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## **Exploring the relationships between self-presentation and self-esteem of mothers in social media in Russia**

### **Abstract**

Majority of parents use social media platforms, with young mothers being the most active users. Academic research has only recently started addressing the impact of social media on mothers, although they are one of the most engaged online audiences. Instagram and Facebook perceived as positive types of social media, where users post positive content to increase encouraging response from their subscribers and thus enhance their self-esteem. This also relates to mothers portraying positive self-presentation online, therefore enhancing their parental self-esteem. This study provides in-depth analysis of 23 popular online profiles of mothers with more than thirty thousand followers on Instagram and 12 interviews with socially active mothers. This work focuses on mothers in Russia. Research findings show mothers with children of pre-school age are the most regular users of social media. This is due to time availability, as majority of these mothers are on maternity leave and due to little knowledge in child related aspects, which leads to lower self-esteem. They often look for assurance in online community. Mothers that are more confident have positive attitude towards social media communication. Mothers with initially lower self-esteem feel under pressure to maintain positive image to be in line with other mothers' presentation on social media. Mothers find Facebook more informative and supportive vehicle of communication than Instagram.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Self-Presentation, Mothers, Self-Esteem.

## 1. Introduction

Parents become increasingly involved in social media platforms (Statista, 2016). Seventy-five percent of all parents engage in social media, with young mothers (with the child under the age of 5) being the most active users (Cohen, 2015). They often share the content related to their child on digital platform with other parents and exchange/ follow the postings of others who they share similar views on parenthood or find their online content of interest (Madden et al., 2012). Previous research determines that parents use social networking sites to increase their social capital (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Doty & Dworkin, 2013; Jang & Dworkin, 2014; Duggan et al., 2015). They mainly focus on the use of Facebook. There are still, however, unknown aspects of parental social media engagement. One of these aspects is the relationships between online self-presentation and mothers' self-esteem that this study examines.

Young mothers extensively use both Facebook and Instagram to connect with wider community of parents (Duggan et al., 2015). Facebook provides informative content consisting of access to a range of pages with motherhood related aspects (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014). Less research explores Instagram, although this media is one of the fast-growing (Statista, 2016). Instagram is a platform where users share photographs of their lifestyles and communicate via textual commentary under the images. The advantage of this media type is instant communication of visual information. More than half of Instagram users are females who prefer to follow positive content displayed in profiles (Statista, 2016; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

This study explores the engagement in social media of mothers in Russia. Russia is the second top user of Instagram after United States (Statista, 2016). The main difference of motherhood in Russia is a long-term maternity leave (up to three years). During this time, young mothers get more involved in social media when it concerns parenting questions (Duggan et al., 2015). Recently, more mothers in Russia find a new business opportunity when using social platform (Isupova, 2015). This is particularly evident in Instagram, where users can easily promote their business initiatives and mothers do so by basing their business ideas on children activities and products (Tkachova, 2016).

Previous research argues that positive content posted on social media generates more encouraging feedback from other users, which in its turn enhances one's self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2006). Users tend to portray their online lives more complimentary than

they are in reality (Chiang & Suen, 2015). Previous research argues that positive self-presentation on social media generates more encouraging feedback from other users, which in its turn enhances one's self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Chiang & Suen, 2015).

As online parental community is influential, it is important to explore the patterns of social media use by mothers and relationships between their self-presentation and self-esteem (Bartholomew et al., 2012). There are still many unknown aspects of parental use of social media (Jang & Dworkin, 2014). The current study aims to explore the aspects and impact of self-presentation of mothers on social media (Facebook and Instagram) on their self-esteem. The differences between online and offline life are explored to understand the reasons for this behaviour.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Parental Engagement in Social Media*

Although parenthood is a rewarding and enjoyable experience, it also involves some challenges and anxiety, including newborn care demands, high costs, lack of knowledge and experience, and reduced spare time (Petch & Halford, 2008; Bartholomew et al., 2012). The transition to parenthood can be one of the most stressful life experiences for new parents (McDaniel et al., 2012). Social support provided to parents is associated with better health and relationships satisfaction. Social media is among recent technological developments, which new mothers extensively use to connect with their peers (McDaniel et al., 2012). The number of social networks improves social capital (Jang & Dworkin, 2014).

