The Effects of Sharing Personal Narratives of Stress on Social Media for College Students

by

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Abstract

Social networking sites (SNS) have become major platforms for expression and self-disclosure (Huang, 2016). In previous research scholars have studied how self-disclosure affects those who are participating in the disclosing. The purpose of this study is to understand how using SNS as a platform for college students to express feelings of stress affects their followers. An experiment was conducted and 124 responses were collected from students of a large public university. Participants were presented with one of two messages and were asked about their feelings toward the post, message evaluation of the post, identification with the post and online and offline behavioral intention after reading the post. The results were analyzed using SPSS where descriptives, frequencies, correlations and t-tests were conducted. Researchers found that each emotion had a different function when interacting with posts. When using messages in campaigns there should be multiple emotions expressed to help make them more believable. More importantly Instagram users are more likely to help themselves and recognize the issues they face when trying to help others.

Introduction

Social networking Sites (SNS) continue to be spaces of self-disclosure for many people (Huang & Hsin-Yi, 2016). Some scholars also associated SNS use with loneliness and stress (Karsay et al., 2019). In recent years Instagram has been blamed for users' negative self image because of their ability to constantly compare themselves to strangers (Lup et al., 2015). However, posting personal experiences and stories on SNS could also have positive effects on users. Previous studies showed self-disclosure brings social support and increases online wellbeing (Huang & Hsin-Yi, 2016). The practice of self-disclosure on SNS was also shown to

help reduce loneliness and stress (Karsay et al., 2019). Specifically on Instagram there are positive outcomes for users who follow many people they know (Lup et al., 2015). In a time of unlimited access to SNS, users could better utilize online spaces by knowing of all possible benefits and disadvantages of self-disclosure.

The present study focuses on the effects of sharing personal narratives of stress on Instagram for college students. Many previous studies utilized Facebook as the platform for their research. In recent years there has been a growing prevalence of Instagram use especially seen in Millennials and Generation Z (Perrin et al., 2019). In the experiment participants were shown one of two posts on Instagram that discussed stress, one with a negative tone the other with a positive tone. After reading the post they responded to statements on seven point likert scales. The questions gathered information on the participants feelings toward the post, message evaluation, identification with the post and online and offline behavioral intention. Finally, demographic information was gathered on their age, year in college, SNS use and the stress they experience.

While earlier research provides an understanding of the effects of self disclosure on the poster the current study sought an understanding of the effects on those who see the post.

Literature Review

Social networking sites (SNS) have been studied for years now. However, even with the variety of platforms Facebook is typically the program studied because of its capacity for long form posts. Instagram is an increasingly popular social media platform among Millennials and Generation Z, reaching a very similar level of recognition to Facebook. According to Perrin et al. (2019), of adults age 18-24, 75% of them have ever used Instagram. When looking at all adults

ages 18 and older, 42% of the participants indicated that they use Instagram several times a day (Perrin et al., 2019). Instagram allows users to connect with each other, just in a different way than Facebook. Self-disclosure is the disclosing of any personal information about oneself to another person (Weber, 2019). Instagram gives users a platform to participate in self-disclosure while sharing photos. Stress is a topic SNS users may discuss in posts, especially college students. College students find themselves stressed frequently and for many similar reasons (Beiter et al., 2015). Beiter et al. (2015) found that college students' most pressing stressors are, academic performance, pressure to succeed, post-graduation plans, financial concerns, quality of sleep, relationship with friends, relationship with family, overall health, body image, and self-esteem.

Oh and LaRose (2016) conducted research to see if the intensity of a stressful situation affected how people used SNS. Researchers found that people were more likely to look for social support when facing a mildly stressful situation; however, they hypothesized that this would occur with a highly stressful situation. Participants cared more for impression management goals when posting publicly than when privately sharing their story. This study also found that people were likely to spend more time crafting messages to be posted publicly than sent in private when using SNS, specifically when they had goals they were trying to achieve with the message. By using the capabilities provided by SNS, users can not only achieve their primary goal of either gathering social support or impression management but they can accomplish both goals and meet situational demands simultaneously.

