Investigating the Impact of Instagram Application on Algerian Individuals' Self-Identifications: The Case of Algerian Teenagers

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Abstract

Modern media creates for young people a desire to change them with a subsequent loss of personality. It has influenced its users, particularly adolescents because it carries different contents that attract their attention; therefore, they escape to the world of dreams where they can find a suitable place for themselves through being an influencer and/ or following media content creators who share what is attractive to gain more followers. To this end, adolescents are the intended age segment because they get influenced easily owing to their sensitive age period. In this regard, the present paper aims at studying the impact of Instagram on Algerian adolescents' self-identifications. It focuses on how individuals interact within Instagram as a virtual community and how it affects their real lives due to the unbalances between the real and the virtual worlds. To do that, we employed mixed-methods research relying on an online observation and an online questionnaire as research instruments. The participants were 161 Algerian adolescents known to be Instagram users. Final results indicated that 57,8 % of their real and virtual identities are the same, and 42,2 % have declared that there is a contradiction between both identities, which has amplified the phenomenon of double personality or schizophrenia with 61 % among Algerian teenagers. Therefore, the Instagram app has hidden individual and psychological effects on its users.

Keywords: Algerian teenagers, Instagram application, self-identification, media.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, social media becomes rooted and indispensable in societies and cultures; it has become a glass that reflects universal ideas and cultures transmitted from one society to another. Therefore, the rapid spread of social media has made it take significant roles within human societies by transforming new patterns, values, behaviours and identities through the communication and interaction of individuals in the virtual world. This fact confirms that the services of these sites constitute a threat to the values and identities of Eastern and conservative societies, especially among young people. Algerian youths find themselves trapped between a social reality that does not suit their aspirations and foreign media entertainment, making them prefer to stay in a virtual world where they express themselves freely, which leads to a sudden loss of identity and self-identification. Therefore, there is a rebellious behaviour on the social system, values and identities that govern and regulate the behaviour of young users within the Algerian society. This phenomenon makes us wonder about Algerian youths' access to the virtual world and its different practices, particularly Instagram in relation to the self-identification because the youth stage is considered as a transitional phase, a passage from childhood to adulthood, thus, it is a developmental life step. For this reason, youths are well-known for some characteristics that distinguish them from other age groups, including their rejection of old and aspiration to social

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freedom. Therefore, they are the most affected by the ideas they receive in the stages of their identity formation from various institutions of socialization mainly media contents; they have attracted adolescents' attention because it suits their age dreams and desires. Youths express themselves verbally or nonverbally in this virtual space; that affects them and disturbs their identity formation in all its dimensions. They cannot fully adapt to real life because they live in two distinct spheres with different standards. In this regard, adolescents' digital presence has become more important than the real one; they enjoy pictures and videos more than the time itself. Besides, their virtual success has become their real success, that is why users rush to collect views, likes, and shares from their fans and followers to feel the joy of a fake accomplishment, and if it does not happen, their confidence and psyche will be seriously damaged. To this end, social media is considered as an integral space for youths' self-identification formation.

On the other side, identity represents how people view themselves and others might see them. It has two different types that are distinct but closely related: social identity refers to the characteristics that are attributed to an individual by others, and self-identity is the one that sets people as distinct individuals (Gidden, 2005; Flourish, 2013). It refers to the process of self-development through which we formulate a unique sense of ourselves and our relationships to the world around us, whereas identification means uniqueness, and it is not a ready and final system; instead, it remains open to the future. Identification involves the principles and values that direct people to achieve certain goals because of their importance in shaping individual and societal identities (Ogibi, 2015). Henceforth, self-identification is distinguishing one person from others and the uniqueness of one person among other persons, it is the quality that makes a person different from other people while consciously recognizing the uniqueness of those self-qualities (Ogibi, 2015).