Research shows that parents spend more time on social media straight after the childbirth (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016). Mothers are more heavily engaged in social media, giving and receiving social support (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016). They are one of the top online users, with three out of four mothers using social media (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014). Research on US mothers finds that young mothers of age 18-34 spent more time on Facebook than other demographics. Mothers of younger children are more likely to be social media users sharing the content related to their child with others (Duggan et al., 2015). Parents use range of social media types. Young mothers notably engage in Facebook, YouTube and Instagram

(eMarketer, 2013). This study focuses on Facebook and Instagram for the purposes of exploring relationships between self-presentation and self-esteem. Research shows that individuals engage in Facebook twice more than in YouTube (American Press Institute, 2016). Users create personal profiles on Facebook and Instagram where they share/exchange information with others. YouTube commonly used for entertainment purposes. Mothers do not tend to create active YouTube profiles uploading videos, thus, it is more difficult to monitor and evaluate users' representation/profiles on this media in relation to self-presentation and self-esteem. Eighty-one percent of mothers' use Facebook and thirty percent engage in Instagram communication to get parenting advices (Duggan et al., 2015; Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014).

Involvement of new mothers into digital media, such as blogging and social media can improve their well-being allowing them to connect to the outside world (McDaniel et al., 2012). However, social media also puts more pressure on young mothers to maintain certain positive online image of themselves as mothers (eMarketer, 2015). Duggan et al. (2015) argues that more parents respond to good news than to bad news of their network connections, indicating they feel more comfortable dealing with positive content.

## *2.2. Self-Presentation in Social Media*

With recent developments of social media communication, the need for understanding of online self-presentation and its determinants increased (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016). Understanding online self-presentation is of importance as previous research argues that users positively enhance their self-image online to receive more positive feedback from other users (Chua and Chang, 2016; Fox & Vendemia, 2016). It is also the case with online representation of mothers as they feel under pressure to maintain an ideal image (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Jang & Dworkin, 2014.). Self-presentation is an appearance of an individual in society (Goffman, 1959). The self-impression depends on the goals of communication and the expectation of one's social ties (Sanderson, 2008). According to Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2016), users with performance goals think that competence is fixed and they compare their abilities with others. Therefore, they are more inclined to demonstrate positive self-impression and self-promotion in online world. Online users modify their self-presentation to be more favourable with strangers; but they are less pretentious with friends

as they already hold initial information about them (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011). Social media allows people to look more attractive than in reality (Chua and Chang, 2016).

Recent studies extensively research the notion of self-expression in relation to social media (Shim et al., 2016; Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016; Chiang & Suen, 2015; Chua & Chang, 2016). Research on Facebook shows users prefer to portray a positive self-image (Kim et al., 2010; Kim & Lee, 2011). Shim et al. (2016) explore the determinants of positive self-presentation on social media and find that public self-consciousness influences positive self-presentation. Users gain peer acceptance through self-presentation that helps to build relationships with other individuals (Chiang & Suen, 2015). Self-impression influences self-esteem even in the absence of the feedback, through imaginary responses from individuals (de Vries, 2016). When individuals are concerned for another person's positive online self-presentation they refrain from posting critical comment, but tend to post a lie to avoid threatening one's positive self-image on Facebook (Spottswood & Hancock, 2016). In the case of online motherhood/parenthood, this imaginary feedback would come from other mothers who they try to attract to their profiles.

### *2.3. Self-esteem and Self-presentation of Mothers on Social Media: Facebook and Instagram*

Self-esteem is a determinant of person's well-being and regulated by supportive social environment (Gonzales, 2014; Cramer et al., 2016). Numerous studies researched the effect of social media use on self-esteem (Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013; Kropp et al., 2005; Wilcox et al., 2011). Previous research findings highlight both positive and negative effects of social media use on individuals. Several recent studies explore its negative influence (Thomholt, 2016; Baker & Algotha, 2016; Fox & Vendemia, 2016). According to Thomholt (2016), Facebook users are more likely to be less happy than their friends are and after a week without Facebook, respondents felt more satisfied with their social life. Baker and Algotha (2016) analyse the links between social networking and depression. Fox and Vendemia (2016) identify that women edit their online images more often than men and feel worse about their body image on social media. Better coherence between the true self and the Facebook self was associated with better psychological health (Grieve & Watkinson, 2016).

Social platform use was higher among individuals with low in self-esteem, high in narcissism and loneliness (Liu & Baumeister, 2016).