While SNS users may cater their posts for their audience Huang and Hsin-Yi (2016) studied the effects of self-disclosure via Facebook and users' wellbeing. Researchers collected

information on self-disclosure, emotional and informational support measures, online social

wellbeing and continuance (Huang & Hsin-Yi, 2016). Researchers found that self-disclosure had

significant positive effects on social well-being and online social support (Huang & Hsin-Yi,

2016). They found that sharing personal information led to individuals feeling cared about,

responded to and being helped by friends. In addition, improved individual social well-being

online led to more positive contributions online (Huang & Hsin-Yi, 2016). With such positive

experiences on SNS, people became more loyal to using Facebook and would continue to utilize

the platform (Huang & Hsin-Yi, 2016). They also proposed that online self-disclosure could be

seen as a valuable behavior to improve mental health and feelings of connection (Huang &

Hsin-Yi, 2016). Overall, the feelings of social support may be more important than the act of

self-disclosure as it is a more social interaction in comparison to self-disclosure as a solitary act.

Igartua (2010) found that identifying with characters in films can dictate viewers'

emotional responses to the film. The relationship and relatability of a film character with the

average person is more strained than college students reading the Instagram posts of another

college student. The present study proposes that affective responses to others' posts on SNS will

have similar effects on their identification with the post and intention to post.

H1: Affective responses to the post are positively correlated with identification to the

person in the post.

H2: Affective responses to the post are positively correlated with intention to post.

Due to online self-disclosure's influence on SNS users' mental health (Huang & Hsin-Yi,

2016), there is the possibility that the positive feelings users experience online can influence

their interactions with others offline. It is not clear how negative emotions such as feeling angry or sad may affect behavioral intentions so the study proposes the following research question:

RQ1: Are affective responses positively correlated with intention to share through other mediums (talking to family/friends, therapy, or journaling)?

As seen in the study by Oh and LaRose (2016), people often take time to construct their posts about what they are experiencing emotionally. While Oh and LaRose (2016) found that users were doing this for the sake of impression management and receiving social support, Zhang (2017) found that intentionally expressing one's emotions and experiences in periods of stress can help to decrease depression symptoms. Their study also found that people who took the time to make intimate and meaningful public posts on Facebook had increased satisfaction with life (Zhang, 2017). While this type of intimate sharing leads to catharsis relieving the poster of stress, sharing negative posts have the opposite effect (Zhang, 2017). Negative posts open the user up to being seen as undesirable (Zhang, 2017).

The present study hypothesizes that positive and negative posts about stress can lead to different outcomes and perceptions. Particularly, a positive post is more likely to lead to positive affective responses as opposed to a negative post. It is also possible that users are more likely to identify with a positive post. Therefore, H3 and H4 propose that:

H3: Those with affective responses to the positive post will also have positive attitudes toward the post and those with affective responses to the negative post will also have negative attitudes toward the post.

H4: Those who are given the positive post are more likely to identify with it than those given the negative post.

The effectiveness of message valence on users' intention to interact with the post and intention to interact with others offline have not been studied extensively in previous research. The current study asks the following two research questions:

RQ2: What is the relationship between the valence of the post and intention to post?

RQ3: What is the relationship between the valence of the post and sharing through other mediums (talking to family/friends, therapy, or journaling)?

Lastly, the study intends to explore how the valence of SNS posts influence readers' attitude toward the message. Given that negative posts can make the poster seem as undesirable, it is also likely that the message could be viewed negatively. The study asks the following research question:

RQ4: What is the relationship between the valence of the post and post evaluation?

The studies that have been conducted thus far on self-disclosure through SNS have found that there is a positive effect from participating in this form of self expression. Other than the feelings of relief are there actions being taken or do people feel more inclined to interact with these posts? According to Maier (2015), people may be reaching a point of exhaustion where they do not want to interact with self-disclosure posts. While this may be true people are still posting about both positive and negative experiences and receiving interaction from their networks. The current study examines the effects of positive and negative stress stories on users' identification, affective responses, message evaluation and behavioral intention.

Methods

An online experimental study was conducted. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In one condition, they were asked to read an Instagram post about a student's

negative experience with stress. In the other condition, they were asked to read an Instagram post about a student's positive experience with stress. After they finished reading the message, they then were asked to answer some questions about the post. The questions included measures of identification, affective responses, message evaluation, behavioral intention, stressors and stress levels, SNS use, and demographics.