Thus the main problem that Algerian adolescents face as a result of their abusive use of social media, particularly Instagram, is a contradiction between their true identities in their real social dealings with their families and learning environment and how they act and identify themselves in Instagram because they are living in two different environments simultaneously. Accordingly, they have two distinct identities, one real and the other virtual. This arrangement between what is real and virtual has created complex virtual identities that reflect users' acts. Therefore, the current study revolves around the effects of Instagram on Algerian youths' self-identifications; it seeks to find an answer to the following question:

- To what extent are the virtual interactions and the online practices on the Instagram platform able to influence Algerian teenagers' self-identifications?

Based on this question, we have hypothesized that:

- The virtual interactions on Instagram can influence Algerian teenagers' self-identifications due to the difference between online and offline practices.

2. Materials and methods

The main objective of conducting this study is Algerian individuals' abusive usage of Instagram application; they share their routines with their followers, thinking that they are influencers that impact others' lives. On the other hand, other individuals prefer to keep their digital presence on Instagram private; they contact the influencers to share their talents and advertise their products. Therefore, Instagram has become an application that presents virtual job opportunities to Algerian individuals. To do that, they spend all their time in this virtual platform, and they show only their positive side, which has influenced their self-identification because of their presence in two dissimilar environments (natural and virtual). To reach the research goal, we implemented mixed-method research using online observation and online questionnaire to investigate this topic. The mixed-method is the associated combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches; hence, it is research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using qualitative and quantitative techniques in a single study (Tashakkori et al., 2007).

Algerian adolescents known to be Instagram users were selected to be the participants in this research because youths are well-known for some characteristics that distinguish them from other age groups. We have deliberately selected a representative sample that serves the aims of the study to reach objective results that are compatible with the nature and goals of the inquiry. Therefore, Algerian teenagers aged between 13 and 24 years known to be Instagram users have been chosen; they were 161 informants.

We contacted some Algerian influencers to share the questionnaire with their followers to reach the targeted sample. We have deliberately selected this age group because the adolescence stage is associated with the identity construction of individuals; according to Erikson's psychological theory, adolescents face the challenge of identity versus confusion; they try to achieve their identity and their identity role in the society. Nevertheless, they adopt negative attitudes and identities if they do not reach this goal. Moreover, they find themselves in a state of disturbance or depression of identity (Erikson, 1968).

The observation is the basic research instrument of the current study; it is the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts. In this context, we have undertaken the online observation of the Instagram application through a personal account, and we were in the setting under study as observers. We have started following, randomly, Algerian teenagers' accounts, males and females from different Algerian regions, as well as we have followed several pages, profiles, videos, comments, and the content in order to cover almost everything in detail.

Based on the observation, which lasted more than three months, we have observed that Instagram has eradicated the geographical and spatial barriers since it provides its users with different types of interaction through reading status, audio and visual communication. Hence, it gives its users the opportunity of connections and friendship through giving opinions, analyzing, criticizing, exchanging ideas, files, images, and videos. Besides, there are plenty of pages, and each page has its own content that serves the intended objectives and interests of its users. We have also observed that Instagram has become a platform for advertisement. Moreover, it is characterized by suggesting profiles and pages to follow. Hence, Instagram is a virtual environment categorized by the charity of ideas and desires despite age, gender, or educational level differences. There is even the possibility of interaction and communication with friends through sharing stories option and informing them about the work that he/she is currently doing so that they remain in constant contact through this virtual site. Instagram users can also share direct videos with their followers to interact directly and exclusively. The person organizing the online meeting appears to followers reads and responds to their comments. Hence, a virtual meeting and interaction with different followers and users occur. They talk about different topics; sometimes, the interaction is planned before and has some social or individual goals to achieve; other times, it contains random discussions. On the whole, Instagram has the same features as Facebook.

However, Instagram also has a negative side that cannot be neglected. It shows the Algerian social classes imbalances; it leads users to waste their time, isolate them from their existing society, lead them to live in a virtual community, and weakens their skills. Moreover, Instagram has become an addiction that takes its users from reality to a world full of imagination.

