

## **How does social media affect people's self worth in different age groups?**

### **Introduction:**

Before social media became as ubiquitous as it is today, an individual's "image" was largely built around what they were like in person – how they dressed, spoke and behaved. Today, it is easier than ever to shape a personal image online and carve your digital footprint. However, due to this, it is easier to show an unrealistic image of your whole life, which is easy for people to compare their life to.

Previous research showed that Gen Z (currently 5-25 years old) are more image-conscious and care more about others' opinions on social media than other generations, such as Gen X (currently 41-55 years old). Due to them caring more about others' opinions research shows that 42% of Gen Z are more swayed by people's opinions than Gen X (31%). This ultimately has an effect on how people view themselves and how they act on social media.

After reading about this my aim is to see if the younger generations self-worth is affected more by social media than older generations. This will be carried out by creating a questionnaire of 7 statements based on social media which the participant can rate how strongly they agree with them.

### Alternate Hypothesis:

People between the age of 15-20 will score higher on the questionnaire (the higher the score means the more they agreed with the statements) than people of other ages.

### Null Hypothesis:

There will be no significant difference between 15-20-year old's scores on the questionnaire compared to older people's scores on the same questionnaire.

## Method:

### Design:

This study used an independent measures design. The independent variable was the difference in age, ranging from '14 or younger' to '71 and older'. The dependent variable was the 7 questions on the questionnaire.

### Ethical Issues:

My study aimed to have as little ethical issues as possible. With this study being a volunteer sample, participants had the choice to complete the questionnaire or not. There was no pressure to do it as it was done online, so there was no face to face contact with the participants and I. Therefore, I won't have known if they chose not to do it. Additionally, all answers were anonymous, so I don't have information on who completed the questionnaire. The only information I have from them is their age and their answers to the questionnaire. The participants also had the choice to miss out a question if they did not want to answer it.

### Sample:

In this study I used a volunteer sample, e.g. respondents clicked on a link from my Instagram and Snapchat or my mum's Facebook account.

### Materials:

Questionnaire on Google forms (see appendix 1)

### Procedure:

I aimed to collect as much data as possible so to do that, I created a questionnaire on Google forms with 7 statements that related to self-worth, self-validation and people's 'image' online (see appendix 1). Then I put a link to the questionnaire on my Instagram and Snapchat so that people could easily access it. This would help me collect data from people in my age group (roughly 21 or younger), then to collect data from other age groups, my mum also shared the link to the questionnaire onto her Facebook. The participants had to select how much they agreed with each of the statements. Which I could then see all the responses on Google forms as soon as they had submitted it.

## Results:

Once participants had completed the questionnaire their responses were sent straight to me on Google forms. On Google forms I could then see a summary of the overall answers on each question in a pie chart (see appendix 2).

However, I wanted to view people's individual results, therefore I downloaded the data into excel so I could see a spreadsheet of people's raw data (see appendix 3). In the raw data it showed me every person's age category that they had selected and then the answers they had submitted.

The way I then recorded the data was by giving each individual a score out of 35, the score each individual got was based on their answers (see appendix 3).

E.g. If they responded with 'Not at all true' this =1, 'A little bit true' =2, 'Somewhat true' =3, 'Very true' =4 and 'Extremely true' =5

Therefore, the higher the score out of 35 the more they agreed with the statements. For example, the maximum score they could get would be 35 which would mean they strongly agreed with all the statements in the questionnaire.