Other studies show that extensive social media engagement boosts self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Wilcox et al., 2011). One's self-esteem depends on the online followership and quality of one's relationship in online and offline settings (Gonzales, 2014). Less confident users are more likely to follow the opinion of online profiles, which they get inspiration from (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013). Previous research finds positive correlation between low self-esteem, loneliness, low life satisfaction and excessive use of social networking sites (Blachnio et al., 2016). Users with low self-esteem improve their social relations by communicating online. Positive social interaction between users increases one's self-esteem (Gonzales, 2014). Mothers use social media for various reasons: connection and information sharing, but entertainment reasons also prevail (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014).

Young mothers widely use Facebook and Instagram (Duggan et al., 2015). Research on the use of Facebook by mothers is limited (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Jang & Dworkin, 2014). As mothers extensively participate in Facebook, it is worth exploring further the reasons for their involvement. Although both, Instagram and Facebook fulfil communication objectives, each operates differently in information transmission. Facebook is the most popular social networking site among all existing networks (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014; Przepiorka et al., 2016). Individuals on Facebook refrain from posting/commenting negative content in relation to other users, thus maintaining their positive self-image (Spottswood & Hancock, 2016). However, it can also indicate untrue nature of the online postings and positive bias on Facebook communication (Spottswood & Hancock, 2016). Facebook consists of textual and imagery content sharing, and offers users range of functions, including information-based pages related to one's interests. In case of this paper, mothers refer to Facebook pages dedicated to mother/child subjects, where parents share issues/concerns related to their children. Users are able to follow and engage in certain pages' online, thus making connection with other mothers on Facebook.

Instagram is a social platform where individuals post and share their images and commentary with other users. This social media type is one of the fast growing vehicles accessible via smart phones and other digital devices (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Visual representation is foundation of Instagram, and enhances with the use of special effects available on Instagram. Individuals perceive Instagram as a positive type of social media where users

choose to share positive content with their connections. Positive perception of online profiles creates positive feedback from their followers. Research on Facebook shows that positive feedback enhances user's self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2006). Previous studies (Bearden et al., 1989; Kropp et al., 2005) argue that less confident individuals are more vulnerable and seeking social approval, thus they are more susceptible to the opinion of others. Female users are more likely to follow the recommendations of other individuals (Bearden et al., 1990). New mothers refer to vulnerable target audience due to the challenges they face at the time of transition to parenthood. They search for social support and connections in community of mothers online and offline (Jang & Dworkin, 2014).

Most popular Instagram 'mummy' profiles are the picture of inspiration, style and care free life. According to Instagram, motherhood is beautiful and not a daunting experience (Dawson, 2016). Sixty-seven percent of parents think parents are not honest about their parenting on social media and it could be as most parents themselves are faking their online self-presentation (Dawson, 2016). There is positive correlation between the age of mother and online pressure to present positive family life in social media (Statista, 2014). Young mothers feel under more pressure to maintain certain positive online images of themselves as mothers (eMarketer, 2015). The reasons for that could be low confidence of younger mothers due to changes in their lives.

### **3. Research Methods**

Previous studies predominantly use quantitative research methods in relation to social media use (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013; Blachnio et al., 2016). Although it provides some preliminary results to understand the aspects of the research subject, there is still gap in in-depth investigation of self-esteem and self-presentation relationships. To explore these notions in relation to mothers' use of social media, current study adapts qualitative research methodology. In qualitative research, the aim is rarely to arrive at statistically valid conclusions, but rather to gain insights to advance theory (Bryman, 2015). Qualitative studies depend on context and do not seek to be representative of a larger universe (Neergaard & Parm Ulhoi, 2007).

To meet the research objectives, we employ several data collection methods. We start with qualitative content analysis of 23 popular Instagram profiles of mothers to explore the notion



of online self-presentation of mothers; then continue with in-depth 12 interviews with mothers, who are socially active online and use both Facebook and Instagram. Interviews extract the topics related to the attitudes of mothers to other online mothers' self-presentation and its relationships to self-esteem. Qualitative content analysis of discussions produced by mothers on social media in the form of commentary related to mother/children topics also considered for the research data. Content analysis is a research tool, which identifies particular pre-selected factors within a text. Having identified relevant patterns in the literature, qualitative research then used to generate information in relation to patterns constructed by mothers' discussions.