Consequently, it leads to the loss of social communication. It has profound impacts on the self-identification of its users. Many users do not expose their true identity; instead, they impersonate a character they may admire to deal with several people. In general, Instagram contributes to achieving imaginary harmony and interconnectedness.

3. Discussion

The current paper addresses the changes that Algeria is witnessing as a result of the global openness and the excessive use of Instagram app by Algerian teenagers and the consequences of this usage on their self-identifications. It focuses on how youths interact within the virtual community and the effects of this communication on their real lives because the increasing popularity of social media has become the hallmark of modern human societies, especially among teenagers who find themselves addicted in front of imported technology that responds to their age needs (Dekhil et al., 2021). Algerian young users in front of this media influx lose the ability to manage and control social networking sites; they seek to liberate themselves from all kinds of social restrictions to satisfy their needs by joining social media with its various applications. Thereby, their digital presence is more important than their real social presence. This affects the sociological structure, including the self-identification of individuals because they are in the position of the receivers and imitators.

Instagram is regarded as a virtual addiction, its users are obsessed with receiving and sending messages, sharing and following stories option every moment (Ginige, 2017). Therefore, Instagram has become a window through which people overlook peoples' worlds through pictures and videos and narrate the facts of their daily lives with details. In other words, Instagram, as a part of the technological revolution with its different applications, has brought up foreign patterns

and behaviours. Algerian social media handlers are active participants. They share their everyday practices with their virtual followers through live or stories options. Hence, their lives are no longer private though privacy was highly valued, especially regarding family confidences. However, Algerian Instagram users imitate all what they follow; there is a kind of virtual contamination or competition in the foreign virtual spheres. Besides, Instagramming is an activity that most youths, the Digital Natives, would certainly fall into since it gives a diverse range of any images starting from beautiful scenery up to beauty products. Therefore, Instagram posts tend to have minimum texts that are quite rich in image presentation (Purnama, 2017) in order to present memorable moments that are positive, reinforce life ideals for the followers and present gratifying reflection of themselves with the digital community (Nurzilanet al, 2020).

Yet, smartphone use in general and Instagram app in particular are associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression (Elhadi et al., 2017) due to the inequalities between the natural and virtual spheres and they can cause self-identification harm to users because they don't know to which environment they really belong, even the face-to-face communication will be affected because they depend more on watching videos, writing messages and voice recordings, therefore, the feeling of loneliness is increased (Dacrin et al., 2017) for the reason that they escape to the world of dreams which is a suitable space that enables them to show only what is positive and perform multiple virtual identities.

In this regard, Junco (Junco, 2014) introduced the concept of *"digital identification"* in ways that individuals choose to present their identity in a social and digital context; unlike what is possible in the physical world, users can choose to reveal themselves or not to varying degrees and can have one or multiple online identities because social media handlers who present their true identities must be highly motivated to manage their self-presentation and must make decisions about how to react to the comments and wall posts that others contribute (Hollenbaugh, 2021). Therefore, most of the relationships and partnerships in virtual societies are anonymous. Accordingly, individuals engaging in these interactions are hidden behind virtual names, photos, and filters. According to Schau (Hope et al., 2003), every time we choose a nickname for an online service, we are doing an act of self-presentation. In the same vein, Donath (Donath et al., 2004) claimed that the networks of connections are displayed as an integral part of individuals' self-presentations and that an extended network may validate identity information presented in a person's profile. The dramaturgical theory of Goffman (Goffman, 1956) reinforces this idea in his book *The presentation of self in everyday life,* it discusses the idea of the presenter and audience in a theatre play as a metaphor to explain the interactions in social media behind the screens. Each individual would act, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to represent himself and aims to create a picture impression (Krisnawati, 2020). In other words, the interactions that occur in the virtual world differ from the natural ones, which can influence social media handlers' psyche, produce new virtual identities, and affect their self-identification.

Social and digital technologies allow individuals to create a different online persona and digital identifications. One individual might have multiple persona or identifications: some anonymous, some pseudo-anonymous, and some explicitly tied to their true-physical world selves. Individuals can quickly switch between these personas and different social and digital spaces through a smartphone or other technologies that let them move between one network or application to another within minutes (Brown, 2016).

