CultureCase

How Instagram artists promote mental health awareness

This research was conducted by **Frances J. Griffith** and **three others** at **Bowling Green State University, USA**

Summary

Instagram is a popular social networking site which has revolutionised the way that artists express themselves and connect with audiences. Although the platform is mainly about the sharing of images, each post can be accompanied by a small amount of text. This research looked at 1,000 Instagram posts tagged with 10 different mental health “hashtags” (such as #depressionart) in order to better understand how artists were using their work to engage with issues of mental health. The researchers found that most artists sought to convey information about the experience of mental illness to audiences nonverbally through their art and text captions. A smaller number of artists used the hashtags to say something about their artmaking or sales.

More functional artwork, such as ceramics and jewellery, generally received more attention and engagement on the hashtags

The research assigned each of the 1,000 posts to a category of media (e.g. drawing) and style (e.g. representational) as well as the ‘content of text captions included with artworks to examine how artists described the content, meaning, and context of their own work’. The researchers collected posts from September 2018 to March 2019 until they had 100 posts for each of the 10 hashtags. In the end they had content from 461 Instagram artists' accounts. ‘Text captions were generally more focused on describing aspects of artists’ experiences or understanding of mental health conditions than on artistic features of their images.’

Instagram provides an accessible virtual exhibition space

By situating experiences of mental illness in small, everyday stories on social media, artists have the means to challenge notions of “normality” and stigma. Artists wanted to convey nonverbal, narrative meaning to viewers. In the artists’ own descriptions, ‘the most prominent word cluster in art text captions described emotions depicted in the artwork. The second most frequent word cluster contained descriptions of the artists’ experiences facing mental health concerns'. Because of its ubiquity and ease of use, social media provides an incredible platform for artists to ‘increase mental health awareness and empathy for people experiencing mental illness’ and this deserves more attention in future scholarship.

Keywords

social media **art** **mental health** **online**

Title	#MentalHealthArt: How Instagram artists promote mental health awareness online
Author(s)	Griffith, F. J., Stein, C. H., Hoag, J. E. & Gay, K. N.
Publication date	2021
Source	Public Health, Vol. 194, pp. 67-74
Link	**https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2021.02.006**
Author email	**fgriffi@bgsu.edu**

By **Culture.Case** | | **Live and digital engagement in arts and culture** |

King's Culture
© Copyright 2026
Designed, developed and maintained by **King's Digital Lab**
Originally built by **weheartdigital Ltd**
Accessibility Statement