practice self-deprecation will feel as though they have no accomplishments and no happiness (Lykov & Kuzmin, 2015).

Instagram is a useful resource for exploring public sentiments related to antidepressant use. Mental health professionals should be cognizant of these sentiments/perceptions in order to tailor communication with patients and should consider increasing their social media presence (Lykov & Kuzmin, 2015). The Social Comparison

Theory posits that people assess their own ability, opinions, and physical attractiveness by making a comparison with other individuals. Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others (Rizzuto, 2023). This theory is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where users are constantly exposed to curated representations of others' lives. Research indicates that frequent engagement with social media can lead to negative self-evaluations and feelings of inadequacy, particularly when users compare themselves to the idealized images presented online. This phenomenon can exacerbate mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, as individuals may feel pressured to meet unrealistic standards (Christensen, 2015). These comparisons are often unconscious but deeply impactful, especially when repeated daily.

From the data obtained, according to the Kepios report, a UK-based digital company, explained that the total number of global Instagram users reached 1.74 billion as of February 2025. Regarding the high number of social media users, in Indonesia itself, currently if we look at the existing data, there are around 91 million Instagram users as of January 2025. This data makes Indonesia the fourth country with the most Instagram users in the world. Along with its development, if we look at the data released by NapoleonCat, the latest data states that the number of Instagram users in Indonesia, from the results obtained, as of May 2025, the number of social media consumers reached 90,183,200 users. Therefore, regarding this condition, in the midst of the massive use of social media in Indonesia, we can pay further attention, that the high number of social media users, the risks that can be present will also be very high. The impact that can be felt on the negative side of the high number of users of the application can also threaten their health. Especially related to his mental health (Julius, 2025).

In the development of social media and massive technological advancements, there is a lot of literature exploring the impact of social media on mental health, only a few studies specifically focus on Instagram as a platform where identity formation, self-deprecation, and public mental health discourse intersect, especially among Indonesian youth. While many existing studies treat social media as a general category, this research distinguishes itself by specifically analyzing the unique visual and performative characteristics of Instagram. This study fills a critical gap by exploring how visual culture, performativity, and mental health issues are intertwined specifically within the Indonesian demographic. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, linking the specific features of Instagram--such as its algorithmic emphasis on aesthetics--directly to the identity formation and self-deprecation behaviors of Indonesian youth, offering original insights into how strategic digital actions can mitigate mental health challenges. The choice of Instagram is based on its dominant role in shaping social comparison behavior, identity performance, and the normalization of mental health narratives through aesthetic and algorithmic mechanisms. In addition, the purpose of this study also aims to offer an integrative approach in an effort to understand the importance of efforts to maintain and present mental health in the digital era, amidst the rise and high number of social media users. Recognizing mental health conditions due to social media use, by linking them to social media behavior, especially on Instagram, so that in the future there will be psychological well-being for people who use social media. This study also aims to provide original insights into how strategic actions on the digital platforms created can reduce mental health challenges and encourage healthier and more beneficial online communities.

Methods

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2020), in which the study collects data in the form of words and images. This research method does not gather numerical data. According to Bogdan and Taylor (Moleong, 2017), qualitative research is a procedure in which the results of the research are in the form of descriptive data, containing written or spoken words sourced from people who act as informants or from observed behaviors. Descriptive research itself is research that aims to describe and provide an overview of existing phenomena (Moleong, 2017). The objective of descriptive research is to produce a study that is systematic, factual, and accurate in regard to the facts occurring in the field, and to describe the characteristics of a particular population within society.

Instagram was chosen as the research subject because it is a highly visual platform that aligns with the goals of descriptive qualitative research, which emphasizes the analysis of images and expressions as part of personal experience (Fitri Wahyu Rahmadania et al., 2023). Furthermore, Instagram's structure encourages identity performance through curated content, making it an ideal site to observe behavior, social comparison, and expressions related to mental health. The platform's popularity among teenagers and young adults, who are often in the identity-forming stage of life, also enhances its relevance to the study's target demographic. This research uses two informants; Gladys Jessica Lauw (Gladys), aged 21 years and Vionita Wijaya (Viola), aged 22 years. They are currently studying at a private college in Jakarta.