Participants

A total number of 124 participants were recruited at a major public university in the U.S. for this experimental study. There was no criteria for exclusion of participants as long as they were university-enrolled students and 18-years-old or older. Participants were informed in advance that their participation was voluntary and confidential. The average participant was 21 (*SD*=3.1). All participants were college students, 16.1% were in their first year, 25% were in their second year, 20.2% were in their third year, 34.7% were in their fourth year and 4% were in their fifth year or more.

Participants spent an average of 3.5 hours on social media daily (*SD*=2.08). Of the participants in the experiment 65.7% have a Facebook account, 65.7% have an Instagram account and 66.3% have a Snapchat account. These 3 SNS were the most popular amongst participants. On average respondents use Facebook 2-3 times a day (*M*=3.15, *SD*=1.56), Instagram 6-7 times a day (*M*=4.78, *SD*=1.88), and Snapchat 8-9 times a day (*M*=5.52, *SD*=1.79). Participants are typically fairly stressed (*M*=4.94, *SD*=1.3). The most pressing stressors for respondents are out of class assignments (*M*=5.37, *SD*=1.41) and extracurricular activities (*M*=4.73, *SD*=1.62).

Procedure

The experiment was shared via email with students. Once participants gave their consent to participate in the study, they were randomly assigned into one of the two experimental conditions. In both conditions, they were presented with an image of a post from Instagram. Both posts included the same image, and were by the same user Alex Smith or alex.smith103. This name was chosen because of Alex's gender neutrality and Smith is a common last name in the United States. The two posts were also similar in length.

After reading the post participants were asked questions about their perception of the post. The third statement assessed the participants emotions toward the post they were provided. The next statement served to participants gathered information on their identification with the post. Behavioral intention was the next variable respondents were questioned on.

Following the questions about the post came demographics. Information on which SNS they use, how frequently they use them, along with their age and year in school. The last set of questions were about the stress that participants experience. Participants discussed their average stress level and how pressing different potential stressors were.

Once they completed the experiment participants were given a thank you message for participating.

Stimuli

Two Instagram posts were created. Both posts were of approximately the same length but portrayed one situation college students may find themselves in; however, the messages presented the situation in different ways. The same picture was used in each post and was posted by the same user, Alex Smith or alex.smith103. Each message mentioned spending time in the

library, being tired, internships and homework. The first message contained more negative wording when discussing the situation (**Appendix A**) where the second had a more positive disposition (**Appendix B**).

Measures

After exposure to the stimuli, participants completed the questions which measured affective response, message evaluation, identification, behavioral intention online and offline, demographic measures and stress (see **Appendix C**).

a) **Affective responses.** Participants were given the statement "The story makes me feel_____." followed by a likert scale including the four basic emotions: angry, fearful, joyful, and sad. They were asked to rank how much they were feeling each emotion on a scale that ranged from 1, *not at all*, to 7, *very much*. This measurement of emotion was adopted from Uebel (2019).

b) **Message evaluation.** To measure participants message evaluation (Cronbach α = .85) they were asked their agreement to 9 different characteristics on a likert scale ranging from 1, *not,* to 7, *very*. The characteristics used include believable, clear, truthful, convincing, compelling, informative, easy to understand, interesting and intimate.

c) **Identification.** Participants identification (Cronbach α = .85) was measured by asking them to rank their agreement to 10 statements on a likert scale from 1, *strongly agree*, to 7, *strongly disagree*. The measures were adopted from Busselle & Bilandzic (2009).

d) **Behavioral intention online.** When measuring behavioral intention online (Cronbach α = .68) participants were ranked their likelihood to execute 5 different actions on a likert scale from 1, *not at all*, to 7, *extremely likely*.

e) **Behavioral intention offline.** To measure the offline behavioral intention of participants (Cronbach α = .80) they ranked their likelihood to complete 3 different actions on a likert scale from 1, *not at all*, to 7, *extremely likely*.

f) **Demographic measures.** Participants answered questions about their SNS use, from how many times they use their social media daily, which SNS they have accounts with and how much time they collectively spend on all SNS. They were also asked their age and year of college.

g) **Stress.** In order to better understand the stress participants face they were asked to indicate their average stress level on a likert scale ranging from 1, *not at all stressed*, to 7, *extremely stressed*. Then they were asked about specific agents of stress and how much of a stressor they are to a participant. The likert scale where responses were recorded was from 1, *not a stressor*, to 7, *most pressing stressor*.

