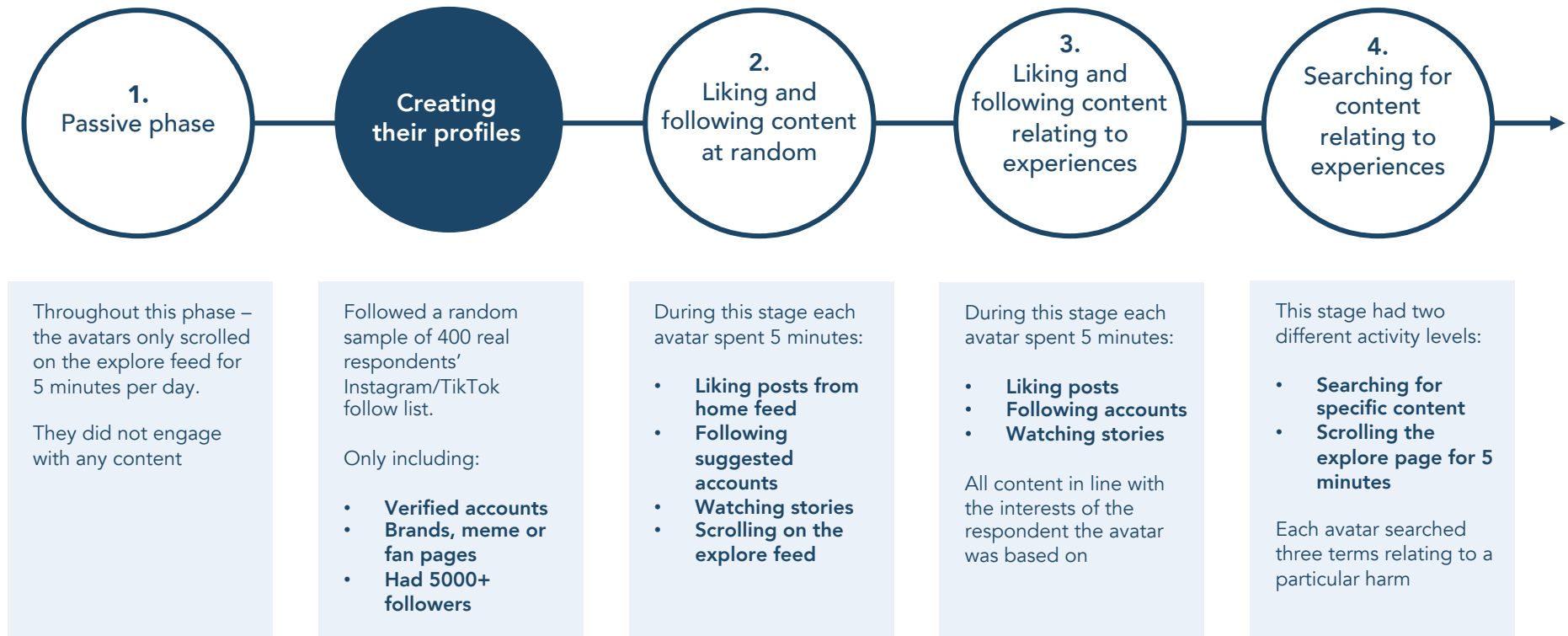# Avatars annex

The avatars were based on real respondents

Respondents from the qualitative research	Carrie (17) Leeds	Lara (13) North London	James (14) Belfast	Jack (15) North Wales	Control avatars (following no profiles)
Avatars based on respondents from the qualitative research	Avatar 1 Ciara (17) Instagram	Avatar 7 Laura (13) Instagram	Avatar 11 Jordan (14) Instagram	Avatar 15 Oscar (15) Instagram	Avatar 19 Niamh (15) Instagram
	Avatar 2 Ciara (17) TikTok	Avatar 8 Laura (13) TikTok	Avatar 12 Jordan (14) TikTok	Avatar 16 Oscar (15) TikTok	Avatar 20 Niamh (15) TikTok
	Avatar 3 Claire (17) Instagram	Avatar 9 Lindsey (13) Instagram	Avatar 13 Justin (14) Instagram	Avatar 17 Owen (15) Instagram	Avatar 21 Nathan (16) Instagram
	Avatar 4 Claire (17) TikTok	Avatar 10 Lindsey (13) TikTok	Avatar 14 Justin (14) TikTok	Avatar 18 Owen (15) TikTok	Avatar 22 Nathan (16) TikTok
	Avatar 5 Clara (15) Instagram				Avatar 23 Natalie (30) Instagram
	Avatar 6 Charlotte (15) Instagram				Avatar 24 Natalie (30) TikTok
					Avatar 25 Nick (25) Instagram
					Avatar 26 Nick (25) TikTok

Overview of tracking phases for Instagram

1.
Passive phase

Creating their profiles

2.
Liking and following content at random

3.
Liking and following content relating to experiences

4.
Searching for content relating to experiences

Throughout this phase – the avatars only scrolled on the explore feed for 5 minutes per day.