Results

Based on information obtained from two (2) informants, several things related to the answers and narratives conveyed can be observed and studied further. The two informants are; Gladys Jessica Lauw (Gladys), aged 21 years and Vionita Wijaya (Viola), aged 22 years. They are currently studying at a private college in Jakarta. Based on the results of interviews with the two sources above, this study found several important aspects that have been narrated in the form of a research report.

The use of social media, particularly Instagram, has become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives, as reflected in the experiences of Gladys and Viola, who have both used Instagram for over five years. Initially, they were very active in sharing various moments from their daily routines, such as school activities, time at home, and family gatherings, often utilizing Instagram Stories and posting with considerable frequency. Both respondents described feeling happy, proud, and appreciated when they could share these moments and receive responses in the form of likes or comments from friends, which fostered a sense of connection and recognition within their social circles.

However, over time, the frequency of sharing decreased, and their enthusiasm for posting declined. When their posts received fewer comments or likes than expected, feelings of being unappreciated, inferior, and unrecognized began to emerge. Gladys admitted to blaming herself, feeling overlooked by others, and comparing herself to peers who seemed more adept at creating engaging content. Similarly, Viola experienced a decline in self-confidence and self-worth, accompanied by suspicions that others did not care or even harbored negative opinions about her. These psychological impacts became more pronounced as both respondents began to avoid interactions with friends or acquaintances who had seen their posts, driven by fear of negative judgment, discomfort, and anxiety about how others perceived them.

These findings illustrate that while social media interactions can initially provide positive feelings of connection and validation, they also carry significant psychological risks. The need for social recognition and the dynamics of self-esteem among adolescents are deeply influenced by their experiences and feedback within these digital platforms, highlighting the importance of critical awareness regarding the mental health implications of social media use.

Based on the findings of the interview, it was revealed that the two informants had experienced mental health disorders and were in the process of attempting self-recovery. When clarification regarding their current mental health status was requested, it was honestly conveyed by both informants that a form of mental illness related to the use of social media, particularly Instagram, had indeed been experienced. It was openly acknowledged that their health and psychological conditions had been disrupted, and it was emphasized that this issue could not be underestimated or denied. As a subsequent step towards recovery and the enhancement of mental resilience, it was advised that both informants seek professional psychological assistance, and referrals to psychiatrists were provided so that appropriate treatment could be administered. The handling of their cases was carried out through further clinical evaluation and the provision of interventions tailored to their needs. This recommendation was viewed not merely as a procedural step, but as a significant and constructive effort to ensure that their mental health was addressed systematically and professionally.

In addition, it was explained that, in relation to the mental health issues experienced, reducing and monitoring the use of social media was believed to help manage their dependence on such platforms. The importance of building effective communication with the surrounding environment was also highlighted as part of the healing process. It was believed by the informants that consistent engagement with mental health services could gradually establish a stronger foundation for emotional stability and psychological growth. The recovery process was regarded as a meaningful investment in personal development, especially in strengthening self-regulation, self-awareness, and emotional resilience for future challenges.

Moreover, it was reported that intensive use of social media had significantly impacted the informants' behavior and appearance, where dependence on social media was identified as a major factor contributing to the emergence of mental disorders. It was mentioned by Gladys that Instagram served as one of the most frequently used platforms for communication and socialization. In general, it was explained by both Gladys and Viola that, when using Instagram to exchange information and express themselves, efforts were made to refrain from uploading inappropriate content or anything that could belittle themselves or others. The concept of mutual respect and positive sharing on social media was appreciated as a valuable part of their experience.

