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UCR Honors Capstones 2018-2019

Title

Instagram Happiness

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Publication Date

2019-04-01

By

A capstone project submitted for
Graduation with University Honors

University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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Department of

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Abstract

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A correlational approach to Instagram and happiness

Social Media

Social media (SM) is computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is internet-based and gives users quick, electronic access to communication and user content. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users engage with social media through computer, tablet or smartphone via web-based software or web application, often utilizing it for messaging often as a form of socializing virtually. Social Media (SM) plays a big role in everyone's daily lives. People are constantly using their mobile and electronic devices to be on social media all throughout the day: right when people wake up, during work, lunchtime, breaks, during class, whenever they have access to a mobile device people can use social media. Whether it's YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, etc.; there are thousands of social media apps that people are using. According to a study conducted by Common Sense Media (a family technology education non-profit group), reported by the Washington Post, teens are "spending more than one-third of their days using media such as online video or music, nearly nine hours on average" (Asano 2017).

Social network sites (social media) appeal to their "users because humans are social creatures who require connection with others to thrive" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). SM helps people meet their basic human need of social connection. There is a significant amount of research that has identified connections between the use of social network sites and lower well-being. But an important aspect to note is that these research studies suggest that whether behavior on social network sites is good or bad for our well-being and happiness, depends on whether the behavior advances or hinders innate human desires for

acceptance and belonging. Positive associations between well-being and use of social network sites are typically linked to benefits of increased connection, such as social support. While negative associations between well-being and use of social network sites go hand in hand with behaviors that do not help to meet users' needs for acceptance and belonging. These negative consequences that these research studies refer to are isolation and social comparison. Individuals use social media because these sites are an outlet for communication. On the downside, it, enables lonely individuals to socially snack (temporarily fulfill their social needs virtually). But such activities fail to "contribute to interpersonal connection, ultimately resulting in a deficit in important relational resources, such as social support" (Green et al., 2005). Furthermore, social network sites provide constant opportunities for social comparison. Social comparison is when people evaluate their abilities and attitudes in relation to those of others in a process that plays a significant role in self-image and subjective well-being; and repeated self-comparison has been linked to negative outcomes, particularly when the "comparison is to a superior other" (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). When users compare their own experiences with others' through posts, pictures, videos that they upload to various social media sites, they may feel that their lives are lacking or not fulfilled, which results in these users suffering from envy and depression.

Happiness

Being happy is perhaps the most common and important goal individuals have. Happiness is generally considered an ultimate goal of life; virtually everybody wants to be happy. This is why society has the saying "the pursuit of happiness." Although happiness is a universally desired state, thoughts and opinions about this indefinable concept exist in various forms and there are differences in the meaning attached to the term 'happiness'. Some believe happiness comes primarily from unique personal achievements: like getting a job, acing a test, or graduating from college; obtaining materialistic things like a car, massive amounts of money, a

new phone (Diener and Suh 2000); whereas "others see it more as a communal experience attained through social relationships" (Shin et al., 2018) like love, friendships, or daily interactions with people. The list goes on and on about what can contribute to one's own happiness. In this research, I would like to focus on a definition of happiness that is free of any prepossession about its causes. I define happiness as the subjective enjoyment of one's own life as a whole, in other words, how much one likes the life one lives (aka Life Satisfaction).

Study Overview

Based on the aforementioned literature the researcher chose to test the idea that social media, specifically Instagram, is related to individual's happiness. When using Instagram, users are known to care about how many followers they have, the aesthetics and quality of the pictures and videos they post, or how many likes they get on these posts. When these users are so focused on these aspects, it could dictate how they feel due to the anxiety and irritation they get when it doesn't meet their standards. But since there is little research found and connected with Instagram and its impact on one's own well-being, I decided to research the correlations of different aspects regarding the use of Instagram with happiness. Because most of the past research studies suggest that using social media has a negative impact on one's well-being, we hypothesize that there will be a negative relationship between Instagram use and user happiness. It is important to research the correlations of Instagram and happiness because the more we use social media, the more we become addicted to using it. Social media could eventually consume our lives, dictate how we feel, how we start our days, or it can even affect our mental health.