Results

Data Analysis

H1 stated that affective responses to the post are positively correlated with identification to the person in the post. Anger, fear, joy and sadness were categorized as affective responses where intention to post was online behavioral intention. The correlation between anger and identification was not significant, $r(129) = -.02, p = .81$. The correlation between fear and identification was not significant, $r(129) = -.06, p = .48$. The correlation between joy and identification was not significant, $r(129) = -.01, p = .93$. The correlation between sadness and identification was significant, $r(129) = -.28, p < .01$.

This led to H1 being partially supported as sadness was the only affective response that had a significant relationship with identification to the person in the post. This relationship was also negative rather than positive.

H2 stated that affective responses to the post are positively correlated with intention to post. The correlation between anger and online behavioral intention was not significant, $r(123) = .14$, $p = .13$. The correlation between fear and online behavioral intention was significant, $r(123) = .19$, $p < .05$. The correlation between joy and online behavioral intention was not significant, $r(123) = .17$, $p = .06$. There was a significant correlation between sadness and online behavioral intention, $r(123) = .25$, $p < .01$. There was not a significant difference in online behavioral intention between positive and negative stories, $t(123) = .18$, $p = .86$. The people who read the positive story ($M=2.50$, $SD=1.02$) showed about the same online behavioral intention than those who read the negative story ($M=2.54$, $SD=1.23$).

Much like H1 this led to H2 being partially supported since fear and sadness were the only affective responses that had significant relationships with an intention to post.

RQ1 asked if affective responses are positively correlated with intention to share through other mediums (talking to family/friends, therapy, or journaling). The correlation between anger and offline behavioral intention was significant, $r(122) = .22$, $p < .05$. The correlation between fear and offline behavioral intention was insignificant, $r(122) = .1$, $p = .3$. The correlation between joy and offline behavioral intention was insignificant, $r(122) = -.08$, $p = .35$. The correlation between sadness and offline behavioral intention was significant, $r(122) = .19$, $p < .05$. There was a significant difference in offline behavioral intention between positive and negative stories, $t(122) = 2.67$, $p = .01$. The people who read the positive story ($M=2.61$,

SD=1.39) showed lower offline behavioral intention than those who read the negative story (*M*=3.38, *SD*=1.7).

The only affective responses to have significant relationships with offline behavioral intentions were anger and sadness.

H3 stated that those with affective responses to the positive post will also have positive attitudes toward the post and those with affective responses to the negative post will also have negative attitudes toward the post. There was a significant difference in anger between positive and negative stories, $t(135) = 3.73$, $p = .00$. People who read the positive story (*M*=1.64, *SD*=1.17) showed less anger than people who read the negative story (*M*=2.5, *SD*=1.53). There was a significant difference in fear between positive and negative stories, $t(135) = 3.92$, $p = .00$. People who read the positive story (*M*=2.05, *SD*=1.44) showed less fear than people who read the negative story (*M*=3.14, *SD*=1.83). There was a significant difference in joy between positive and negative stories, $t(85) = -10.3$, $p = .00$. People who read the positive story (*M*=4.28, *SD*=1.91) showed more joy than people who read the negative story (*M*=1.51, *SD*=0.97). There was a significant difference in sadness between positive and negative stories, $t(135) = 8.12$, $p = .00$. People who read the positive story (*M*=2.03, *SD*=1.45) showed less sadness than people who read the negative story (*M*=4.32, *SD*=1.84). Since the affective responses were appropriate for the story participants read H3 was supported.

H4 stated those who are given the positive post are more likely to identify with it than those given the negative post. There was a significant difference in identification between positive and negative stories, $t(129) = -2.72$, $p =.01$. People who read the positive story (*M*=3.21, *SD*=.96) showed higher identification than people who read the negative story (*M*=2.73,

SD=1.01). Participants showed more identification to the positive post than to the negative post leading to H4 being supported.

RQ2 asked what is the relationship between the valence of the post and intention to post. There was not a significant relationship between valence of the post and online behavioral intention, *t*(123) = .18, *p* = .86. Those who read the positive story (M=2.50, SD=1.02) and those who read the negative story (M=2.54, SD=1.23) had similar intentions to post.