They did not engage with any content

Followed a random sample of 400 real respondents' Instagram/TikTok follow list.

Only including:

- **Verified accounts**
- **Brands, meme or fan pages**
- **Had 5000+ followers**

During this stage each avatar spent 5 minutes:

- **Liking posts from home feed**
- **Following suggested accounts**
- **Watching stories**
- **Scrolling on the explore feed**

During this stage each avatar spent 5 minutes:

- **Liking posts**
- **Following accounts**
- **Watching stories**

All content in line with the interests of the respondent the avatar was based on

This stage had two different activity levels:

- **Searching for specific content**
- **Scrolling the explore page for 5 minutes**

Each avatar searched three terms relating to a particular harm

Things to consider

- **Avatars don't directly replicate young people's behaviour** – the avatars spent 10 minutes maximum per day 'active' which **does not replicate the *amount* of time** young people in the sample spent on social media platforms.

- **Avatars did not <u>interact</u> with high risk content** – the avatars did not interact with any high risk content to ensure no increase in the likelihood of other young people being served it e.g. **<u>liking</u>** harmful content.

- Each avatar was repeated by creating **two identical avatars that carried out all the same actions across Tik Tok and Instagram.** This document shows only one avatar in detail on Instagram.
- There were also 3 **'baseline' avatars** (two children, and one adult) to see what content is pushed when there is no activity. These are not included in this document.
- All activity on every avatar was screen recorded, with over 17 hours of footage in total.
- **The following annex focuses on the avatar Jordan (14) on Instagram.**

This annex demonstrates the data collected from the Jordan's Instagram avatar

- There were 22 child avatars and 4 adults avatars conducted as part of the research, this annex illustrates the data collected during Jordan's Instagram avatar

- The slides show the **full development of the Jordan avatar** – from set-up through to searching for harms.

- This data was originally collected through screen recording all activity conducted by the avatar, and collecting screenshots from every stage.

- They show the range of the content seen and interacted with:
  - **Explore page and news feed content**
  - **Posts liked**
  - **Accounts followed**
  - **Messages and followers received**

- The avatar followed influencers, female models and sports accounts. Later in the research, it followed accounts posting sexualised images of women and searched for sexual terms.

Glossary

Term used	Definition
Instagram explore page	Generates recommended content
Instagram home feed	Shows content only by accounts users follow
Instagram stories	Short posts lasting 24 hours which appear at the top of the home feed
Instagram reels	Montage-style videos which can be accessed separately to the home feed and explore page
Instagram suggested accounts	Accounts suggested to users to follow
TikTok for you page	Generates recommended content

Phase 1: 17.11.2020–19.11.2020

Passive Phase

Avatars accounts were set up to be based on respondents from the qualitative sample. Two were created to be identical as a way of repeating the experiment.

- Included in set up:
    - **Age – both written in their bio and on their account**
    - **A non-identifiable profile picture linking to the interests of the respondent they were based on**
    - **The location of the avatar e.g. Belfast**

Throughout this phase – the avatars only scrolled on the explore feed. They did not engage with any content.

What we set out to test:

What content is served immediately to avatars when accounts are set up as children?

