

# “A content and thematic analysis of #instagramvsreality images and captions on Instagram”

Meaghan Furlano & Kaitlynn Mendes



Taken from sample (@breeelenehan on Instagram)

# Agenda

- Existing Literature on Instagram and Body Image
- What is the “Instagram vs. Reality” Trend?
- The Project
- Methods
- Results
- Implications



Taken from sample (@diaryofafitmommyofficial on Instagram)

# Existing Instagram/Body Image Literature

- **2022:** Nearly 1.4 billion active users on Instagram
- 61.9% of Instagram users are 18-34
- Unlike traditional media, IG is peer-generated and interactive
- Leads to social comparison and surveillance
- IG is a site through which social norms are dispersed and taken up
- Easily accessible editing technologies → hard to tell which bodies are edited

# Continued

- IG images tend to be highly staged and unrealistic
- Exposure to idealized IG images leads to body dissatisfaction and self-objectification
  - Linked to depression, eating disorders, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, etc.
- **Thinspiration + fitspiration trends** → affect users *negatively* and *to the same degree*
- **Body positivity** → promotes a more inclusive conceptualization of the body
  - Associated with positive health, emotional, and psychological outcomes
  - **Negatives:**
    - Can feed into body fixation
    - Images of white women may dominate the movement
    - Commodification dilutes message

# Instagram vs. Reality Trend



Taken from sample (@nadiasawalha on Instagram)

- Users post side-by-side images of themselves
- One side is “Instagram” + other is “reality”
  - **Instagram side:** Sucking in stomach, flattering lighting, artful posing, getting the “right” angle, editing, etc.
  - **Reality side:** Standing/sitting “naturally,” relaxed stomach, blemished skin, cellulite, rolls, stretch marks, etc.
- A form on *online activism* → designed to show that social media is “fake” and encourages users to stop making comparisons
- *One study* has taken up the trend academically
- Found that exposure to “IG v. R” and “reality” images led to *decreased body dissatisfaction* amongst participants

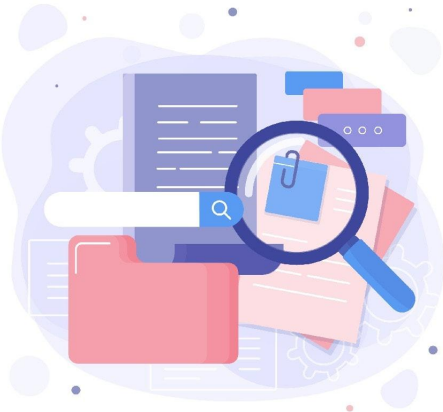
# The Project

**RQ1:** Who is using the “Instagram vs. reality” trend on Instagram?

**RQ2:** How are Instagram users participating in the trend?

**RQ3:** How do Instagram users articulate their reasons for participating through their captions?

# Methods



Taken from <https://www.marketing91.com/content-analysis/>

- *Content analysis*
  - Used SPSS
  - Coded using pre-existing codebooks
  - Added new coding questions to meet the needs of the trend
  - **Interested in:** Demographics, Body-related attributes, Clothing, Objectification, Editing, Lighting, and Captions
  
- *Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)*
  - Noted recurring themes while coding