RQ3 asked what is the relationship between the valence of the post and sharing through other mediums (talking to family/friends, therapy, or journaling)? There was a significant relationship between valence and sharing through other mediums *t*(122)=2.67, *p*<.05. Participants who read the positive story (*M*=2.61, *SD*=1.39) were less likely to use offline methods of sharing than those who read the negative story (*M*=3.38, *SD*=1.70).

RQ4 asked what is the relationship between the valence of the post and post evaluation? There was a significant relationship between the valence of the post and post evaluation, t(135)=2.24, p<.05. People who saw the positive post (*M*=4.64, *SD*=1.02) evaluated the post lower than those who saw the negative post (*M*=5.05, *SD*=1.03).

There are some additional findings. The correlation between identification and online behavioral intention was significant, *r*(123) = -.5, *p* < .01. The correlation between identification and offline behavioral intention was significant, *r*(122) = -.19, *p* <.05. The correlation between message evaluation and online behavioral intention was significant, *r*(123) = .44, *p* < .01. The correlation between sadness and message evaluation was significant, *r*(135) = .29, *p* < .01.

Discussion

H1 was partially supported because identification had a significant relationship with only one of the affective responses, sadness. This negative significant correlation between sadness and identification may be due to participants trying to separate themselves from the post. The emotions and experiences expressed in the post may resemble parts of the participants' lives and they do not want to allow themselves to make this connection.

Identification and online behavioral intention are negatively related for similar reasons to H1. Participants do not want to recognize the experiences or feelings expressed in the posts within themselves, give them credit, nor express them to others. When looking at offline behavioral intention it only has significant relationships with anger and sadness. Anger and sadness being considered negative feelings may push participants to want to discuss them. Fear may not be included here because not feeling alone, or having a community may combat this negative feeling, which can be found online. It may take more talking in person to friends, family or a professional to handle anger and sadness.

Participants experienced affective responses to the posts they read. It was expected that experiencing affective responses would impact their evaluation of the posts dependent on the one they read. Their affective responses did affect the message evaluation but not in the way that was expected. Rather than having a higher message evaluation for the positive post they had higher message evaluation with the negative post. Sadness had a significant relationship with message evaluation. The more sad readers felt after reading the post the more credit they gave the post meaning they scored the post as more believable, clear, truthful, etc. This may be due to negative messages displaying more complexity of emotion and believability than positive messages.

Participants did identify with the positive post more than the negative post. This may be due to wanting to see themselves in the position of the person in the positive message. They would want to build a positive self image of success rather than seeing themselves within the negative post.

The results showed that the more that respondents identified with the post the higher their online behavioral intention. If people see themselves within the posts they read they are more likely to interact with the post/poster online or even make a post themselves. Especially since participants identified with the positive post more. The positive relationship between identification and online behavioral intention may be due to readers wanting to take action and be more like the person in the positive post. They want to continue to construct themself and find commonalities between them and the positive message poster.

In addition, identification and offline behavioral intentions are negatively correlated, meaning the more a participant saw themself in the post the less likely they were to journal or talk to family, friends or a professional. This may occur because talking about negative experiences face to face makes the person think more about how they are experiencing difficulty with stress.

The higher identification the lower message evaluation and the higher message evaluation the lower identification. This negative relationship between identification and message evaluation may be due to students trying to discredit the issues discussed in the post. Respondents may want to discredit these messages because it helps them to feel better about their own situation.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand the effects of sharing personal narratives of stress on Instagram for college students. Previous studies researched what posting about stress did for the college student who made the post and found that self-disclosure was a useful way to deal with negative emotions and gather support from followers (Huang & Hsin-Yi, 2016; Zhang, 2017). By getting SNS users to support others on the platforms they use can lead to them doing more to help themselves. Users can help themselves by helping others because they are participating in the development of a community on SNS. Having this community can help make the user feel more comfortable posting online about their experiences. By being more open to participate in online self-disclosure they will be more prone to using offline means of communication with friends, family, professionals or even a journal to express experiences with stress. Understanding this can be useful for those concerned with mental health. Professionals can encourage those who are struggling with stress to support others on SNS which will in turn help the individual.

Another implication of this research is the use of positive and negative narratives. If the goal of a campaign is to have the audience self reflect a positive message is the most useful. Where if a campaign goal is to raise awareness a negative message is more likely help to achieve that goal. However, an even better practice than using solely positive or negative messages would be to employ more emotional messages, something that is both positive and negative. These messages should use multiple emotions as it makes a more complex story which is more realistic for people to connect with.