Furthermore, it was underlined that dependence on social media and the effort to maintain mental health were considered crucial. It was stated by the resource person that mental health is a fundamental basis for comprehensive self-care, which means that its maintenance should be carried out continuously in order to control social media usage and prevent the development of excessive dependence. It was also recognized that individuals who are currently experiencing mental health problems are likely to encounter various difficulties, yet social media continues to be considered an effective means of communication, despite the significant risks lurking behind it.

In subsequent explanations, it was indicated that active social media users like Gladys and Viola tend to regularly share their thoughts and personal experiences. This

sharing process was positioned as a habitual way of self-expression and of maintaining a connection with their audience. It was emphasized that social media had been used as a space for the construction and reconstruction of personal identity, emotions, and narratives.

Furthermore, it was explained that every time posts were made, honesty and emotional openness were prioritized. Positive responses from the audience, such as likes and comments, were felt as validation and motivation, which encouraged further engagement in online conversations, thereby creating a form of emotional exchange that strengthened the sense of belonging. This dynamic highlighted the importance of appropriately understanding and interpreting one's social media presence. When a positive emotional state was experienced, the expression of previously suppressed thoughts and feelings could be externalized constructively through social media.

However, a warning was also issued about the risks of excessive expression without proper introspection. It was conveyed that the use of social media demands self-awareness and self-control, where the capacity to filter emotions before sharing is considered essential. This filtering process is not intended as suppression, but rather as a mindful communication practice--selecting which emotions are productive to share and which may be better left unspoken to avoid misunderstandings or further emotional harm. In conclusion, it was agreed by Gladys and Viola that responsible engagement with social media requires emotional regulation, critical understanding of motivations for sharing, and the maintenance of healthy boundaries between the private self and the public persona. With such awareness, social media can be utilized as a space for positive interactions, rather than a venue for uncontrolled emotional exposure.

From several discussions conducted with the informants, a number of significant aspects were identified that require further and more comprehensive attention. In the context described above, it can be understood that mental illness, which is increasingly prevalent in society today, constitutes a critical issue that disrupts overall human well-being by primarily affecting an individual's psychological condition. Many individuals suffering from mental health problems tend to seek solutions by undergoing counseling sessions.

Crucially, the investigation confirmed that these were not merely fleeting feelings of sadness but developed into recognizable mental health concerns. Both informants honestly acknowledged that they had experienced forms of mental illness directly related to their Instagram use. They admitted that their psychological conditions had been disrupted to the point where it could not be underestimated or denied. The intensity of their dependence on social media was identified as a major contributing factor. Gladys noted that Instagram was her primary mode of communication, which made the blurred lines between her digital persona and her actual self even more damaging. The constant exposure to the curated successes of others exacerbated their feelings of inadequacy, leading to a state where they felt inferior and unworthy.

In response to these severe psychological impacts, the study found that recovery required significant intervention. It was not enough for the informants to simply log off; the damage to their self-perception required professional handling. Both informants were advised to seek professional psychological assistance, and referrals to psychiatrists were provided to ensure appropriate treatment. This step underscores the severity of the issue--that social media-induced mental health disorders are clinical matters requiring clinical solutions. The recovery process involved clinical evaluation and interventions tailored to their specific needs, moving beyond simple advice to a systematic reconstruction of their

mental resilience.

Furthermore, a key component of their recovery and ongoing mental health management involved a radical change in their digital habits. Reducing and strictly monitoring social media usage was identified as an essential strategy to manage dependence. Both Gladys and Viola engaged in efforts to refrain from uploading content solely for validation or content that might be self-deprecating. They began to practice 'mindful communication,' where they filtered their emotions before sharing. This filtering was not an act of suppression, but a protective measure to distinguish between productive sharing and harmful emotional exposure. They learned to prioritize honesty and emotional openness but within healthy boundaries, ensuring that their self-worth was no longer contingent on the number of likes they received.

