

Instagram vs BeReal

Their Impact on User's Body Image Concerns and Mental Well Being

Supervised by Dr Sanjay Kumar

Arooj Sakib - Oxford Brookes University, Department of Psychology

Social media has become inextricable to the daily lives of almost every individual in today's day and age, however, Instagram in particular has become associated with heightening body image concerns and lower levels of mental well being within users due to its allowance of edited and photoshopped content. BeReal hosts an antithetical online culture, promoting a filter and photoshop free platform in order to create a more authentic user experience.

Introduction

- Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms to date, with the number of active monthly users worldwide being approximately 1.21 billion in 2021 (Instagram Users Worldwide 2025 | Statista, 2023), making up approximately 28% of the total users of the internet across the world.
- Due to the photo based nature of Instagram, a plethora of previous literature has suggested a **detrimental effect on individuals' perceived body image** (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Festinger, 2016). This is due to a variety of factors such as **upwards appearance comparisons** (Myers & Crowther, 2009) and internalisation of unattainable beauty standards (Stice, 2002);
- In terms of **mental wellbeing** - Engeln-Maddox et al. (2020) found an **association between Instagram use and depression** due to a decrease in body image satisfaction. This was noted even after just seven minutes of browsing on Instagram.
- BeReal is a relatively new photo-based, social media app which boasts a starkly different online culture to that of Instagram - no filtering, uploaded photos or editing one's appearance!
- One of the first psychological studies comparing BeReal to Instagram, this will allow for deeper understanding of its online culture and it's effects

Methods and Materials

Total number of participants = 81 (aged between 18-47)

3 groups:

- 33 = Instagram Only Users
- 18 = BeReal Only Users
- 30 = Both Instagram and BeReal Users

All participants completed two self-report scales:

- DASS-21** - A scale to measure levels of mental well being, specifically depression, anxiety and stress
- BICI** - The Body Image Concern Inventory, measuring levels of body image concern

DASS-21 = Cronbach α = 0.96
BICI = Cronbach's α = 0.93

References

Engeln-Maddox, R., Leach, R., Imundo, M. N., & Zola, A. (2020). Compared to Facebook, Instagram use causes more appearance comparison and lower body satisfaction in college women. *Body Image, 34*, 38-45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.04.007>

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*(2), 117-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>

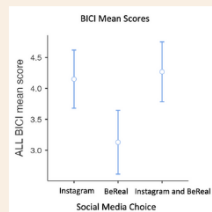
Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M. (2016). A systematic review of the impact of the use of social networking sites on body image and disordered eating outcomes. *Body Image, 17*, 100-110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.02.008>

Instagram users worldwide 2025 | Statista. (2023, August 29). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/283585/instagram-number-of-global-users/>

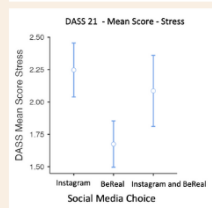
Myers, T. A., & Crowther, J. H. (2009). Social comparison as a predictor of body dissatisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 118*(4), 683-696. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018763>

Stice, E. (2002). Risk and maintenance factors for eating pathology: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*(5), 825-848. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.5.825>

Results

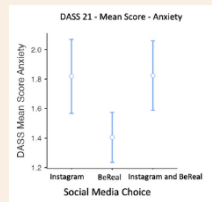


A **significant difference** was reported for levels of body image between the Instagram Only users ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.33$) and BeReal Only users ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.04$).



In terms of mental wellbeing, scores for the DASS-21 were broken up into their subsections.

Those who used BeReal Only exhibited **significantly lower levels** of stress ($MD = 0.57$, $p = .005$) when compared to Instagram Users.



A difference within levels of anxiety can also be noted between Instagram Only and BeReal Only users, however this was not significant.

Overall, Instagram Only users and users of Both social media platforms did not exhibit any significant difference. Scores across both scales indicated similar mean results as pictured within the tables.

Discussion

- The significant difference between BeReal only users and Instagram only users suggests that the lack of edited content provides users with an **online space** where they may experience **lower levels of body image concern as well as lower levels of stress and anxiety**.
- No exposure to edited content does not allow for personal comparisons, internalisation of standards, thus not affecting levels of stress and anxiety.
- No significant differences were found between the Instagram Only users and users of both platforms for either scale. This could suggest that the negative effects garnered through the use of Instagram are **far more overwhelming** than previously realised, as even the use of a social media platform with the opposite culture does not seem to lessen the negative effects.
- The significant findings within users of BeReal could suggest that the **prominence of authenticity** within social media platforms and its content which has not been edited should be prioritised within online spaces which allows for **greater mental well being and lower levels of body image concerns**.