Recent research is beginning to indicate that there may be another underlying factor that is playing a role in college student mental health issues: use of smartphones and social media. A similar study conducted in 2016 "involving 1,700 people found a threefold risk of depression and

anxiety among people who used the most social media platforms," (Brown 2018) with reasons including cyber-bullying, having a distorted view of other people's lives, and feeling like time spent on social media is a waste. We chose to study Instagram specifically because Instagram's popularity has been growing steadily with more than 500 million active users, and it's currently the third most popular social media network in the world. Another reason we want to focus our research on Instagram is because this social media platform remains especially popular among those ages 18 to 24, the age range of most college students. If we can find a negative correlation between Instagram use and well-being, we hope to give some advice on how to use Instagram in order to avoid aspects that hinder happiness.

Methods

Participants

Dr. Sean Jasso, a professor at UCR who teaches BUS 103 Marketing & Distribution Management, and several other professors in the business department, they have come to an agreement of requiring his students to sign up to take part of experiments and research studies conducted by some students and faculty during the course of the academic year. For my study, the incentive to take part in the research studies was a participation grade offered by Dr. Jasso. The students identified themselves as either male, female, non-binary/ third gender. Or preferred to self-describe their gender. All of the participants either marked male or female. Among our 260 participants about 53% were male and 47% were female. The ethnicities of these BUS 103 students range from a wide variety: White/Caucasian (7%), Black/African Descent (2%), American Indian Or Alaska Native (.38%), Latino/Hispanic (26%), Asian Indian (10%), Chinese (31%), Filipino (3%), Japanese (2%), Korean (4%), Vietnamese (8%), Middle Eastern (3%), Pacific Islander (1%) or other (4%). We decided to expand on Asian ethnicities and be more

specific because at UCR a majority of the students that attend are Asian. The age range of these students is from 20 to 33 years old.

Materials

The surveys each student answered was created through a website called Qualtrics. Qualtrics is a useful online survey tool that allows researchers to build surveys, distribute surveys and analyze responses from one convenient online location. It is available to use all faculty, staff and students here at UCR. The types of questions the survey included were 7-point Likert scale questions ranging from 1 (extremely disagree) to 7 (extremely agree) about how happy an individual is when using Instagram, posts per month, addiction of social media, why individuals use Instagram, and importance of likes; fill in the blanks about followers, satisfaction of likes, average number of likes; and slider questions on frequent usage, percentage of liking, and dependence of Instagram. Surveys were taken on school computers.

Procedure

Students completed the research studies held by Business faculty and students for course credit. They were emailed by a lab member/student to sign up for a time spot that can fit their schedule in order to complete the study, Monday through Friday from 12:30 pm – 5:30 pm. There is a maximum of 16 many students for each time slot for that week. Each session is an hour. Students were seated one computer/space away from each other, to prevent cheating and talking to one another. The surveys were taken in the computer lab located in Anderson Hall room 210. Surveys were answered on computers provided by the UCR business department. The survey we created was scheduled to be a part of a series of studies to be finished within this one-hour time limit. Each student, before entering the room, was required to fill out an informed consent form letting them know what they were going to be partaking in that their data was for

research purposes and is completely anonymous. The informed consent forms were used to allocate course credit to participating students.

Results

After obtaining 263 surveys from the BUS 103 participants, we found out that these students' average of hours spent on Instagram was estimated to 1.81 hours with a standard deviation of 1.70. Based on the data, these students averaged to about 13 times per day of opening the Instagram app ($SD = 8.68$) with an average of 3 posts per month ($SD = 2.62$). A surprising result that we found was that the average of number of followers each student has was 298 followers because we thought these students would have more followers. According to **Figure 1** (density graph), more students marked a happiness rating of 5 which means these participants felt slightly happy when using Instagram; but a majority stayed within the range of 4 (neither happy nor unhappy) to 6 (moderately happy) with a standard deviation of 1.001. This result is an indication that most of the participants felt neutral to mild happiness when using Instagram.

In this data we also asked participants to honestly mark how dependent they are on using Instagram. Based on a scale of 1(none at all) to 7 (a great deal) of dependency, about 50% of participants marked themselves as none at all; whereas 28% indicated that they were a little dependent on using Instagram and 18% indicated that they feel a little to a moderate amount of dependency of using the social media app ($SD = 1.028$). Another interesting result we found when asking to what extent does getting likes on the participant's post matter to them is that 28% said that it's not at all important and 31% indicated that they number of likes to them is moderately important but a low percentage of 3% indicated that it was extremely important.

See Figure 4 for a full table of correlations. Correlations with a p-value less than or equal to .05 are indicated with an Asterix (*). From the data we gathered, using Instagram to share memories positively correlates to one's happiness when using the social media app. The amount of times you post on Instagram, hours you spend using the app, the number of times you open the app, addiction and dependency of using Instagram also positively correlate to a user's happiness when using Instagram. Also, the extent to which getting likes on a post matter to a user and minimum number of likes for a user to be satisfied positively correlate with happiness when using Instagram.