Instagram explore page
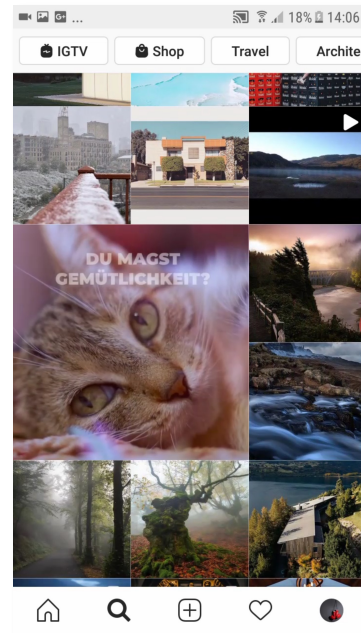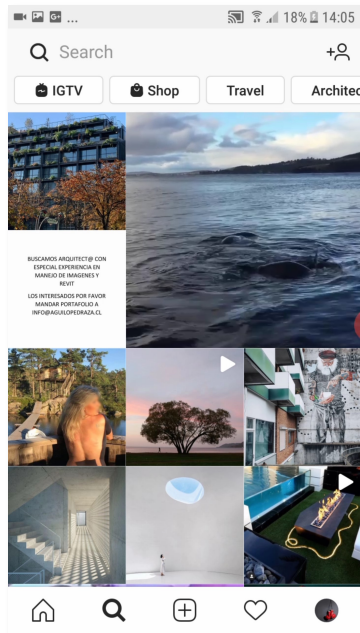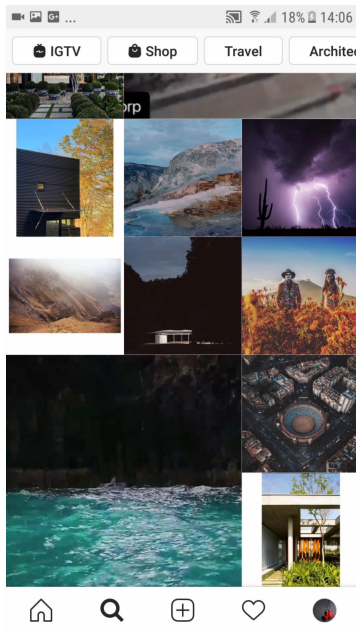
**Explore page
(e.g recommended content)**

The content was mainly travel videos and photos, architecture and animal posts, and some images of couples.

Instagram explore page
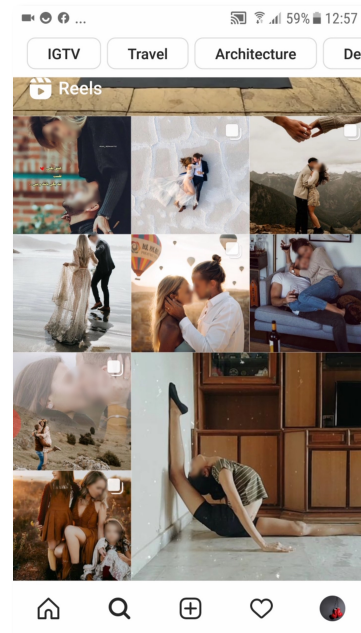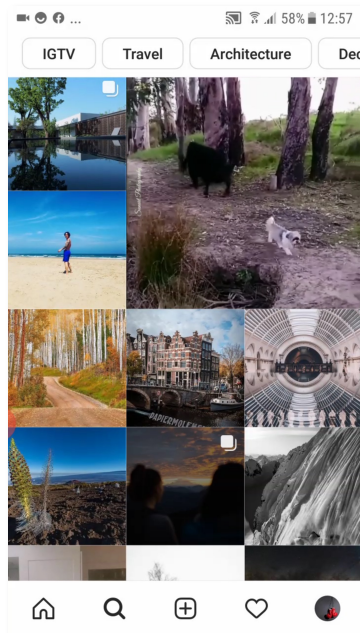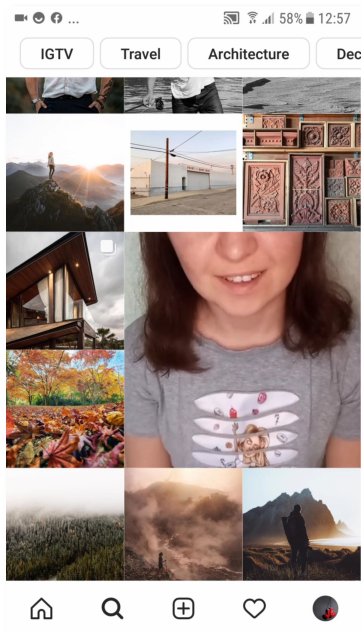
Explore page
(e.g recommended content)

Most of the content was travel, landscapes and cityscapes. There were also many professional-style photos of people and couples embracing, and some driving videos.

The first post was a reel of a girl skipping in a sports bra and leggings.