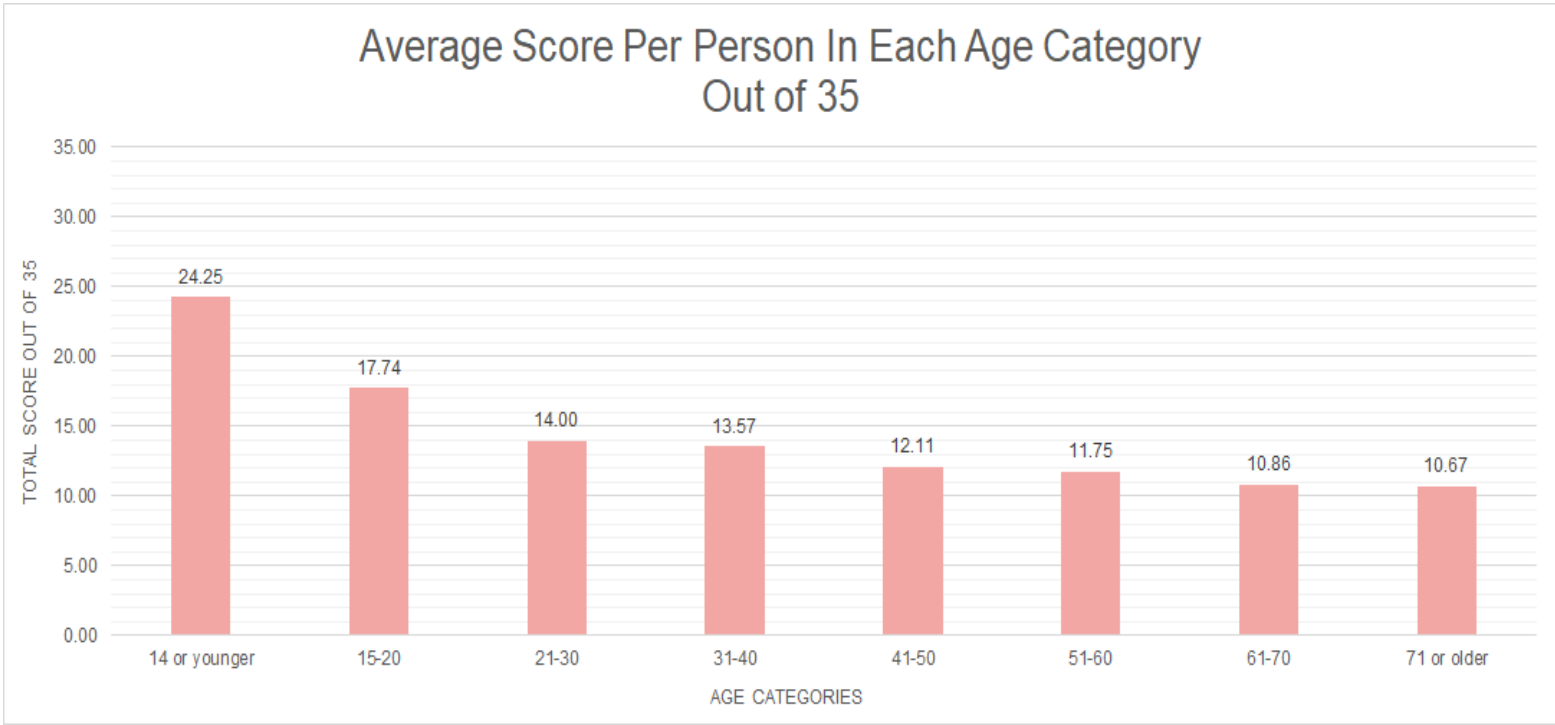
Then from the raw data I created a table so that I could see the average score per person in each age category (see below). The average score is rounded to two decimal places.

<u>Age Category</u>	<u>No. Entries</u>	<u>Total Score out of 35 For All Entries</u>	<u>Average Score Per Person</u>
14 or younger	4	97	24.25
15-20	119	2111	17.74
21-30	10	140	14.00
31-40	23	312	13.57
41-50	37	448	12.11
51-60	28	329	11.75
61-70	14	152	10.86

Amy Austin

71 or older	6	64	10.67
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Graph:



This graph was created based on the data in the table above, the numbers above each of the bars corresponds to the average score per person. I included it so it is easier to read the numbers of the bar chart.

Before creating the bar chart, I removed participants' data if they hadn't answered all of the questions as this would have an effect on their total score and because I don't know why they didn't answer the question I can't presume the reason for this as this could then make my results incorrect. I also removed any outliers as this would skew the overall data.

### Discussion:

My aim was to see if the younger generations self-worth is affected more by social media than older generations

Looking at the graph it shows a negative correlation between the total score out of 35 and the increasing age group. This highlights the fact that as people get older the less they agree with the statements. The questions were worded around the idea of self-validation, people's 'image' online and comparing how our social media looks compared to friends and others. Therefore, the data shows that the younger the

individual the more their self-worth is affected by social media which means I can accept my alternate hypothesis.

I wanted to focus on the 15-20 age group compared to older age groups. People in the 15-20 age group had an average score of 17.74 this is substantially higher than people of my mum's age in the 41-50 category who had an average score of 12.11. This would suggest that people of a younger age are more impacted by social media and how they want to come across online.