In the same vein, the notion of digitized selfhood becomes important; it denotes the extent to which individuals see in their digital world themselves as part of, or separate from, their physical world selves. Digitization is the extent to which individuals see themselves as living their lives in digital spaces. Individuals may use technology to varying degrees, but they also integrate it into their lives to different extents. Those with more intimate relationships with technology tended to conceptualize their physical-world only contexts (Brown, 2016).

4. Results

The questionnaire is divided into two main sections: the socio-demographic data of respondents and Instagram application use by Algerian teenagers. The former provides the age, gender, educational level, and the location of the participants; the latter contains seven questions that yield the research findings that will answer the research question.

Section one: socio-demographic data of respondents

The purpose of this section is to have a general idea about our respondents' age, gender, educational level, and location. Through this initial information, we ensure that people participating in this research have the required conditions to complete the process of answering the remaining questions that will provide the final findings.

Table 1. The Instagram App Use according to Participants' Age

Age	From 13 to 16 years	From 16 to 20 years	From 20 to 24 years	Total
Percentage	02 %	20 %	78 %	100 %

This table stands for a high percentage of 78 % of the total number of respondents aged between 20 and 24 years who use the Instagram application. 20 % of them are aged between 16 and 20 years, and only 02 % have between 13 and 16 years old.

Table 2. The Instagram App Use according to Participants' Gender

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Percentage	20.3 %	79.7 %	100 %

Table 2 reveals that Algerian female teenagers use the Instagram application more than males; females represent 79.7 %, whereas males denote only 20.6 %. It means that most Instagram users are females due to two main reasons; first of all, the percentage of females is higher than the one of males in the Algerian society. Second, Instagram as a virtual community gives females complete freedom as opposed to the real society's restrictions.

Table 3. The Instagram App Use according to Participants' Educational Level

Educational level	Middle school	Secondary school	University	Total
Percentage	5.5 %	5.1 %	90.4 %	100 %

This table demonstrates that the majority of participants are university students; they symbolize 90.4 % of the entire sample. However, middle school and secondary school pupils are minorities, 5.5 % and 5.1 %, respectively. This question is related to the first question of age because whenever individuals get old, they become familiar with digital devices and encourage each other to use them. The findings of this question are logical; university students represent a large proportion of Instagram users because they possess their own smartphones. Therefore, their importance to use social media with its various applications increases as it becomes a part of their daily activities. By contrast, most middle and secondary school pupils, especially middle school, do not have smartphones due to their young age.

Table 4. The North and West Participants' Use of the InstagramApp

| Location	North	South	East	West	Total
Percentage	34 %	6.3 %	37 %	22.7 %	100 %

The results indicated that the most considerable fraction comes from the East with 37 %, followed by 34 % from the northern part and 22.7 % from the western part. However, only 6.3 % are from the South. We have observed that the majority of our participants are either from the East or the North, followed by the West. As people from the South are a minority, this is owing to one main reason: the problem of internet influx.

Section two: the use of Instagram by Algerian teenagers

This section is the continuance of the first stage of this questionnaire. It is an introduction that discloses key information about the use of the Instagram application by Algerian teenagers to

know the frequency of using the application, which is one of the main concerns of the study and the perceptions of its users towards their interactions in this virtual platform.

Question one: Do you use the Instagram application?
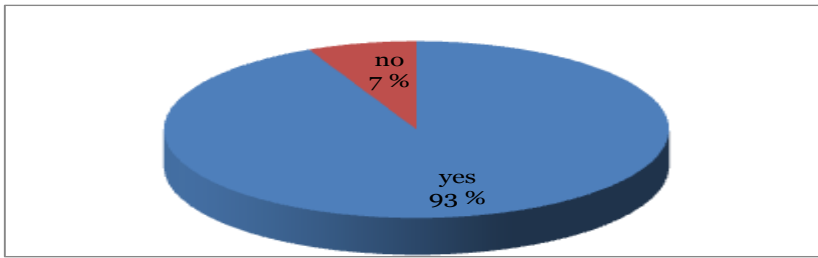
Fig. 1. The use of the Instagram application by Algerian teenagers

As the question of having an Instagram application was asked to 161 respondents, the findings show that the responses of the large proportion were positive, exactly about 93 %, it is widely used by Algerian youths. By contrast, only 7 % do not use the application.

