

## Instagram changes with the times



*One of the biggest stories in the social media world is Instagram's recent announcement to hide the total number of likes on posts. With influencers' careers on the line and businesses doing a double take on their social media strategy, the question is, why would Instagram change such a major part of its experience?*

As part of Instagram's '[commitment to lead the fight against online bullying](#)', they claim that removing the capacity for people to see how many likes posts have, will help to reduce [online bullying](#).

Bullying is becoming a national crisis in Australia with 3 in 5 students (59%) experiencing bullying.

But is this change led by a truly altruistic motive or high-key, about [generating more profit](#)?

Social media stars have raised the most concern as they rely on the number of likes and comments from followers to monetise posts. Likes were almost a form of currency on Instagram. These concerns should not be a major factor though as users (whether influencer or insecure adolescents) can still see and track their own engagement levels.

In our latest media commentary for SBS News, McCrindle Social Researcher, Geoff Brailey, provided [insights into the drivers behind these changes and what impact it will have on Australian Instagram users](#).

## **More than 1 in 3 Australians use Instagram**

Australia has over 9 million active users on Instagram according to online sources.<sup>[i]</sup> More Australian women than men use the platform (57% cf. 43%) and it is the millennials' platform of choice.

The key motivator for removing visibility of likes, according to Instagram, is to care for the well-being of younger users. It's been well-documented that social media in general - and Instagram in particular - is not good for mental health, with TIME rating it as the worst platform for mental health.<sup>[ii]</sup>

Back in 2014, largely due to the global success of Instagram, the word of the year was 'selfie'. The resulting vanity springing from 'selfie-esteem' has plagued emerging generations' well-being and placed additional digital peer pressure on them to get enough likes to feel validated, accepted and popular.

This digital pressure has caused many people to question the social value of Instagram and other social media platforms in an era of increasing awareness of anxiety and depression.

## **1 in 5 Australians are struggling with a mental condition and 1 in 8 are struggling with an anxiety-related condition**

Anxiety-related conditions are the most common mental health condition, affecting 1 in 8 Australians (13%). Mental illness and anxiety-related conditions specifically, are on the rise, up from 17.5% in 2014-15 to 20.1% in 2017-18.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Though social media cannot be made solely responsible, it is a contributing factor. Posts of people looking 'perfect', constantly on holiday or always out with friends can create feelings of inadequacy, of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and unrealistic comparisons.

## Altruism or ‘moneyism’?

Changing the like feature to reduce worry and encourage people to post more does seem quite altruistic but is there more to the story than meets the eye?

If ad revenues decline, it will be interesting to see if the likes will be back. The chances of that are slim, however, as some detailed behavioural and user analysis would have gone into a modification of this magnitude. For example, Instagram expects that removing the likes count will take the pressure off users, freeing people to post and like what they truly want to.

According to Mia Garlick, the Director of Public Policy for Facebook and Instagram in Australia and New Zealand, they’re aiming to reduce the “competition” from posting.

We want to make sure that people are not feeling like they should like a particular post because it’s getting a lot of likes, and that they shouldn’t feel like they are sharing solely to get likes,” Mia says.[\[iv\]](#)

Perhaps, what is higher up on the tech giant’s agenda though, is to close the gap between businesses that pay for ads and businesses that rely on organic reach. Globally, there are 25 million Instagram business profiles and only 2 million of those are monthly advertisers. [\[v\]](#)

During the pre-like phase, businesses found it hard to get cut through and social proof in the form of likes. Fearing what every adolescent or social media star does, little or no likes.

The removal of total likes means users can post without the worry or pressure of what other people will think if their posts do not receive enough likes.

This will likely equal more engagement, more click-through, more sales and more revenue for the platform.

It’s especially interesting to note that Australia is one of the first countries, after Canada, this feature has been rolled out in. [Small businesses make up 98% of all Australian businesses](#) so encouraging more businesses to pay to advertise is #GOALS for Instagram.

### For more:

[Generation Z defined; The 5 characteristics of today’s students](#)

### Sources:

[i] [NapoleonCat.com](http://NapoleonCat.com)

[ii] [TIME.com](http://TIME.com)

[iii] [ABS - National Health Survey 2017-18](#)

[iv] [ABC.net.au](http://ABC.net.au)

[v] [Mumbrella.com](http://Mumbrella.com)

## **For more information**

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