Data gathered was analysed in an interpretive way, but with the aim to generate identifiable categories, to explore the categories expressed by mothers' narratives. The researcher has to lead the interpretation but not add meaning which is not evident in the text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). This research goes beyond the frequency rate of the variables to discover why these particular variables represent certain aspects of online self-presentation and self-esteem of mothers.

At the initial stage, content analysis method explores the generic patterns of online usage when it comes to subscribing to other mothers' profiles on social media. We analyse the content of popular profiles to understand what constitutes phenomenon of 'Instamother'. More specifically, this study analyses the following aspects: number of followership, nature of pictures, source of their expertise, top images/videos liked by the followers, nature of posted content, quality of images, overall self-presentation/image, commentary to the pictures and videos produced by the users, number of children and their age. Instagram profiles are the most reflective of individual self-presentation due to its image-based nature. Focus of Instagram profiles of mothers is on pictures of their children. Their followership are mothers too. While Facebook is widely used by mothers, they mainly interested in being part of the groups such as Mother's club, Mothers in Moscow, and other similar networks, where they can find relevant information on motherhood questions. However, personal Facebook profiles of mothers are more private and include only close friends and families.

Instagram is the social media where women with children position themselves as mothers, and that is the reason Instagram profiles used for further analysis in this study. Table 1 presents a summary of 23 Instagram profiles:

Table 1 A Summary of Researched Instagram Profiles.

Name	Number of Followers 8/2016	Number of Followers 12/2016	#Posts	# of children	boys	girls	Average # of posts per day	Most liked post	Most like video
1.alina_alina88888	35 608	40 987	128	2	1	1	1	2183	31 000
2.veradegtyareva	51 137	137 251	650	1	1		1	4822	13300
3.jul_so	52 670	57 596	530	1			1	9835	24 000
4.klimovakatrinka	86 673	156 244	1237	1		1	2	6612	30 300
5.ksenia_bezuglova	91 983	102 895	155	1		1	2	11200	72200
6.jeweltravel	99 665	104 125	2065	2		2	1	3216	16 300
7.ma_linochka	114 035	182 214	2643	5	2	3	4	6365	25200
8.juliasmolnaya	188 273	224 769	1418	2	2		1	15 720	102 000
9.dipeshkova	266 297	526 148	2108	1	1	0	1	7178	81 700
10.doctor_annamama	273 743	373 213	804	2	1	1	3	9088	97 700
11.matildamylove	311 638	312 488	3436	1		1	2	14 000	170 000
12.schreinerkate	324 713	718 574	1033	1		1	1	9144	84 300
13.vasiliysmolniy	335 379	406 973	3011	2	2		1	11 300	98 500
14.galainst	369 080	510 737	1776	1	1		1	17 800	156 000
15.doctor_zubareva	415 017	587 567	1503	2	1	1	3	12 800	126 000
16.annybakhireva	444 217	451 959	1776	2	1	1	2	33 900	207 000
17.vovchenkomarina	547 100	682 249	1535	3	1	2	3	17 600	387 000
18.elle_four_mom	1 107 239	1 154 822	2140	4	0	4	3	128 000	597 000
19.karina_paletskikh	1 093 606	1 150 709	2217	2		2	2	154 000	1,2 millio
20.simona280	1 747 254	1 920 100	876	1		1	1	217 000	2,4 millio
21.larangsovet	493 131	501 364	1466	5	1	4	3	10 900	95 600
22.nikaromina	193 041	215 448	2774	2	1	1	2	9 060	34 500
23.pushkinatalie	193 214	216 106	2758	2	1	1	3	11 100	91 300

Further questions such as credibility of mothers' online profiles, social support, and self-presentation and self-esteem factors tackled through the analysis of interviews. Chosen research methods enable us to draw the links between online self-presentation and self-esteem of new mothers.

Research analyses the content of 23 popular Instagram profiles of mothers. Number of subscribers determines the selection process of researched profiles. Previous research shows

that large number of followers, usually more than 30,000, perceived as more credible by users (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Chosen profiles followership ranges from 40 thousand to 1, 9 million users. Fourteen of these mothers have two or more children and nine have one child.