The informants also highlighted the importance of re-establishing connections with their physical environment. Effective communication with people in their real-life surroundings became a pillar of their healing process. By shifting their focus from the virtual show-off stage back to tangible, interpersonal relationships, they were able to gradually rebuild their emotional stability. They agreed that responsible engagement with social media requires high levels of self-awareness and emotional regulation. Ultimately, the results demonstrate that while Instagram creates a fertile ground for mental health degradation through comparison and validation-seeking, recovery is possible through a combination of professional help, digital detoxing, and a conscious re-evaluation of one's sources of self-worth.

Discussion

Mental illness manifests through disturbances in one's emotional state, cognitive function, and behavioral patterns, or through a combination of these elements, each of which plays a fundamental role in shaping an individual's personality and mental development. In recent findings, Dror Ben-Zeev (2025) highlights that unpleasant experiences particularly acts of sexual violence have been found to significantly contribute to the deterioration of mental health. Such traumatic experiences can cause persistent psychological distress, making them extremely hazardous for victims who endure ongoing abuse (Ben-Zeev, 2025). The psychological burden stemming from such violence emphasizes the need for trauma-informed care and long-term mental health support for survivors.

In a more comprehensive framework, mental illness can be linked to various types of disfunction across different aspects of an individual's life. As Putra (2023) notes, the presence of mental disorders is often accompanied by an individual's inability to function effectively within social settings, at work, or in family life (Putra, 2023). Meanwhile, according to Ndetei, mental illness may also encompass conditions that directly affect the way people think, feel, and behave in their day-to-day experiences. These multi-dimensional impacts highlight the severity of mental disorders as not merely internal conditions but also as social and relational challenges that must be addressed holistically (Ndetei et al., 2019).

Moreover, mental illness poses a serious threat to psychological well-being and, if left untreated, may lead to further complications. Mamaru Melkam (2024) underscores that in Africa, mental health research remains significantly underdeveloped, revealing a critical gap in global mental health awareness and intervention (Melkam, 2024). A particularly alarming implication of untreated mental illness, as indicated by Dhingra (2025), is its potential to trigger additional chronic illnesses such as diabetes. This finding

reveals the psychosomatic connection between mental and physical health, reinforcing the urgent need for early detection and comprehensive intervention (Dhingra, 2025).

On a deeper level, according to the argument presented by Lee and Vidamaly (2021) in the journal article: *Young Adults' Mental Illness Aesthetics on Social Media*, there are seven identified mediators that contribute to the aestheticization of mental illness issues (Vidamaly, 2021). Therefore, it can be understood that the media referred to as a unit, such as film, TV, blogs, magazines, books, artworks, and even billboards, play a significant role in the process of glorifying mental disorders, especially eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and self-harm (Jepson J, 2022).

In the context of social phenomena, growing public attention and efforts to address the increasingly widespread incidence of mental health disturbances or what is often referred to as the glorification of mental illness can potentially lead to detrimental effects on the personality development of individuals affected by mental disorders (Sonalika, 2023). As explains, this overexposure or romanticization of mental illness may distort public understanding and inadvertently promote unhealthy identification with such conditions. When mental health is framed inappropriately, it risks reducing the complexity of psychological suffering into mere trends, instead of recognizing it as a serious and multifaceted health concern. Furthermore, those experiencing mental illness often have different interpretations and understandings of their own conditions. Getahun (2025) argues that when individuals lack access to appropriate guidance and treatment, they may turn to self-diagnosis. This practice is not only risky to themselves but also potentially harmful to others. The tendency to assume that mental illness is easily diagnosed and treated could lead individuals to prematurely label themselves as sufferers (Getahun, 2025). Utari (2022) asserts that these abnormal assumptions may worsen the situation, especially when individuals begin to romanticize or normalize what should be viewed as a serious mental health issue (Utari, 2022).