Question two: Do you share your personal life on Instagram?
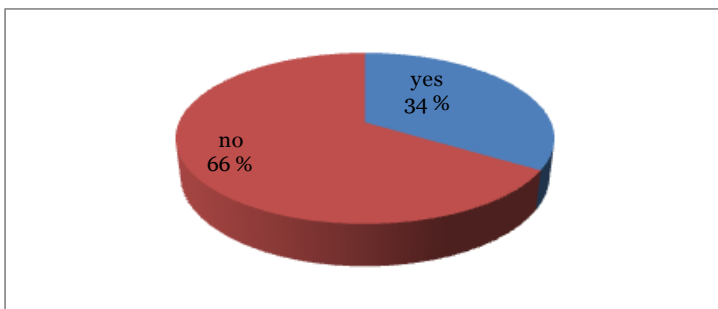
Fig. 2. Algerian Teenagers' Broadcasting of Personal Life on Instagram

Instagram is a social networking platform where people can share their details with other virtual users to build virtual relations. In this regard, this question refers to sharing coordinates, for example, the educational level, the academic institution, the full name, the profession, and the list of followers, as well as sharing stories to be viewed by other followers or by everyone if the profile is public and hence, giving people the opportunity to know them. Based on the graph shown above, it is clear that 66 % of respondents do not share their personal lives and issues on social media, precisely the Instagram platform; they prefer to keep their lives private. However, the remaining percentage, 34 % do not find problems in sharing their coordinates publically as a kind of self-demonstration.

Question three: How many followers do you have on Instagram?
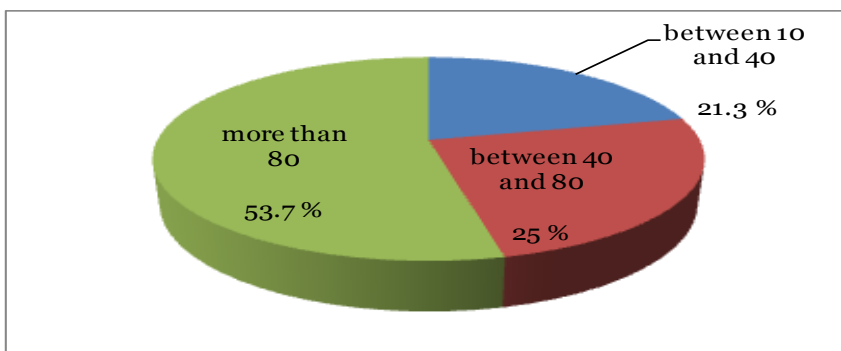
Fig. 3. The number of Instagram followers

This question is related to the virtual relations that Instagram users build with other people through the option of "follow," which allows them to keep an eye on the profiles and personal lives of others as well as to interact and communicate with each other. The pie chart above indicates that the largest fraction of participants (53.7 %) show that they have more than 80 followers, while 25 % revealed between 40 and 80 followers. Finally, 21.3 % have less than 40 followers. From these responses, we deduce that the majority of Instagram users build random relations because if the number of followers gets large, it means that they are in contact with strangers, and maybe that is why they do not share their personal information and photos because they cannot trust all their followers since they do not know them.

