



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



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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.

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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, Cortesi, Gasser, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2012). Previous research determines that parents use social networking sites to increase their social capital (Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, Kamp Dush, & Sullivan, 2012; Doty & Dworkin, 2013;

Jane & Dworkin, 2014; Duggan, Lenhart, Lampe, & Ellison, 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 (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Statista, 2016).

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

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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, Peter, & Schouten, 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 (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Valkenburg et al., 2006).

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 (Jane & 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 (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Petch & Halford, 2008). The transition to parenthood can be one of the most stressful life experiences for new parents (McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 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 (Jane & Dworkin, 2014).

Research shows that parents spend more time on social media straight after the childbirth (Tomfohtde & Reinke, 2016). Mothers are more heavily engaged in social media, giving and receiving social support (Tomfohtde & 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, 2013). 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, Moran, & Shahar, 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 & 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; Jane & 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 & Chang, 2016).

Recent studies extensively research the notion of self-expression in relation to social media (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016; Chiang & Suen, 2015; Chua & Chang, 2016; Shim, Lee-Won, & Hee Park, 2016). Research on Facebook shows users prefer to portray a positive self-image (Kim & Lee, 2011; Kim, Kim, & Nam, 2010). 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 posing 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 (Cramer, Song, & Drent, 2016; Gonzales, 2014). Numerous studies researched the effect of social media use on self-esteem (Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera, 2005; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013; Wilcox, Kramer, & Sen, 2011). Previous research findings highlight both positive and negative effects of social media use on individuals. Several recent studies explore its negative influence (Tromholt, 2016; Baker & Algorta, 2016; Fox & Vendemia, 2016). According to Tromholt (2016), Facebook users

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