One of the biggest jumps is between the 14 and younger category and the 15-20 age category. The average score in 14 and younger was 24.25 out of 35, this suggests this age category is even more affected by social media than any other age group. This is alarming when they are in the fundamental part of their development, this could cause serious knock on effects later in life. However, in my study this age group had the lowest amount of entries and this therefore means that anybody that scored higher on the questionnaire could skew the data quite dramatically. Although the participants in this age category on the whole did individually all score highly, I would need to gather more data by getting more people in this age category to fill out the questionnaire. This would enable me to be more confident in my results and if there is a genuine trend that people in the 14 or younger age category are the most affected by social media.

One strength of my study was that I used volunteer sampling, this helped me achieve a big sample quickly that reached all the age categories that I needed data for. However, due to using this sampling method those who respond to the call for volunteers may all display similar characteristics (such as being more trusting or cooperative than those who did not apply) thus increasing the chances of yielding an unrepresentative sample. That being said in this case people were able to fill out the questionnaire at home, so they never had to meet me or cooperate with me as it was completely their choice if they wanted to complete it. Also, many people that did the questionnaire through my mum's link on Facebook won't have known me personally, this therefore reduces demand characteristics as they don't know what answer I was looking for and they most likely would have felt more confident to answer honestly as all answers were anonymous.

For further research as mentioned previously, I would be very interested in collecting more data on the younger age categories. It worried me how high on average people scored and this makes me question whether people are getting social media too early, and ultimately is it having serious negative consequences? The previous research I found already highlighted how people between the ages of 5-25 are more image conscious and more easily swayed by people's opinions. I think this leads to an interesting debate about how to educate young people to use social media for the right reasons and to be effective rather than lowering young people's self-confidence and questioning how they think they should look online.

## Appendix


Appendix 1: Questionnaire that participants filled out either from my Instagram or Snapchat or my mum's Facebook.

### A Level Psychology Research - Amy Austin

Please answer how much you agree with each of the following statements about social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat). Please only answer if you use social media. All answers are anonymous.

Firstly, please select the age category you fall into.

- 14 or younger
- 15-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71+




If I post something on my profile and no one "likes" it or forwards/retweets it, it makes me feel embarrassed.

- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little bit true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Very true
- 5 = Extremely true

If I am tagged in a photo and I don't think I look good, I untag myself.

- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little bit true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Very true
- 5 = Extremely true



Amy Austin

Sometimes I post things on social media just because I think it will get lots of attention (likes, forwards, or more followers on my profile).

- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little bit true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Very true
- 5 = Extremely true

If someone has lots of followers on Instagram/Facebook or any other social media, I think they must be really popular.

- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little bit true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Very true
- 5 = Extremely true

I compare how many likes I get on my photo compared with how many my friends get on their photo.

- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little bit true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Very true
- 5 = Extremely true

If I get a lot of messages a day, I feel popular.

- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little bit true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Very true
- 5 = Extremely true

If my friends don't comment on my picture, I feel like I don't look good enough.

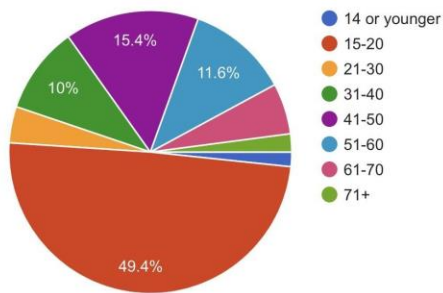
- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little bit true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Very true
- 5 = Extremely true



Appendix 2: Pie chart explaining the percentage of how everyone voted in each answer

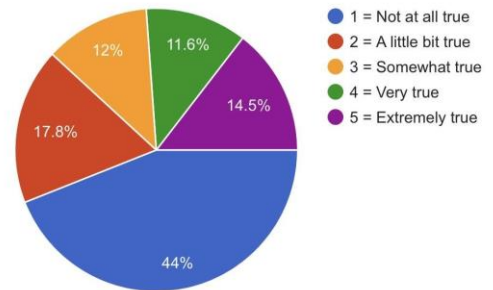
Firstly, please select the age category you fall into.