Question four: Do you know all of them, some of them, or you do not know them?
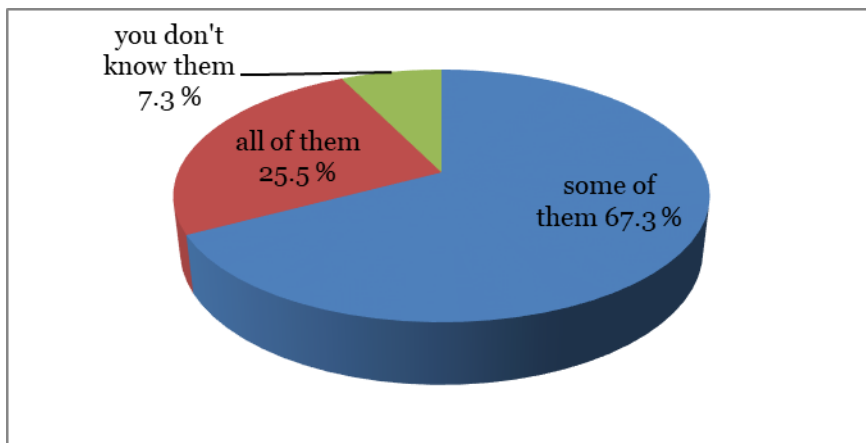
Fig. 4. Algerian Teenagers' Familiarity with their Followers

As the previous question was about the number of followers, this question is about whether they know people they follow or not. The findings demonstrate that a very large proportion of respondents know some of their followers, exactly about 67.3 %. However, 25.5 % are acquainted with all their followers, it means they are in contact only with their relatives. Finally, 7.3 % do not know the people they are interacting with.

Question five: Do you prefer the real communications and interactions or those that occur in the virtual space, particularly in the Instagram platform?
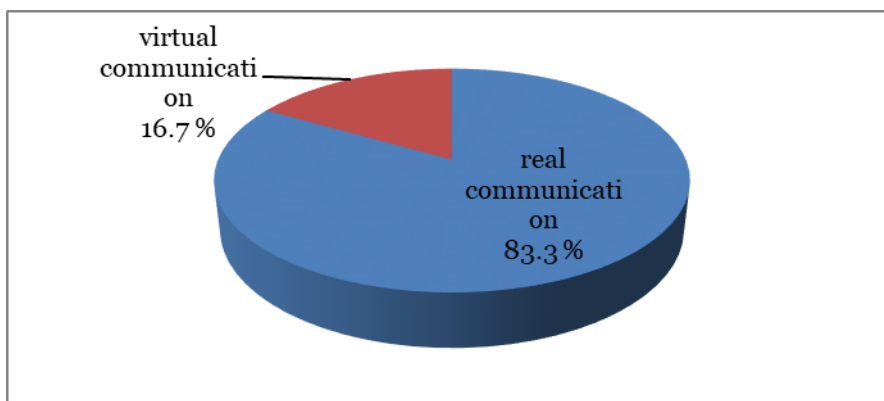
Fig. 5. Comparison between Face-to-face and Virtual Communication

We seek to compare two types of communication, real and virtual, through this question. The figure above demonstrates that 83.3 % of the population prefers real, natural, or face-to-face communication. However, people who prefer virtual communication and interaction count for 16.7 %.

Question six: In your opinion, is Instagram a reflection of your true identity or contradicts it?
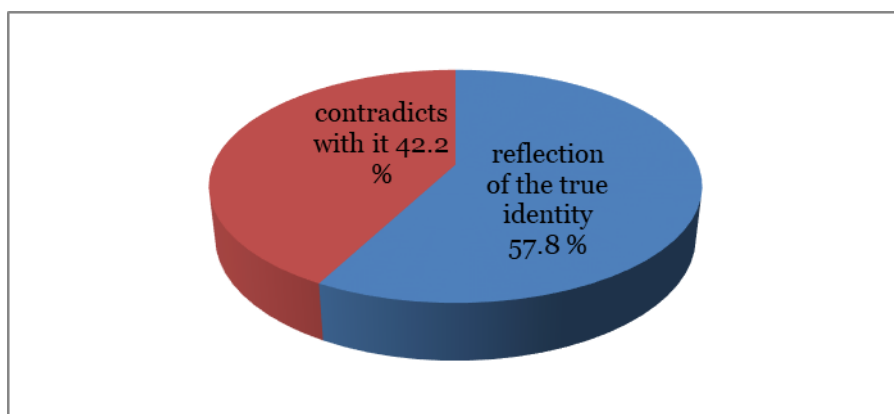
Fig. 6. Instagram Identity vs. the True Identity

