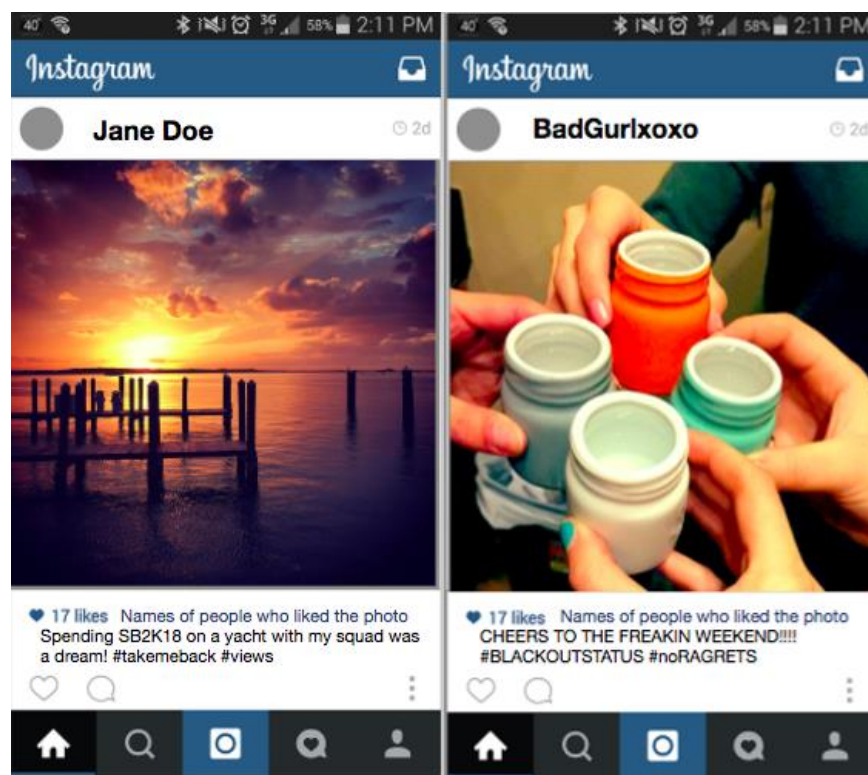




Finsta Fad: The Real Ethics of Fake Social Media Profiles

Instagram is the largest social media platform for teenagers. Not only are teens posting images for their numerous followers on their primary Instagram account to see, they are now creating a more selective, secondary account they refer to as their “Finsta,” short for “fake Instagram” account. Their real account is used to post pictures of their “best-self” having various fun and exciting experiences, while their “Finsta” is often used to post pictures of their unfiltered—and perhaps more authentic—self. What ethical decisions come with the ability to have an Instagram account for a filtered self and a fake profile for a “real” self?



Template: Jim Covais

Many teens use their Finsta account to post pictures that would not be posted on their “real” Instagram. Finsta posts might include pictures of teens’ goofy, emotional, or rebellious activities. Teens will typically create Finstas under a name that is not related to their own so that this profile or its posts will not be traced back to them; these accounts are often set to “private,” limiting them only to their approved followers. Many adults might see this as a red flag that their teen is participating in scandalous and inappropriate behavior that they would not want their followers on their primary account to see. This is not always the case.

Instead of hiding harmful behavior, some Finstas seem to exist to escape the pressure to be perfect in the digital panopticon of the online world. Many Finsta owners see their second account as a way to post and like what they want without the judgment and criticism of



friends, family, and co-workers. Teens see their Finstas as a release from crushing social media pressures to be popular and as a way to truly express themselves. The privacy of a Finsta creates a sense of freedom to show their silly and vulnerable self to their small group of friends they have approved to follow their Finsta.

Finstas hold the potential for harm, however. The idea that only their small circle of followers have access to these posts may encourage teens to post inappropriate, mean, and scandalous pictures or comments. This sense of privacy, however, can prove illusory. There is nothing to stop a follower—perhaps a friend or ex-friend in real life of the account holder—from taking a screenshot of a post and showing others this supposedly private content. In this way, comments and pictures can be shared far beyond the limited group of approved followers of one’s Finsta account. Beyond the negative comments of the Finsta account holder, such shared content could be used in courses of bullying against the account holder themselves. In the search for a safe way to separate different images of who they are for different audiences, Finsta owners may find out the hard way that what they post is still traceable and potentially very public. In many ways, Finstas represent the Faustian bargain of the ability to create and remake our online selves—they can be a helpful outlet for teens and their processes of self-discovery, but they can quickly create real repercussions.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the ethical issues with having both a “real” Instagram account and a Finsta?
2. How might the use of Finstas create good consequences for teens? How might they go wrong?
3. Do Finstas involve deception? If so, how do you balance this ethical concern against any good consequences they may enable?
4. Are there ethical limits to how teens (or others) should use their Finstas? Or are the ethical limits mainly for their “public” and “real” account?

Further Information:

Joanne Orlando, “How Teens use Fake Instagram Accounts to Relieve the Pressure of Perfection.” Available at: <http://theconversation.com/how-teens-use-fake-instagram-accounts-to-relieve-the-pressure-of-perfection-92105>

Karena Tse, “Pro/Con: The Finsta Phenomenon.” April 10, 2017. Available at: <https://www.chsglobe.com/29354/commentary/pro-con-the-Finsta-phenomenon/>



Savannah Dube, "Finstas and Self-Idealizing in the Digital World." Oct 3, 2016.
Available at: <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/Finstas-self-idealizing-digital-world>

Author:

Morgan Malouf
Media Ethics Initiative
University of Texas at Austin
April 25, 2018

www.mediaethicsinitiative.org