# Results

## *Who is using the “Instagram vs. reality” trend on Instagram?*

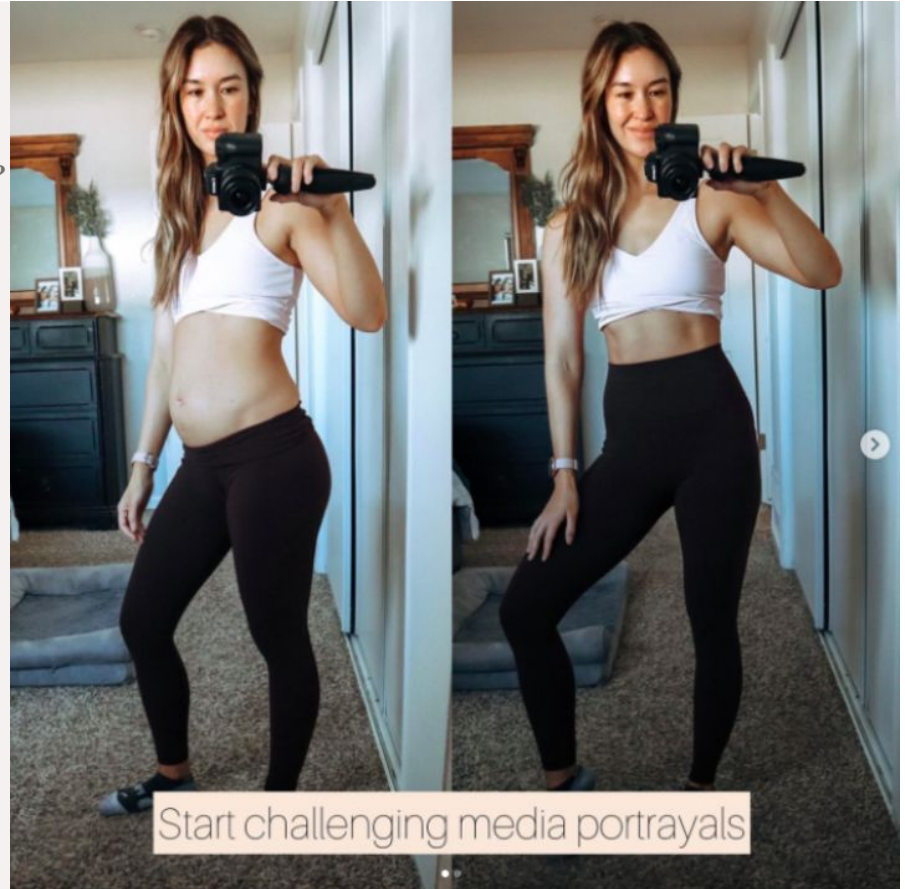
- Mainly white women aged 20-39, at a healthy weight
- Tend to have straight hair and no visible acne/cellulite

## *How are Instagram users utilizing the trend?*

- Showing the role of filters, lighting, posing, editing, etc.
- Many users focus on stomach differences

## *How do Instagram users articulate their reasons for participating via their captions?*

- **Popular themes:** Instagram is fake, stopping comparisons, reclaiming body confidence, and that editing/posing can alter one’s appearance
- Most captions did not contain direct ads/self promotion



Taken from sample (@annamarq\_ on Instagram)



# Thematic Notes

- Degree of change
- Text on images
- Mentions of weather
- Familiar faces
- Redefining “looking into the camera”



Taken from sample (@fayes\_skin on Instagram)

# Implications

- The IG v. R trend is an offshoot of the body positivity movement
- But perhaps it deals more with instilling media literacy than promoting body positivity
  - **Media literacy:** The skills one must adopt to protect themselves against unrealistic beauty and appearance standards online.
- *Makes sense* → considering the IG v. R trend is less diverse than the body positivity movement
- IG v. R has the potential to be a useful trend
- However, its limitations must be noted

# Thank you

Any questions?

You can reach me at:

- [mfurlan4@uwo.ca](mailto:mfurlan4@uwo.ca)



Taken from sample (@claireashleybeauty on Instagram)

# Citations

Baker, N., Ferszt, G., & Breines, J. G. (2019). "A Qualitative Study Exploring Female College Students' Instagram Use and Body Image." *Cyberpsychology, behaviour, and social networking*, 22, 277-282.

Caldeira, S. P., De Ridder, S., & Van Bauwel, S. (2020). "Between the Mundane and the Political: Women's Self-Representations on Instagram." *Social Media + Society*, 6, 1-14.

Cohen, R., Fardouly, J., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019a). "#BoPo on Instagram: An experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young women's mood and body image." *new media & society*, 21, 1546-1564.

Cohen, R., Irwin, L., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019b). "#bodypositivity: A content analysis of body positive accounts on Instagram." *Body Image*, 29, 47-57.

Lazuka, R. F., Wick, M. R., Keel, P. K., Harringer, J. A. (2020). "Are We There Yet? Progress in Depicting Diverse Images of Beauty in Instagram's Body Positivity Movement." *Body Image*, 34, 85-93.

Statistica. (2022). "Distribution of Instagram users worldwide as of April 2022, by age group."

Tiggemann, M., & Anderberg, I. (2020). "Social media is not real: The effect of 'Instagram vs reality' images on women's social comparison and body image." *new media & society*, 22, 2183-2199.

Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. L. (2015). "What is and what is not positive body image? Conceptual foundations and construct definition." *Body Image*, 14, 118-129.

Wise, J. (2022). "How many people use Instagram in 2022? (monthly active users)." *EarthWeb*.