The phenomenon of using Instagram as a primary platform to popularize the showing off trend, which contributes to the emergence of various mental health issues particularly mental illness--is a significant concern. In the ever-evolving digital era, social media platforms such as Instagram have become an inseparable part of many individuals' daily lives, especially among the younger generation. Therefore, in a recent study conducted by Emily A. Karanges, the findings revealed that individuals suffering from mental health disorders are particularly vulnerable to the use of illicit substances (Karanges, 2025). One possible solution to address this issue is the adoption of regular physical exercise, as this activity can help individuals with mental health conditions maintain a balanced and healthier lifestyle (Austin, 2025).

Instagram offers a range of visual features that enable users to showcase their lives in an aesthetically pleasing and appealing manner, often tied to the display of wealth, beauty, success, and luxury lifestyles. In a study conducted by Rachel Kahn Best (2025), it is asserted that individuals suffering from mental illness are often those who belong to marginalized groups--people who are frequently overlooked or dismissed by mainstream society (Best, 2025). The trend of showing off has thus become a facet of popular culture, driven largely by the desire for social recognition, validation, and approval in the form of likes and engagement from other users.

This phenomenon not only serves as a platform for individuals to highlight their personal accomplishments but also imposes immense social pressure (Razaq, 2020). Such pressure is particularly significant for adolescents and young adults, who are still navigating the formative stages of identity construction and self-esteem. When

individuals feel compelled to present a curated, flawless version of their lives filled with success and aesthetic appeal, they are more prone to comparing themselves to the unrealistic standards perpetuated by social media platforms. This comparison often leads to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and emotional distress, further exacerbating the risk of developing or worsening mental health issues. Several psychological factors related to social pressure and comparison can be seen in the following visual representation (see [Figure 1](#)):

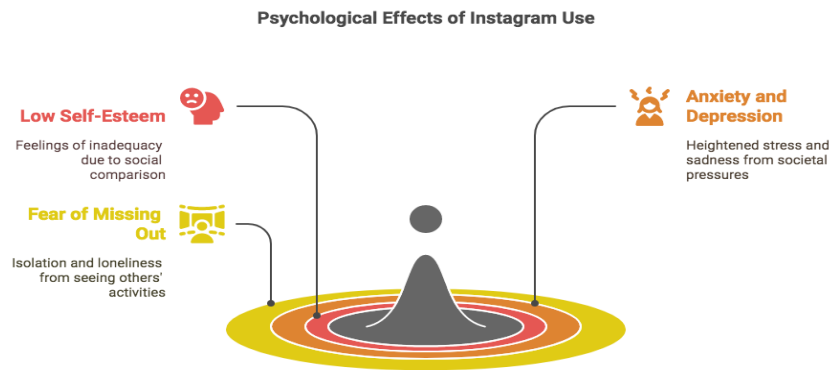


Figure 1. Psychological Effects of Instagram Use (source: [Vahia & Kirwin, 2018](#))

The psychological impact of this trend is quite significant. Research reviewed in this article shows that users involved in excessive ‘showing off’ practices tend to experience increased levels of anxiety, stress, and feelings of inferiority. They may feel that their achievements and appearance are not good enough compared to others who seem more successful and visually attractive. The feeling of failing to meet these high social standards can trigger mental disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, and even eating disorders ([Vahia & Kirwin, 2018](#)).

Furthermore, the pressure to maintain a perfect image on social media can lead to emotional exhaustion and mental fatigue, which further worsens the psychological state of users. This phenomenon also reveals that many users feel the need to constantly compare their lives with others, ultimately causing feelings of dissatisfaction, envy, and low self-esteem. It is not uncommon for users who feel unable to meet these standards to withdraw from real-life social interactions, potentially exacerbating their mental health conditions ([O’Connor & Vaughan, 2021](#)).

