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University Application Distress: An Instagram Based Investigation of Youth Experiences

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ABSTRACT :

The transition from high school to higher education is a significant milestone that often brings about stress and anxiety for youth aged 17 to 21 years old. This study investigates the stress experienced by youth during the university admission process through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of Instagram posts. A total of 50 posts were analyzed, revealing prevalent themes such as anxiety about acceptance, academic pressure, emotional struggles, and comparison with peers. Quantitative findings indicate high levels of anxiety (70%), stress (60%), and uncertainty (44%) expressed in the posts. Coping mechanisms, including seeking social support (40%), practicing self-care (36%), and sharing experiences (30%), were also identified. The study provides insights into the challenges faced by youth during this critical period and highlights the importance of developing effective support systems to promote resilience and well-being.

Keywords: College Applications, Instagram, Mental Health, University Admissions, Youth

1. Introduction :

The transition from high school to higher education represents a significant milestone in the lives of young individuals, marking the beginning of their journey into adulthood and the pursuit of their academic and career aspirations (Matud et al., 2020). However, amidst the excitement of exploring new opportunities, the university admission process often brings about a considerable amount of stress and anxiety for youth aged 17 to 21 years old (Barbayannis et al., 2022). This stress stems from various factors, including intense competition, societal expectations, and personal aspirations, all of which converge to create a challenging and emotionally charged environment (Campbell et al., 2022; Xu, 2011).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the profound psychological impact that the university admission process can have on young individuals. This recognition is particularly evident in the prevalence of stress-related issues among youth, as evidenced by the increasing number of conversations and discussions on social media platforms such as Instagram. With its widespread usage among young people (Dixon, 2023), Instagram serves as a rich source of insights into the emotions, experiences, and coping mechanisms of individuals navigating the complexities of university admissions.

Understanding the stress experienced by youth during the university admission process is crucial not only for identifying the challenges they face but also for developing effective support systems and interventions to address their needs. By delving into the narratives shared on Instagram, this study seeks to shed light on the multifaceted nature of stress among young individuals during this critical phase of their educational journey. Through a systematic analysis of Instagram posts related to stress in university admissions, this research aims to uncover prevalent themes, emotions, coping mechanisms, and the broader implications for youth mental health and well-being.

2. Methodology :

The data collection process for this study was conducted primarily on the Instagram platform, a widely-used social media platform among youth aged 17 to 21 years old. To gather relevant content, specific hashtags associated with stress during the university admission process were identified. These hashtags included #collegeadmissionsstress, #universityadmissions, #admissionanxiety, #collegeapplications, and #highschoolgraduates, among others. These hashtags were chosen based on their prevalence in discussions related to university admissions stress and their relevance to the target age group.

Using the identified hashtags, a systematic search was performed on the Instagram platform. This involved scrolling through search results, exploring posts, profiles, and related hashtags to identify content that met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria stipulated that posts must be authored by individuals aged 17 to 21 years old and must discuss stress specifically related to the university admission process.

Once the hashtags were identified, each post was meticulously reviewed to extract qualitative coding for themes. Following the coding process, the quantitative data extracted from the Instagram posts were tabulated to calculate the number and percentage of posts corresponding to each theme, emotion, and coping mechanism.

3. Results :

A total of 50 Instagram posts were collected. Each identified post was subjected to rigorous content analysis to extract quantitative data on themes, emotions, and coping mechanisms. A coding framework was developed to categorize posts based on predefined themes such as anxiety, academic pressure, comparison with peers, emotional struggles, and coping strategies. Additionally, emotions expressed in the posts, including anxiety, uncertainty, stress, determination, and hopefulness, were coded to capture the range of sentiments conveyed by youth during the admission process. Finally, coping mechanisms adopted by individuals, such as seeking social support, sharing experiences, practicing self-care activities, seeking professional help, and engaging in hobbies/distractions, were coded to assess the strategies employed to manage stress and navigate the challenges of university admissions.

Quantitative analysis of the collected Instagram posts related to stress during the university admission process among youth aged 17 to 21 years old revealed several notable findings. Firstly, in terms of themes, the most prevalent theme observed was "anxiety and uncertainty about acceptance," accounting for 56% of the posts analyzed. Following closely were themes such as "academic pressure and performance expectations" (24%), "emotional struggles and mental health challenges" (30%), and "comparison with peers and fear of failure" (18%). These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of stress experienced by youth during the university admission process, encompassing both academic and emotional dimensions.