Neuendorf (2002) argues that researchers' bias affects decisions about the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. All those processes influence the questions of the research and might be in favour of the researcher's objectives. As the aim of this qualitative study is not generalisation but an in-depth exploration of relations between concepts, reliability and validity issues taken into consideration and minimised as possible. Observations are socially dependent on researchers' surrounding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

### *3.1. Interviews with Mothers on Social Media*

This research employs non-probability purposive sampling as this approach provides good source of data collection in exploratory qualitative research. Respondents analysed are mothers, who regularly use social media such as Instagram and Facebook. These are mothers with younger children, under 6 years old, with majority of mothers being on maternity leave with children under 3 years old. They use social media to connect with other mothers and discuss topics relevant to motherhood. Mothers find time for social media engagement, although most of their time consumed with childcare. All respondents are mothers from Russia. The access to the sample draws from the authors' personal connections in social media. Authors themselves belong to this demographical category and have access to the data from social media community of mothers in Russia. Social media in Russia is widely used by mothers who are on maternity leave (which, in Russia, normally lasts up to the child turning 3 years old). Russia is the second leading country (after United States) based on the active users of Instagram (Statista, 2016). Social media in Russia has a well-established online community of mothers, which led to development of numerous awards measuring top mothers' profiles based on their online engagement, and content related to children activities. Table 2 provides a description of interview respondents.

Table 2 Mothers-Respondents Description.

Respondent	Age	Number of kids	Kid's age	Current Occupation	How often do you use SM?	What kind of SM do you use?
#1	29	2	2,4	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram, Facebook
#2	27	1	2	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram, Facebook
#3	30	2	3,6	Business owner	Daily	Facebook, Instagram
#4	23	1	2	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram
#5	22	1	2	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram
#6	32	1	1	Maternity Leave	Daily	Facebook
#7	36	3	2,4,6	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram, Facebook
#8	35	2	4,6	Accountant	Weekly	Facebook, Instagram
#9	28	3	1,3,5	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram, Facebook
#10	29	2	2,6	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram, Facebook
#11	30	1	4	Manager	Daily	Facebook
#12	33	2	1,4	Maternity Leave	Daily	Instagram

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section starts with the discussion of results drawn from the content analysis of top profiles, and continues with the key themes identified through the analysis of social media pages produced by mothers and interviews. Discussion underpinned with relevant theories of self-presentation and self-esteem and aims to generate conclusion on the relations between these two theories. Both Instagram and Facebook communication analysed to draw conclusion on functions of each social networking site.

##### 4.1. Use of Social Media by Mothers: Key Patterns

Online mothers' profiles can be broken into several categories:

- 1) Mothers demonstrate the content related to their child, but avoid in-depth discussions of topics related to children, thus they want to appear more competent in child subject and show they have other areas of interests and self-development. These mothers like acknowledgement that they have child/children, but also like to focus on self-development.

- 2) Mothers share the content related to their children. These mothers engage in discussions related to children topics and like to share their personal experience with others. They like to show their confidence and competence in this subject.
- 3) Mothers heavily engage in social interactions with other mothers. They are likely perceived very competent mothers and asked questions related to children by their followers. They often have more than one child, which also affects the credibility of one as a mother. Due to a large followership, these mothers advertise children related products and at times, open their own small business online, for example selling children's clothes.

Analysis of popular profiles of mothers on social media shows that certain motherhood/child topics regularly appear on social media and get high commentary by online community.

These topics consist of the following aspects: milestones of children development; pregnancy and childbirth; breastfeeding; childcare help; mothers' well-being; mothers' social life/engagement. These topics generate more comments, judgements and presumptions from other mothers. Findings show that majority of mothers follow other mothers' profiles to get inspiration and social support. They engage in social media as it is convenient and provides instant access to questions (Kaufmann & Buckner, 2014).

Age of the child determines mother's engagement online. Researched profiles consists of children of various ages, however, majority of them are under six years old. Analysis shows that mothers are mostly socially active in the first year of their child. This could be due to the lack of experience and most demanding time in transition to parenthood. Previous research also confirms that parents spend more time on social media straight after their child is born searching for a necessary social support at the time (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016; Jang & Dworkin, 2014).