Several features, such as algorithms prioritizing visually appealing and popular content, may encourage users to more actively showcase their lives in order to gain attention and recognition. On the other hand, the lack of regulation and education on healthy social media use exacerbates this situation. Many users are unaware that what they display on social media is only a small portion of their real lives and does not reflect their actual circumstances. As seen in the image below (see [Figure 2](#)):



Figure 2. Causes of Mental Health Issues on Instagram
(source: Data processed by Researchers)

In the context of prevention, this article proposes the importance of education and awareness from various parties, including parents, educators, and the social media platforms themselves. Users need to be taught to understand that the showing off trend is not always healthy and can lead to serious psychological consequences. Developing a culture of positive and realistic social media use is an important step in reducing unnecessary social pressure (Hancq, 2022). Additionally, providing counseling services and psychological support for those who experience pressure or mental disorders due to this trend is also highly necessary.

The showing off phenomenon on Instagram is not just a mere entertainment trend, but rather a complex social phenomenon with serious implications for public mental health, particularly among the younger generation. Therefore, there is a need for collective efforts to create a healthier social media environment that supports positive mental growth. Awareness of the risks and the development of appropriate education strategies and regulations are key to addressing the negative impacts of this trend (Sonalika, 2023).

Meanwhile, in human interactions with one another on social media, communication becomes an important part that can build an intense relationship. However, when we look at the role more comprehensively, the dependence on the use of social media becomes one aspect that needs attention (Razaq, 2020). For communities that are highly dominant in utilizing social media, especially Instagram, a significant impact that can affect the weakness in communication through social media is the emergence of mental illness. One mental illness that draws concern regarding social media use is mental illness itself. Mental illness, or what can be known as a disease that attacks the human mental state, is a condition that may arise in connection with health issues experienced by every user and consumer of social media (Fadila, 2020).

Mental illness can affect anyone, regardless of their background or status, particularly those who are heavily immersed in and consume social media excessively. This condition is not limited by age it can affect individuals ranging from children to the elderly (Jacob, 2017). Likewise, mental disorders do not discriminate by gender; whether male or female, every person remains vulnerable to the psychological impacts of mental illness. What makes this condition especially alarming is its potential to threaten personal safety, as it can manifest in severe forms that endanger an individual's life and well-being. Unlike physical health issues, which often present visible symptoms that can be easily recognized and addressed, mental health disorders frequently remain hidden from view. This invisibility contributes to the tendency of society to ignore or even forget the existence and seriousness of mental illness (Hegde et al., 2025).

In a more profound context, the long-term effects of mental illness can be just as significant as physical health conditions, disrupting an individual's ability to function socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Adamson et al., 2017). Moreover, individuals in restricted environments such as prison inmates--are particularly susceptible to mental health problems due to their isolated and high-stress surroundings. If such disorders are neglected and left untreated, they pose a critical risk to human safety and quality of life (Patler, 2025).

Mental illness or mental disorder, in general, can be defined as a disease that affects a person's mental state or psychological condition. In a broader context, this illness can affect health conditions and have wider impacts, such as disturbing one's thought processes, emotions, behavior, mood, and social attitudes, which can lead to behavioral changes (Mizock & Carr, 2021). The mental illnesses experienced by some individuals due to the impact of social media use may occur in various contexts. These disorders can arise occasionally or persist over a long period (chronically). Therefore, the resulting impacts may include several things that need further attention, especially concerning physical conditions that will surely influence behavior (Sonalika, 2023).

The condition that becomes part of mental illness may eventually become a harmful state for one's health and personal safety. These disturbances may occur on a mild to severe level. Mental disorders can affect a person's ability to carry out daily activities, including social interactions, work, and relationships with family. Thus, the long-term effects that should be given further attention are how these mental disorders can eventually disrupt our social relations with the broader community (Austin, 2025).