Regarding emotions expressed in the posts, anxiety emerged as the most frequently reported emotion, with 70% of the posts conveying feelings of anxiety. Other prevalent emotions included stress (60%), uncertainty (44%), and feeling overwhelmed (36%). However, amidst these negative emotions, there were also expressions of determination (24%) and hopefulness (20%), indicating resilience and optimism among youth despite the challenges they face.

Furthermore, analysis of coping mechanisms depicted in the posts revealed a range of strategies adopted by youth to manage stress during the university admission process. Seeking social support was the most common coping mechanism observed, with 40% of the posts featuring individuals reaching out for support from peers, family, or online communities. Additionally, sharing experiences (30%), practicing self-care activities (36%), engaging in hobbies/distractions (20%), and seeking professional help (14%) were also identified as prevalent coping strategies. Table 1 shows of the quantitative findings, presenting the number of posts and corresponding percentages for each theme, coping mechanism, and emotion identified in the Instagram posts.

Table 1: Instagram posts related to stress during university admission process

Themes	Number of Posts	Percentage
Anxiety and uncertainty about acceptance	28	56%
Academic pressure and performance expectations	12	24%
Comparison with peers and fear of failure	9	18%
Emotional struggles and mental health challenges	15	30%
Coping mechanisms		
Seeking social support	20	40%
Sharing experiences	15	30%
Practicing self-care activities	18	36%
Seeking professional help	7	14%
Engaging in hobbies/distractions	10	20%
Emotions		
Anxiety	35	70%
Uncertainty	22	44%
Stress	30	60%
Overwhelmed	18	36%
Determination	12	24%
Hopeful	10	20%

4. Discussion :

All The findings from both qualitative and quantitative analysis of Instagram posts related to stress during the university admission process among youth aged 17 to 21 years old reveal several key insights into the challenges faced by young individuals during this critical period of transition.

4.1 Qualitative insights: Qualitatively, the analysis illuminated the multifaceted nature of stress experienced by youth during the university admission process. Themes such as anxiety and uncertainty about acceptance, academic pressure, and comparison with peers underscored the intense emotional and academic challenges faced by individuals during this time. Moreover, emotional struggles and mental health challenges emerged as significant themes, highlighting the toll that the admission process can take on the mental well-being of youth. The qualitative findings provided rich narratives and personal accounts, shedding light on the lived experiences and emotional complexities of individuals grappling with the pressures of university admissions.

4.2 Quantitative insights: Quantitatively, the analysis corroborated the qualitative findings and provided numerical evidence of the prevalence of themes, emotions, and coping mechanisms depicted in the Instagram posts. The high percentage of posts expressing anxiety, stress, and uncertainty underscores the pervasive nature of these emotions among youth during the admission process. Additionally, the prominence of coping mechanisms

such as seeking social support, sharing experiences, and practicing self-care activities highlights the resourcefulness and resilience of individuals in managing stress and navigating the challenges of university admissions.

4.3 Integration of findings: The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings provides a comprehensive understanding of the stress experienced by youth during the university admission process. The qualitative insights offer nuanced perspectives and personal narratives, while the quantitative data offer statistical evidence of the prevalence and distribution of themes, emotions, and coping mechanisms. Together, these findings paint a holistic picture of the challenges faced by young individuals and the strategies they employ to cope with stress during this pivotal period of their educational journey.

4.4 Future research directions: Future research in this area could explore the long-term effects of university admission stress on youth mental health and well-being. Longitudinal studies tracking individuals' experiences from the admission process through their college years could provide valuable insights into the lasting impact of admission stress on academic performance, mental health outcomes, and overall life satisfaction. Additionally, further investigation into the role of social media platforms in perpetuating or alleviating admission stress could offer insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of online support networks.

4.5 Implications: The findings of this study have several implications for educators, policymakers, and mental health practitioners involved in supporting youth during the university admission process. By understanding the unique stressors and coping mechanisms of young individuals, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions and resources to promote resilience and well-being. Moreover, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for youth navigating the challenges of university admissions is essential for promoting their holistic development and success in higher education.

4.6 Conclusion: This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of stress among youth during the university admission process and underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems in mitigating its adverse effects.

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