This research provides a better understanding of the emotional relationships SNS users have with others' posts, and how seeing these posts affect their behavioral intentions. In this study there is a deeper understanding on how reading others posts and investing in them can have a positive effect on the audience's relationship with stress.

Limitations

Future research should look to better understand the impact of stigmas toward stress and how the expression of stress on SNS alters readers' understanding of the stories being told. Knowing what these stigmas are and how they affect readers can better explain the impact such thought processes have on identification with the posts. Along with the impacts of mental health stigmas future studies should include messaging about visiting a counselor along with other tools to cope with stress.

The positive message used in this study should have been stronger and more similar to how a college student would post. It is uncommon to post about good experiences, which could make the message appear to be untruthful or unreal. Utilizing messaging that contains more complex emotions may help to make the narratives more realistic, as people do not experience single emotions at a time.

Instagram also has many capabilities for posts that were not utilized in this study. Later research could look more indepth to the different ways to use Instagram. This could be through the use of posting multiple images in a single post, or using instagram stories.
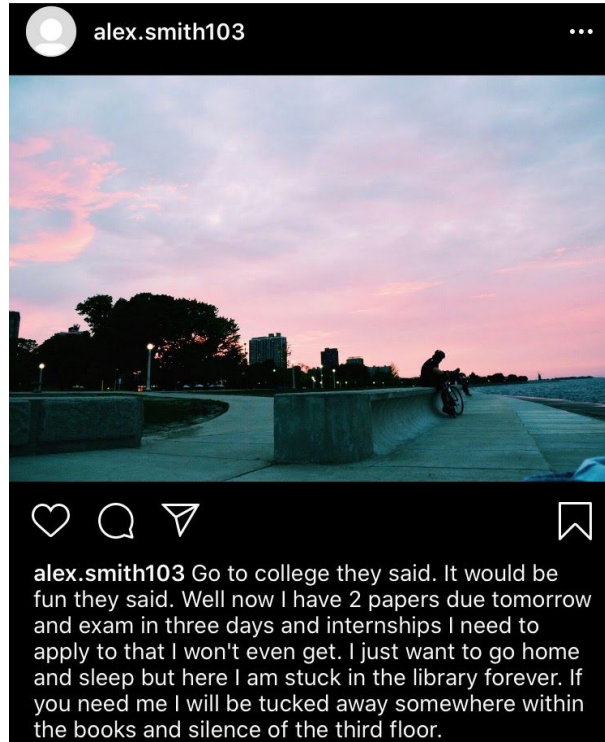
Conclusion

This study brought awareness to the positive effects of college age SNS users seeing posts about stress. If users interact with these messages they not only assist with building a

community where they may feel more comfortable sharing their own narratives of stress, they increase their likelihood of seeking expression in real life. Another important insight from this study is the understanding that people seek a variety of emotion in messages they are presented. By utilizing mixed emotions in messaging, target audiences will find them more believable and relatable.
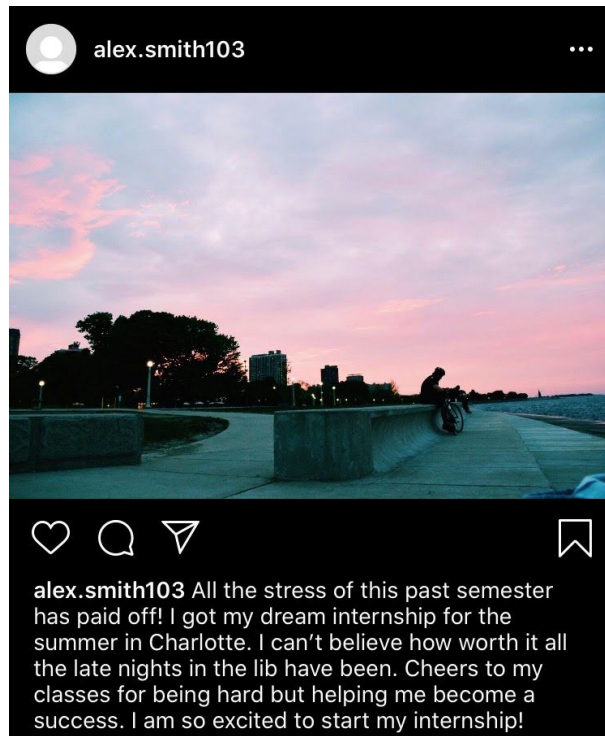
Overall this study provided an introduction of how messages of stress on Instagram can affect its users. Little has been done to understand the platform of Instagram and this research allows futures studies to dive deeper.