As for the question of Instagram users' identity, whether the identity presented on Instagram is a reflection of the true identity or it opposes it, most Instagram profiles of Algerian teenagers (57.8 %) are a reflection of their true identity and give a true first impression to other people. Nevertheless, 42.2 % do not show their real identity. The significance of this answer is that those people know that there is a dissimilarity between both identities. Hence, there are two possibilities: they do not show their real identity on purpose and prefer to keep a distance between the virtual and the real world, therefore, their virtual interactions are not serious, or they are influenced by other people and try to imitate them.

Question seven: Do you think that Instagram contributes to increasing the phenomenon of double personality or schizophrenia?
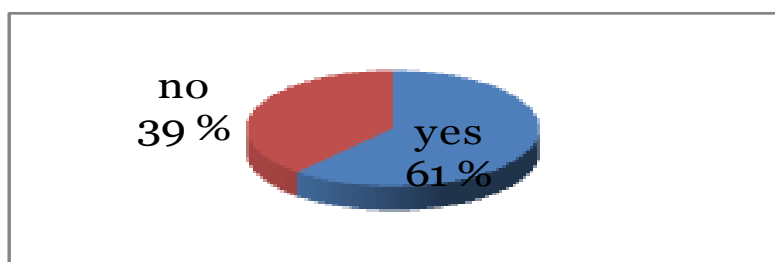
Fig. 7. The Effects of Instagram on its Users' Psychological Side

We are investigating Algerian individuals' identities on Instagram. We have asked our participants about the phenomenon of double personalities or schizophrenia. The greatest percentage, precisely 61 %, demonstrates that Instagram is a social media platform that increases this social phenomenon since we have previously observed a contradiction between the real and virtual identity. On the other side, 39 % perceive that Instagram does not produce schizophrenia or double personality and show that they have a stable personality either on Instagram or the real sphere.

5. Conclusion

In this research study, we attempted to investigate the effects of Instagram app on individuals' self-identifications due to their presence in two distinct spheres, natural and virtual; this fact yields to a contradiction in their identity formation process and even schizophrenia. Therefore, research on social media has become imperative. Based on the responses of the informants in this research illustrated in the tables and graphs above, we obtained the following findings:

To begin with, Algerian teenagers aged between 20 and 24 years, exactly about 78 % and thus university students who count for 90.4 % use Instagram more than any other age group. Additionally, females use the application more than males, most of them are from the East and the North with 37 % and 34 % respectively, followed by the West (22.7 %) and finally the South with the lowest percentage of 6.3.

Second, the results of the second section that have to do with the use of Instagram by Algerian teenagers disclosed that 93 % of the population have Instagram application in their mobiles; however, only 7 % do not have the application because it is almost similar to Facebook.

Third, regarding sharing personal information and photos on Instagram, findings demonstrated that the majority prefer to keep their information private and avoid posting their photos. Hence, they post fake profile photos. Besides, 53,7 % have more than 80 followers on Instagram, and 67,3 % know only some of their followers. Therefore, they are dealing with people they do not know because it is one of the main characteristics of social media; Yet, most Algerian teenagers prefer natural communications (83,3 %).

Results confirmed that most Instagram handlers (48 %) like more natural relations and prefer the natural world (67 %). On the other hand, according to other participants, 51,3 % said that Instagram is an instrument that allows them to know other people and 57,8 % of users' real and virtual identities share the same opinion, and 42,2 % have declared that there is a contradiction between both identities, which has amplified the phenomenon of double personality or schizophrenia with 61 % among Algerian teenagers.

To sum up, we confirm the research hypothesis; Instagram application highly influences Algerian teenagers' self-identifications because of the imbalances between natural and virtual practices.

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