#### *4.2. Self-presentation of Mothers on Social Media*

Mothers' commentaries on social media reveal that online presentation of mothers is often an untrue reflection of the reality. Users note that mothers whose online profiles have large number of followers tend to portray unrealistic and at times idealistic image of the family and mother on Instagram. Mothers rarely discuss real problems or admit challenges they face daily. It is seen as undesirable for a non-working mother to have a paid child support. When online mother admits employing a childcare help, others often become judgemental and

accuse mother of being unable to manage with her own child by herself. Respondents comment:

*'Of course, she manages to look good, as she does not care for her child full time and can spend time on herself going to the gym and beauty salons...'*

*'Looking at other mothers profiles makes me a bad mother. I don't manage everything as well as they do, or at least how they show on their pictures.'*

These types of comments appear regularly under the content where mothers admit availability of extra childcare help. Although mothers reveal that they like to follow inspirational and positive profiles of other mothers, they complain that these mothers do not state all the reality about their life and in fact lie to make a positive self-impression. Previous research suggests link between positive self-presentation and enhanced self-esteem (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Kim & Cholk, 2015). Duggan et al. (2015) also argue that parents feel more comfortable to respond to positive, than negative content online. This indicates mixed attitudes towards presentation of mothers online. This is particularly the case in Instagram, as this communication dominates with high-quality colourful pictures enhanced with special effects to make them more appealing. One respondent says:

*'Positive presentation online can be fake, but I still like feel-good content, and not negatives.'*

Analysis shows that criticism on social media is intolerable in relation to mothers. Mothers tend to block the users who write negative or undesirable comments on their profiles. Although mothers seek answers to certain questions, they can be sensitive towards advice provided. When they do not seek advice but other users still consider interfering with their own opinions, it can appear intrusive and unacceptable to young mothers. This could also relate to lower self-esteem or not being able to deal with critical comments. Gonzales (2014) argues that positive social communication increases an individual's self-esteem.

There is also a presumption that mothers with two or more children adhere more experience thus are more competent when dealing with children. That could be the reason that majority of popular mothers online have more than one child.

### 4.3. *The Effect of Online Self-presentation on Self-esteem of Mothers*

Most ‘liked’ images on mothers’ profiles include children, family and physically attractive mothers themselves. Textual content accompanying the image is also of chief importance and affects the number of ‘likes’ and commentaries from users. Postings receive high number of comments in cases when mothers upload the question/subject of interest to others. Users often answer the questions they feel competent in, thus showing their expertise. A respondent 4 says:

*‘I am happy to help if a mother asks a question which I feel I know the answer for. You feel satisfaction in yourself when answering these questions’.*

Majority (22 out of 23 mothers) of the mothers who generate large number of followers online engage in some type of promotional activity. This activity provides them with extra income. In some cases, mothers feel confident to open their own business, usually related to children. Users acknowledge that some mothers use their popular profiles for income generation but find it destructive if mothers use aggressive techniques to promote their own business online. One respondent says note:

*‘I feel good about myself as I have many followers and it enables me to earn money too. I have opened my own business and do what I like. It is convenient as I am mother and can combine my work and looking after the child. I do feel pressure to look good online though...’*

Mothers with large number of followers commonly are more confident. Their self-esteem enhances with positive interactions with followers. Mothers-followers inclined to have lower self-esteem as they feel pressure to maintain their positive image to fit the online profile of ‘perfect’ mother. Previous research shows that people with low self-esteem, especially women, are more susceptible to the opinions of others as they are seeking social support and approval (Bearden et al., 1989; 1990). The degree to which social media enhances one’s self-esteem depends upon whom users follow on their social network and supportive response they obtain from them (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013). Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2016) argues that posting positive content online increases positive feedback from followers, which leads to social acceptance and higher self-esteem.

#### 4.4. Facebook vs Instagram Use by Mothers

Respondents note that although they have accounts in both Instagram and Facebook, each of these media meets different objectives. Facebook perceived as a constructive and more informative type of media, where mothers share their concerns with others with similar interests. Functions of Facebook vary from discussion boards to pages with topics of common interests, and availability to link to other online sources, for example, online articles. One of the mothers says:

*'Facebook is more social, gives information, and enables raising important issues for discussion. Instagram is very personal, based on family pictures, - there is no room for discussion.'*

In relation to Instagram, images play key factor to capture initial attention to the profile. However, in a longer term, to be able to maintain the interest to their profile, the content of textual commentary is of importance (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Although users prefer high-quality positive images, it is what they write under the image matters the most. Textual commentary indicates user's online engagement with their audience. To be able to engage socially online, mothers need to interact with others by answering questions and comments:

*'I like to engage with people who are open on their pages, so I can trust them, thus listen to their opinions, especially when it comes to recommendations related to children.'*