Conclusion

Our study explores how individuals' use of the social media app Instagram relates to several aspects of their happiness. We designed a survey asking students about how much and why they use Instagram and, separately, how happy they were with various aspects of their life. We found that heavier usage was correlated with greater satisfaction with using Instagram but did not impact (or was even negatively correlated with) overall happiness with life. Multiple studies of research suggest that social media has a negative impact on our lives because it could possibly cause stress, depression, alter our moods, increase anxiety, worsen sleep habits, lower self-esteem, boost or worsen well-being; our study had net neutral results about relationships with between happiness and Instagram. Thus, we cannot support or refute the prior literature. We did find that there are some significant positive correlations when using Instagram if users are happy, regarding variables like satisfaction of likes, dependency and addiction of Instagram, and the frequency of usage. Because the data are correlational, we cannot make causal claims about the influence on a user's happiness.

Because social media plays a big part in our lives, we want to focus on finding more data on social media impact; but this time our focus is on Instagram, rather than Facebook which has been routinely explored in previous research. Since social media is still relatively new, conclusive findings are limited. The research that does exist mainly relies on self-reporting, which can often be flawed, and the majority of studies focus on Facebook.

Limitations

Since the study gathered correlational data and not causal data, we cannot definitively say that there is causality or what direction that causality would be in when determining if using Instagram affects one's happiness. Prior to collecting data, we should have taken baseline measures of how participants were feeling in life at the current moment. It is possible that their current mental/emotional state could have possibly influenced the way they responded to the survey. Also, because these participants were from BUS 103, there may be a bias in the sample populations. Students may have participated in these types of surveys and experiments previously if they have taken Dr. Jasso's classes before and so they might have an understanding on what we as researchers are trying to ask of them; it may have been better to asked other individuals who are not students majoring in business administration to gather an unbiased sample.

Also, regarding the dependency & addiction question; opening of the app; average time spent on Instagram, participants indicated their answers on their own. These answers may have been inaccurate due to self-enhancement bias or because an of error in self reporting (memory etc.) or social desirability which may or may not have changed the results drastically. The participants could have lied in order to avoid being judged or just does not want to disclose this type of information. Because these surveys were a one-time participation, completely

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anonymous, and did not gather their actual Instagram page information, we were not able to validate participant self-reports.

Future Directions

If social network sites are to function as constructive tools that foster healthy relationships, researchers must focus on identifying further beneficial and detrimental behaviors for users of these sites and spreading this knowledge to inform their actions and decisions. If we begin studies and find significant data dealing with Instagram, we could possibly give advice to users in order for them to have the best experience with using this app and even increase or maintain their levels of happiness. Again, because we focused on correlational findings, in future studies we should now focus on some of causal findings to support the original correlational data. With our results in mind, we could begin researching on whether there is an ideal amount of likes for a person to be satisfied. Based on the number of likes a person takes to be satisfied (there are some individuals that have indicated that they do care about the number of likes they get on their post) we should test to figure out whether or not this has any effect on one's happiness in terms of causation; we could also test to see what is the central cause of this possible study. We could look to strengthen our studies by using different methods other than surveys, we could physically observe participants behavior when using Instagram. We could also test whether or not the different ways of how users use Instagram causes different levels of happiness. We could also try to test if the follower-to-following ratio and the number of likes you get on post have any effect on users when using Instagram.

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Qualtrics Survey

Below are the survey questions I asked the BUS 103 participants to answer:

Welcome to this survey about Instagram. We will be asking you some questions about your Instagram usage. Please note that your responses will be anonymous and will not be used to identify your Instagram account. Please answer as honestly as possible. Thank you for your participation!

Do you have an Instagram account?

Yes	No

On average, to what extent does using Instagram make you happy or unhappy?

| Extremely unhappy 1 | Somewhat unhappy 2 | 3 | Neither happy nor unhappy 4 | 4 | Somewhat happy 5 | 6 | Extremely happy 7 |

Yes

How many Instagram followers do you have, and how many accounts do you follow?
Please estimate, if you don't know the exact number.

Number of followers
Number of accounts you follow
Number of accounts you follow that are real life friends

How many times do you post to Instagram per month (on average)? *Select the option closest to your post frequency*

I never post	11-15
<1	16-30
1	31-60
2-3	61-100
4-6	101-200
7-10	>200

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How many hours per day do you spend using Instagram on average?