241 responses



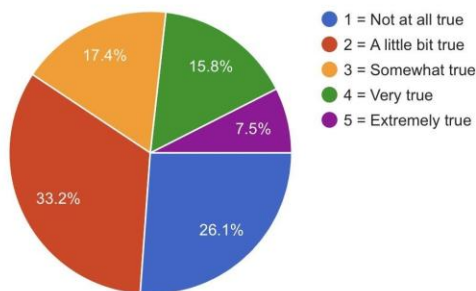
If I am tagged in a photo and I don't think I look good, I untag myself.

241 responses



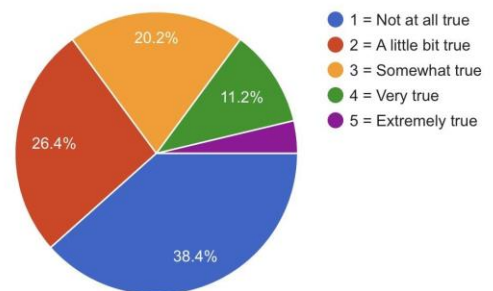
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241 responses



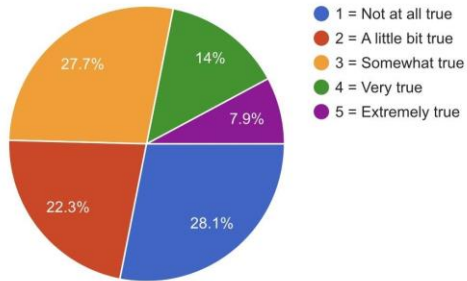
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242 responses



If someone has lots of followers on Instagram/Facebook or any other social media, I think they must be really popular.

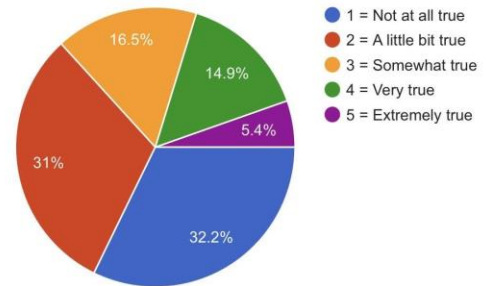
242 responses



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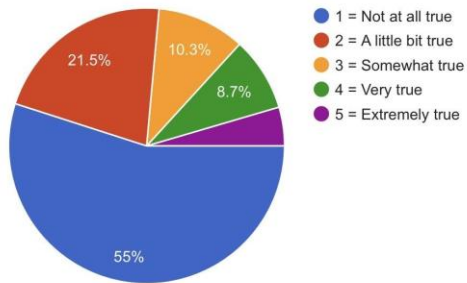
242 responses



I compare how many likes I get on my photo compared with how many my friends get on their photo.

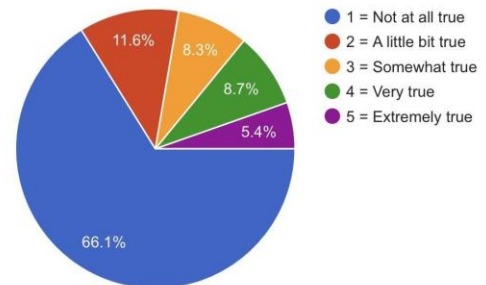


242 responses



If my friends don't comment on my picture, I feel like I don't look good enough.

242 responses



Appendix 3: Example of what part of the raw data looked like once I had added up the score per person.

Score out of 35	Firstly, please select the	If I post something on my	If I am tagged in a photo	Sometimes I post things	(If someone has lots of foll	I compare how many likes	If I get a lot of messages	If my friends don't comme
13	14 or younger	2	1	2	1	3	2	2
20	14 or younger	5	1	3	5	2	1	3
32	14 or younger	5	5	3	5	5	4	5
32	14 or younger	5	5	3	5	5	4	5
25	15-20	4	4	4	4	4	1	4
10	15-20	1	1	2	2	1	2	1
10	15-20	3	2	1	1	1	1	1
10	15-20	3	1	1	1	2	1	1
29	15-20	4	2	5	5	3	5	5
18	15-20	3	4	4	2	1	3	1
19	15-20	5	2	4	5	1	1	1
20	15-20	3	5	2	2	2	3	3
9	15-20	1	1	1	1	2	2	1
25	15-20	2	5	3	3	4	4	4
7	15-20	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
8	15-20	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
27	15-20	5	3	5	2	4	5	3
13	15-20	1	3	2	2	1	3	1
15	15-20	4	1	1	4	1	3	1
24	15-20	3	2	4	5	5	1	4