It is important to further observe the mental health disorders experienced by active social media users. Broadly speaking, it can be noted that this type of mental illness is a disease that falls into the category of those with a treatable recovery process. Mental illness is a condition that can be treated (Felix et al., 2024). As an important note to consider, in a deeper view of this illness, in the lives of those who suffer from mental illness, most of them are still able to carry out their daily routines and professional jobs. However, in more severe conditions, individuals suffering from advanced mental disorders may require intensive care in hospitals to manage their condition (Shiri et al., 2025). Therefore, when considered more closely, in general, it is not uncommon that problems related to mental disorders--especially when they expand and potentially endanger safety can lead sufferers to experience the urge to harm themselves or even end their lives, with actions that are undoubtedly dangerous and can cause prolonged grief (Hu et al., 2024).

Instagram, as a visual-based social media platform, has transformed into a virtual stage where individuals actively present themselves and their lives to a wider audience. Amidst the sea of content flooding the timeline, a striking phenomenon has emerged, namely the show-off culture. This culture is characterized by the tendency of users to selectively display aspects of their lives that are considered the most interesting, luxurious, successful, or happy. Photos of exotic vacations, branded goods, brilliant career achievements, seemingly perfect romantic relationships, and even charming physical appearances have become daily fare for Instagram users (Setiawan et al., 2024). This show-off culture did not just appear out of nowhere. Instagram's own algorithm, which is designed to maximize user engagement, often prioritizes content that is visually appealing and gets a lot of interaction. This indirectly encourages users to create show-off content in order to gain attention and validation from their followers. In addition, social pressure to appear on social media also contributes to this phenomenon. In the

digital era, a person's existence is often measured by their digital footprint, including how they present themselves on platforms like Instagram (Kaparang et al., 2022).

One of the most significant psychological impacts of Instagram's show-off culture is that it triggers social comparison mechanisms. Social comparison theory states that individuals have a natural tendency to compare themselves to others in various aspects of their lives. When Instagram users are constantly exposed to representations of other people's ideal lives, this can trigger upward social comparison, where they compare themselves to people who are perceived as more fortunate or successful (Syafuddin & Lusianawati, 2023).

Constant exposure to the highlight reel of other people's lives can create a distorted perception of reality. Users may begin to feel that their own lives are less interesting, less successful, or less happy than what they see on Instagram. These feelings can trigger a range of negative emotions, such as low self-esteem, envy, frustration, and dissatisfaction with themselves and their lives. This unhealthy cycle of social comparison can slowly but surely erode a person's self-confidence and self-esteem (Fajar, 2019).

Instagram's show-off culture also creates a strong pressure for users to project a perfect self-image. The use of filters, photo and video editing apps, and strategic angles and lighting are common practices to create an ideal look. The narratives and captions that accompany posts are often carefully chosen to highlight positive aspects and hide any flaws or struggles that may be experienced (Nurhayat & Noorizki, 2022).

This pressure to constantly project perfection can force users to live in pretense and inauthenticity. They may feel the need to hide their true selves and only present a version of themselves that has been curated and approved by social media standards. This can lead to feelings of emptiness, alienation, and a loss of genuine connection with oneself and others. Energy that should be used for self-growth and development is instead drained to maintain a false image online (Nurhayat & Noorizki, 2022).

Constant exposure to posts about interesting and enjoyable experiences shared by others on Instagram can trigger the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Users may feel anxious and worried that they are missing out on valuable experiences, exciting events, or the latest trends that others are experiencing. FOMO can trigger feelings of envy, anxiety, and a strong desire to constantly check their Instagram feed to stay on top of information. This can interfere with focus, productivity, and sleep quality. In the long term, chronic FOMO can contribute to increased levels of anxiety and depression (Herlina, 2018).

In the culture of showing off on Instagram, the number of likes, comments, and followers is often an indicator of popularity and social acceptance. Users may subconsciously start to link their self-worth to the external validation they receive on the platform. When a post gets a lot of positive engagement, they may feel happy and appreciated. However, when a post does not get the response they expected, this can trigger feelings of disappointment, worthlessness, and even rejection.