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |

Hour(s) per day

How many different times per day do you open the Instagram app or website on average?

| 0 | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 |

per day

How dependent/addicted are you to Instagram?

| None at all | | A little | | A moderate amount | | A lot | | A great deal |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

What kind of pictures do you post? (Select all that apply)

Selfies	Pets
Events (parties, concerts, etc.)	Significant other
Nature/Landscapes/Artsy photos	Food
Traveling/Adventures	Motivational and inspiring posts
Friends	Products (cars, clothes, electronics, etc.)
Family	Other

To what extent does getting likes on your posts matter to you?

| Not at all important | Slightly important | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |

At what amount of likes on your posts are you satisfied?

How often do you delete your posts if you don't get enough likes?

| Never | Sometimes | About half the time | Most of the time | Always |

To what extent does the amount of followers you have on your Instagram account matter to you?

| Not at all important | Slightly important | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |

What categories of Instagram posts do you like the most? *Please rank these from most to least favorite by dragging and dropping.*

Friends and family

Lifestyle

Travel

Music & Dance

Sports

TV & Movies

Beauty

Food

Gaming

Fitness

Humor

Why do you use Instagram? (Select all that apply)

To engage and connect with others

Share snippets of your daily life

An app to preserve memories

Show off your photography skills

To help promote yourself

Live life vicariously through other's posts

Other

Do you use any techniques to gain more likes on your posts?

Yes

No

If so, what techniques do you use?

To what extent do you think you are a good photographer?

Far above average	Moderately above average	Slightly above average	Average	Slightly below average	Moderately below average	Far below average

How important are filters to you?

Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important

Figure List

When using Instagram:

1- Extremely Unhappy

2- Moderately Unhappy

3- Slightly Unhappy

4- Neither Happy nor unhappy

5- Slightly Happy

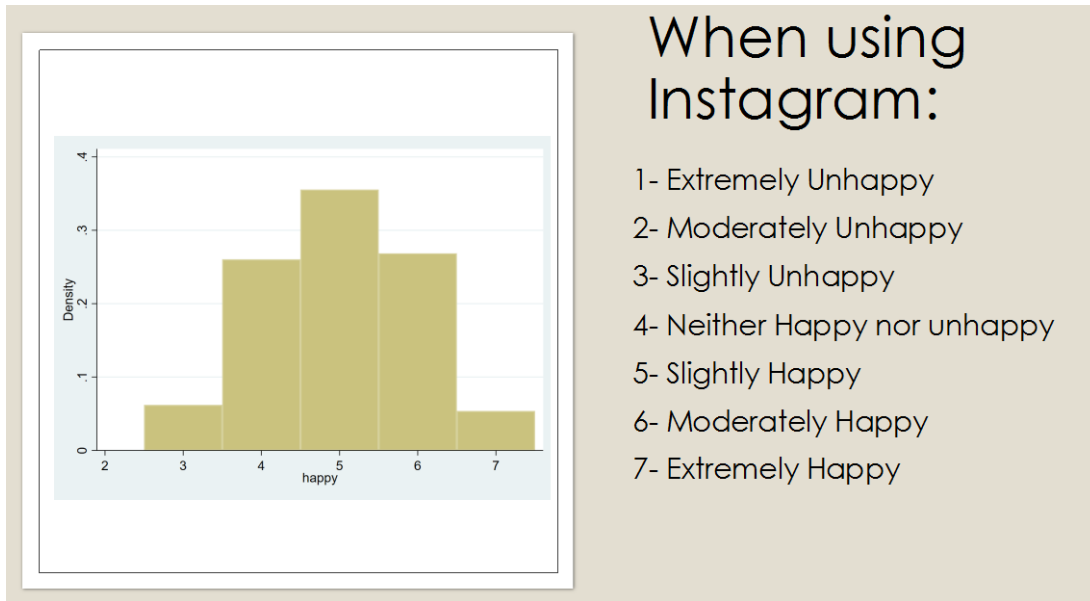6- Moderately Happy

7- Extremely Happy

Figure 1: A density graph measuring participants indication of how happy they are when using the app Instagram.
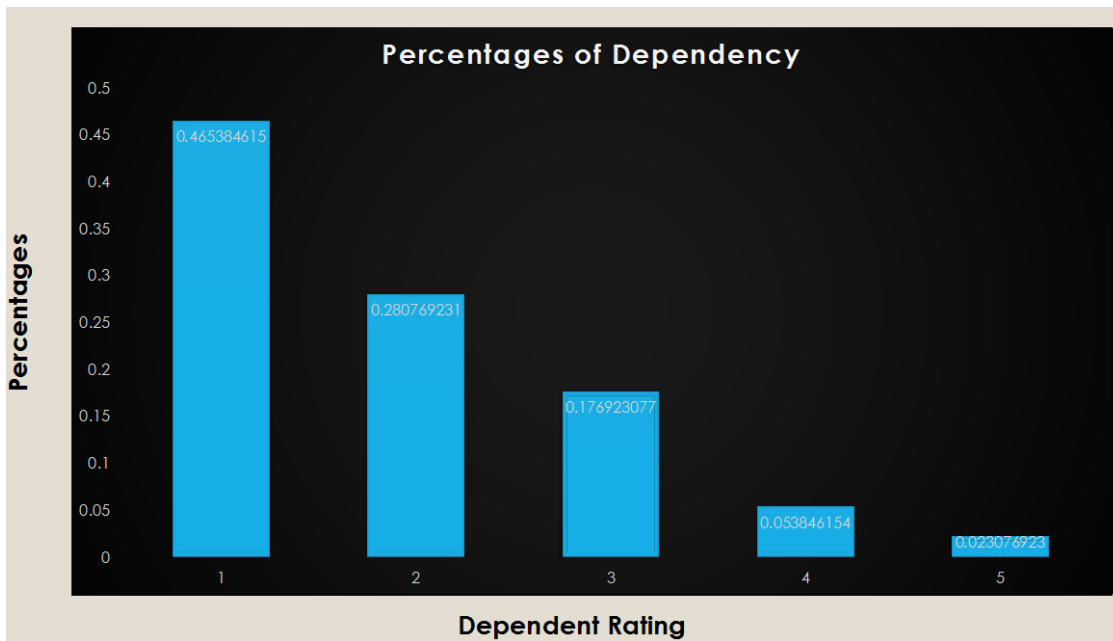