Appendices

Appendix A

alex.smith103 ...

alex.smith103 Go to college they said. It would be fun they said. Well now I have 2 papers due tomorrow and exam in three days and internships I need to apply to that I won't even get. I just want to go home and sleep but here I am stuck in the library forever. If you need me I will be tucked away somewhere within the books and silence of the third floor.

Appendix B

alex.smith103 ...

alex.smith103 All the stress of this past semester has paid off! I got my dream internship for the summer in Charlotte. I can't believe how worth it all the late nights in the lib have been. Cheers to my classes for being hard but helping me become a success. I am so excited to start my internship!

Appendix C

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You are invited to participate in a research study about college students Instagram use.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to complete a 10 to 15 minute survey. You will be asked to read two Instagram posts and then answer questions based on their content.

Benefits of the research may include a deeper understanding of Instagram use affects you and other students.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer any survey question for any reason.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Logan DiFranco (difrancoln@appstate.edu) and Dr. Jiangxue Han (hanj2@appstate.edu). The Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

By continuing to the research procedures, I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old, have read the above information, and agree to participate.

I agree to participate in this study.
I do not agree to participate in this study.

Q1: At the moment I feel____.
  Angry 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)
  Fearful 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)
  Joyous 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)
  Sad 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)

Q2: Please assess the post you have read on the following scales. The post you have just read is:
 not believable   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very believable

not clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very clear
not truthful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very truthful
not convincing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very convincing
not compelling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very compelling
not informative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very informative
difficult to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	easy to understand
not interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very interesting

Q3: The story makes me feel_____.
    Angry 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)
    Fearful 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)
    Joyous 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)
    Sad 1 (not at all) - 7 (very much)

Q4: Please indicate your degree of agreement to the following statements based on the Instagram post you just read.
1. I could relate to Alex in the message.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

2. I could relate to the event described in the message.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

3. While reading the message, I felt I could really get inside Alex's head.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

4. At key moments in the message, I felt I knew exactly what Alex was going through.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

5. I was able to understand the events in the message in a way similar to the way Alex understood them.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

6. I understood the reasons for Alex wanting to post.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

7. While reading the message, I could feel the emotions of Alex.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

8. My understanding of Alex is unclear.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

9. It was difficult to understand Alex's reason for posting.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

10. I could easily imagine myself in Alex's situation.

Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

Q5: Based on the Instagram post you just read, how likely are you to:

Like Alex's post about their stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Comment on Alex's post about their stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Direct Message Alex for this post about their stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Share Alex's post about their stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Q6: Based on the Instagram post you just read, how likely are you to:

Talk to a friend or family member about stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Talk to a counselor or health professional about stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Write or journal about your stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Post on a social networking site about stress? 1 (not at all) - 7 (extremely likely)

Q7: How many times do you use these social networking sites daily?

Facebook 1 (never) - 7 (10 or more)

Instagram 1 (never) - 7 (10 or more)

Snapchat 1 (never) - 7 (10 or more)

Tik Tok 1 (never) - 7 (10 or more)

Twitter 1 (never) - 7 (10 or more)

Other 1 (never) - 7 (10 or more)

Q8: Which social networking sites do you have accounts with (check all that apply)?

Facebook

Instagram

Snapchat

Tik Tok

Twitter

Other (Fill in blank)

Q9: How much time do you spend on all of your social networking sites combined daily? Insert time in hours and then fractions of hours (ex. 4.25 hours for 4 hours and 15 minutes)

Q10: How old are you?

Q11: Year of college are you in?

First year

Second year

Third year

Fourth year

Fifth year or more

Q12: How stressed would you say you are on average?

Average stress level 1 (not at all stress) - 7 (extremely stressed)

Q13: Please rate the following stressors based on your experience.

Attending class 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Professors 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

In Class Assignments 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Out of Class Assignments 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Extra Curriculars 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Living Situation 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Work 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Sleep 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Physical Activity 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Eating 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Social Media 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Friends 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Family 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

Significant Others 1 (not a stressor) - 7 (most pressing stressor)

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