Over-reliance on external validation can leave one's self-esteem fragile and easily swayed by the fluctuations in likes and comments. This can create an unhealthy cycle, where users are constantly seeking validation from others to feel good about themselves. When that validation doesn't come, they can feel increasingly low and vulnerable to mental health issues. The cumulative impact of negative social comparison, pressure for perfectionism, inauthenticity, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and a reliance on external validation can contribute significantly to a range of mental health issues. Research has shown a correlation between heavy social media use, including Instagram, and increased

risk of symptoms of anxiety, depression, body image disturbance, and even suicidal thoughts, especially in adolescents and young adults. Instagram's show-off culture creates a virtual environment filled with illusions and unhealthy comparisons. Constant exposure to unrealistic, idealized representations of life can erode feelings of gratitude, self-satisfaction, and the ability to appreciate real life. It's important to be aware of these potential negative impacts and take proactive steps to maintain mental health amidst the onslaught of show-off culture on social media (Zubaida, 2021).

To combat the negative impacts of Instagram's show-off culture, a crucial first step is to develop self-awareness. Users need to be aware of how the platform affects their thoughts, emotions, and perceptions of themselves and others. Acknowledging the pressure to show off and the negative impact of social comparison is an important first step. Next, it's important to develop healthier Instagram usage strategies. Some steps you can take include limiting your time spent on Instagram, choosing wisely which accounts you follow (focusing on inspiring and positive accounts, not those that trigger negative comparisons), being more selective about sharing personal content, and focusing on authentic and meaningful interactions. It's also important to remind yourself that what you see on Instagram is only a small and often curated representation of someone's life, not the whole reality (Ainiyah, 2018).

If the impact of Instagram's show-off culture is starting to take a toll on your mental health, don't hesitate to seek support from friends, family, or a mental health professional. Talking about your feelings and experiences can help reduce emotional burdens and provide a healthier perspective. It's also important to balance your virtual life with a focus on your mental health in the real world (Koli, 2023). Making time for enjoyable and meaningful activities outside of social media, such as connecting with loved ones, exercising, pursuing hobbies, and enjoying the simple moments in everyday life, can help build mental resilience and reduce your reliance on virtual validation. By developing awareness, adopting healthy usage strategies, seeking support when needed, and prioritizing your mental health in the real world, we can reduce the negative impact of Instagram's show-off culture and create a healthier relationship with social media. Remember that your true self-worth is not determined by the number of likes or followers you have online, but by the quality of your self-worth and meaningful relationships in the real world (Nurjanah, 2024).

Conclusion

Mental illness continues to be a subject of considerable interest and relevance, particularly in relation to the growing demand for and efforts to foster a broader understanding of this issue. In the process of maintaining and educating the mental character of each individual, self-control and effective emotional management emerge as key components in understanding and addressing the diverse forms of mental illness. The importance of remaining open to change serves as a crucial factor in maintaining sound reasoning and in preventing vulnerability to attention-seeking stimuli from social media. Continuously monitoring one's psychological condition is essential for understanding the holistic development of mental health in a structured and organized manner. This article recommends three steps to reduce mental illness: (1) promote digital literacy by educating users about the curated and often idealized nature of social media content to help mitigate feelings of inadequacy; (2) encourage authentic content creation by influencers and users to foster more relatable and honest online environments; and (3) increase access to mental health resources to support users in navigating the psychological challenges presented by

social media platforms. Considering Instagram's significant influence, particularly among adolescents and young adults, future research could explore the psychological effects of emerging features such as Reels and algorithm-driven content feeds, as well as the potential of platform specific interventions such as, content warnings, digital detox tools, or AI-driven sentiment analysis--to proactively support users' mental well-being in an increasingly digital culture.

Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organization related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

The Researchers would like to express their sincere gratitude to Gladys and Viola for generously sharing their stories, as well as to all parties involved in the creation of this journal article.

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