Figure 2: A bar-graph indicating the percentage of students marking how dependent from a scale of 1 to 7 (ranging from none at all, a little, a moderate, amount, a lot, and a great deal) when they are using the app Instagram.
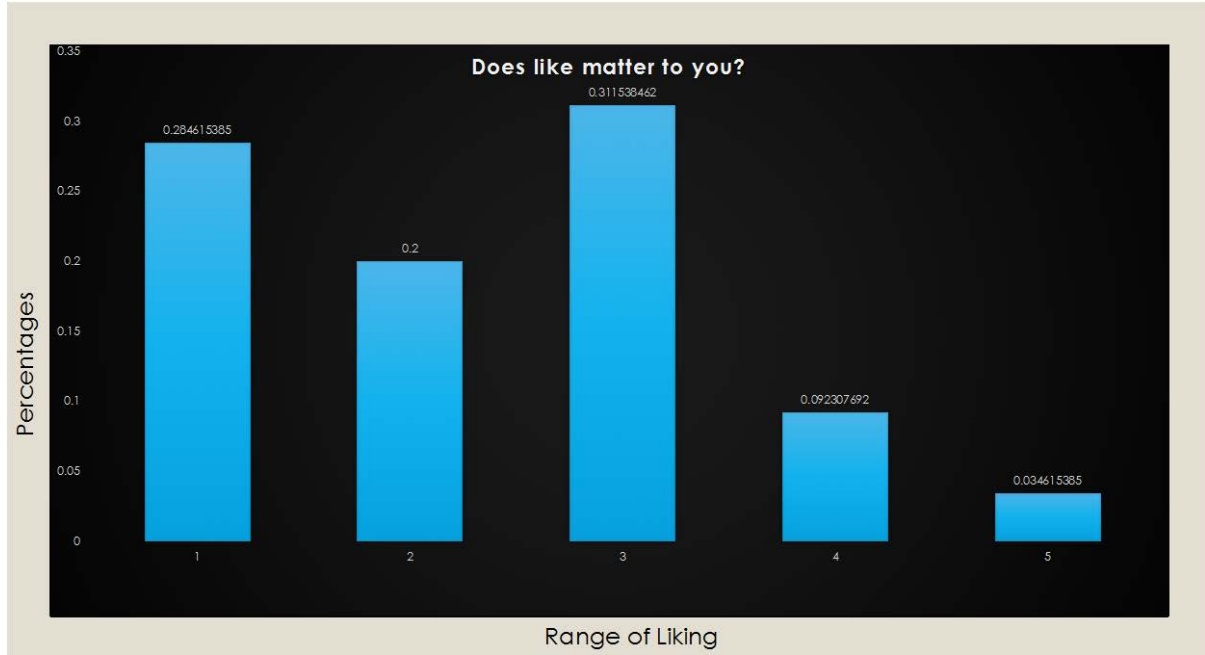
Figure 3: Is another bar-graph that represents the different percentages in which users indicated from a 1-5 scale of importance (not at all important, slightly important, moderately important, very important, extremely important respectively) when they are using the app Instagram.
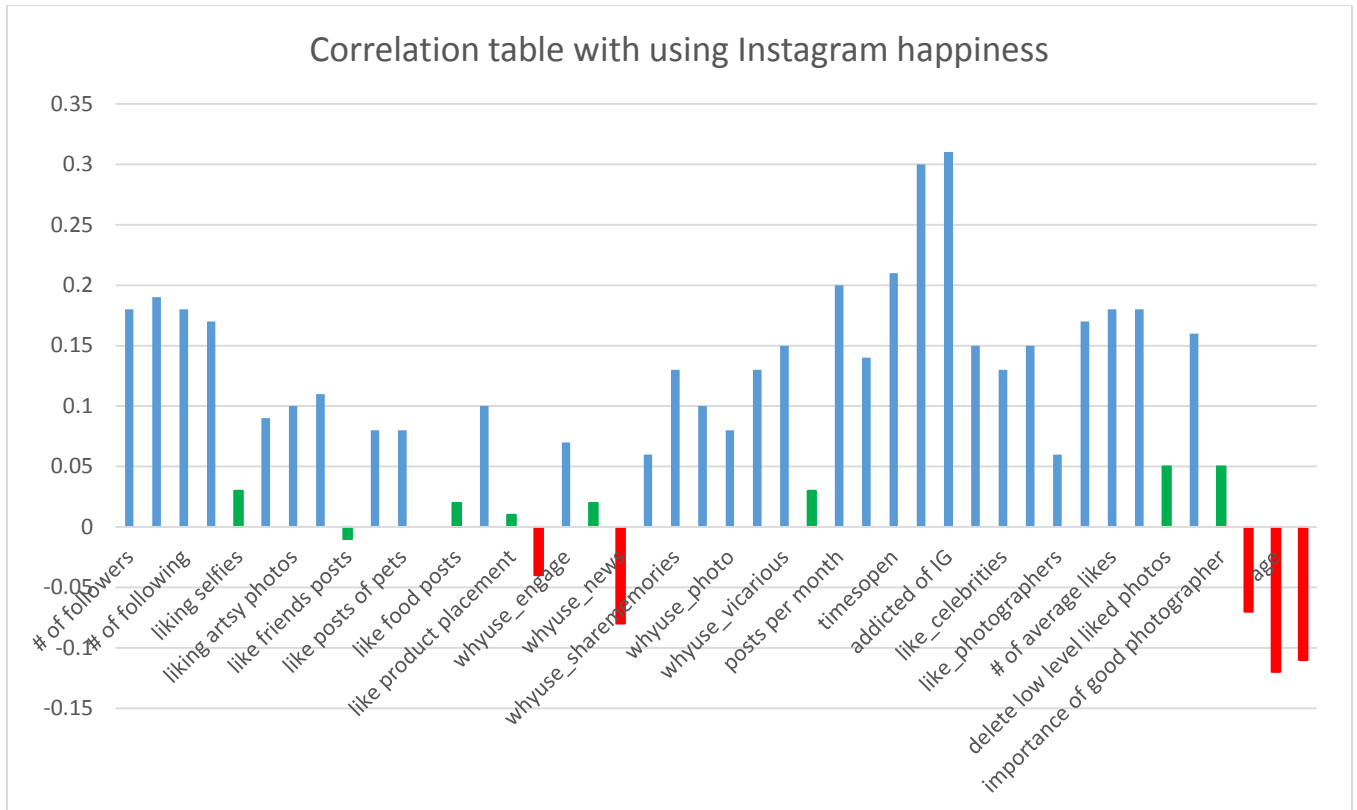
Figure 4: A correlation table regarding the different questions and variables and happiness when using Instagram. The blue bar graphs represent the significant positive correlations, green bar graphs represent data with no significance, and red bar graphs represent significant negative correlations.