*'I don't follow mothers who post only content related to their child. Personal development of mother shows how interesting she is as a person. If mothers manage to develop self while looking after the child, it means they are intelligent and thus, their experience would be of benefit to others...'*

*'Facebook is for reading, Instagram is for glazing... As I have little time, I choose Facebook.'*

If users choose not to engage in commentary, it forces others to 'unfollow' these profiles. Young mothers mainly favour Instagram as it is easily available on the go, and provides quick responses and content in the form of colourful pictures (Dawson, 2016). Pictures are more comprehensive and expressive in representing one online. That is the reason self-presentation of mothers on Instagram easily identified through the content of posted pictures. However, mothers-users comments that Instagram does not provide necessary informative



content when it comes to important questions of motherhood and thus, they refer to other sources of communication such as Facebook pages. Although mothers highly engage in Instagram, they find it difficult to check the authenticity of profiles behind the popular pictures. While Facebook perceived as more neutral and open source of information.

## **5. Conclusion**

### *5.1. Contribution*

Academic research conducted on the excessive use of social media by mothers is limited with only several recent studies exploring this phenomenon (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Doty & Dworkin, 2013; Dawson, 2016; Jang & Dworkin, 2014). This study provides further understandings of this behaviour as there are still unidentified aspects of parental use of social media. It contributes to the previous limited literature dedicated to mothers' online interactions. Target audience of mothers is not to be underestimated, as they are one of the highest users of social media (Dawson, 2016). The current study examines the aspects of self-presentation of mothers on social media (Facebook and Instagram) in Russia and its impact on their self-esteem.

The results of this study reveal younger mothers feel more pressure to maintain their positive image online as dictated by their online community. This is particularly obvious in case of Instagram where positive images are prevalent in portrayal of 'perfect family image'. Although mothers use both Facebook and Instagram, the results of this study show that each media fulfils different objectives of communication.

Facebook is more informative and supportive vehicle of communication for mothers. It enables them to follow certain 'tags' (online topics) and join relevant conversations. Although mothers question the credibility of representation of other mothers' profiles, they still have more trust in Facebook pages and find it more close to the reality than the world on Instagram. Respondents perceived Facebook to be more comprehensive in providing mothers with support. Mothers frequently use Instagram but admit they do not post negative content on this media as it creates negative feedback from their ties and thus decreases their self-esteem. They admit that Instagram community is suitable for inspiration and is supportive

when good news shared; however, they find it judgemental when users reveal problematic issues.

Mothers in Russia use social media due to its easy access to parenting support from other mothers. Younger mothers are socially active online, however they also feel under higher pressure when presenting themselves online. Mothers with higher self-esteem (often with more than one child) find social media a positive development. However, social media use can lower self-esteem of less confident mothers. These findings coincide with previous research on relationships between self-esteem and social media use (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

This study broadens our understanding of mothers' engagement in social media in Russia. The results indicate that although mothers use both Facebook and Instagram to connect with parental community, they see different benefits in each social media. Current work also contributes to the existing literature on concepts of self-presentation and self-esteem in relation to particular target audience.

### *5.2. Implications, Limitations and Further Research Suggestions*

The research findings have implications for professionals to utilise social media to reach out to mothers who require parenting support. Younger mothers appear to be more vulnerable and use social media to gather needed help. Social media can be used to promote professional practices and spread relevant information to the communities of mothers available online. This communication is achievable via various social media vehicles, including specific Facebook pages and cooperation with popular Instagram mothers.

One of the limitations of this research is the lack of existing academic research related to the researched target audience - mothers, or generally parents and their engagement with social media. Future research could further explore wider use of social media by mothers and compare reasons for differences in social media engagement between mothers and fathers. Although the research on social media use is extensive, most of this research explores young population as target audience. Research exploring online engagement by various demographic groups is limited. Current research notes that popular online mothers use their profiles to promote their businesses. It is worth investigating marketing and entrepreneurial

strategies mothers use to advance their business, and generally identify how digital media opens wider business opportunities for online users.

The respondents of this study are from one country, Russia. It allows us to draw initial understanding of the use of social media by Russian mothers. Further work should employ a larger sample size from other cultures to test the results of this work and generalise it to wider population. Cross-cultural studies can generate some interesting findings in relation to social networking sites. In terms of further theoretical contribution, research should explore credibility dimensions of digital media types and users' profiles.

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