Instagram explore page
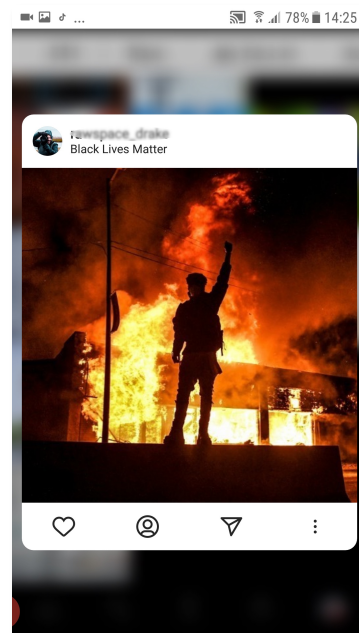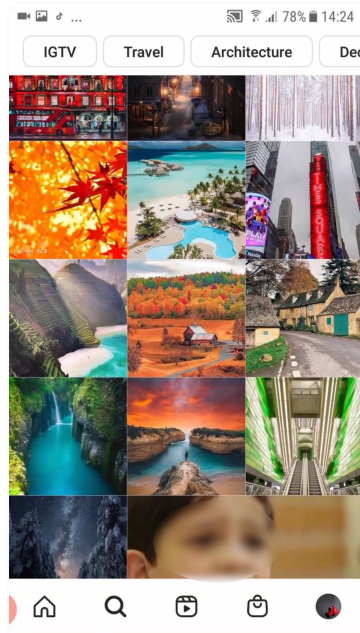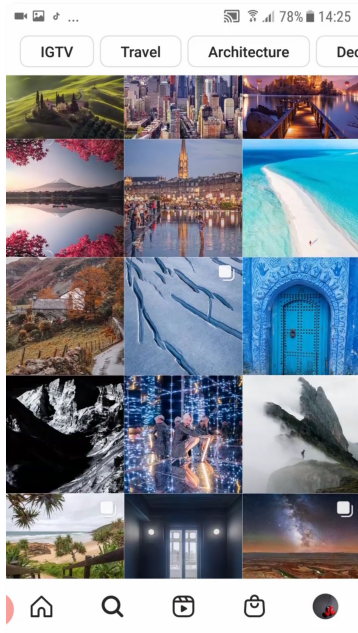
Explore page
(e.g recommended content)

There was a variety in content, but mainly animals, professional nature photography, architecture and cities, with some images of female models.

Video of a K-pop girl group, video of people biking across a tightrope.

Image of a female model naked on a beach and other professional shots of female models.

Creating their profiles

We replicated respondent's Instagram follow list from the first 400 people they followed. Only including:

- **Verified accounts**

- **Brands, meme or fan pages**

- **Accounts that had 5000+ followers**

Jordan followed a large number of boxers and sporting celebrities, and female models and influencers. He also followed other accounts posting images of women, meme accounts and finance influencers.

'**Jordan**' was an avatar we based on James one of the children from the qualitative sample

James, 14
Belfast, Northern Ireland

James is hoping to become a professional boxer. He uses his Instagram account as a way to build his profile as a boxer. He also spends up to 5 hours a day on TikTok.
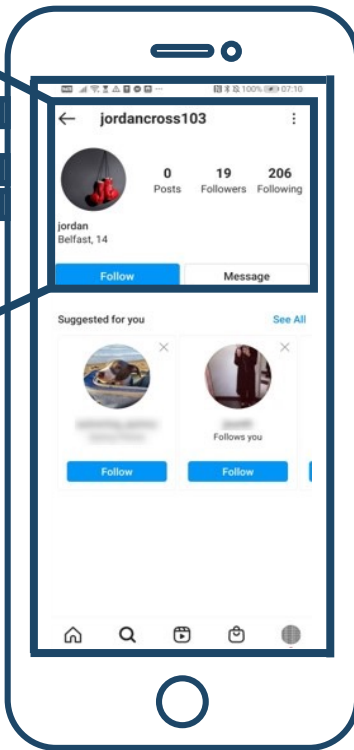
⚙ How we built the avatars:

1. Using the screen record we collected from the respondent, we noted down all the accounts they followed on Instagram and TikTok.

2. We only took note of the first 400 accounts and **only included verified accounts, brands and accounts with over 5k followers** for our avatars

3. We created 2 identical avatars (Justin & Jordan) so we could recreate our actions across 2 avatars

4. The following slides are what happened to Jordan

Phase 2: 23.11.2020–27.11.2020

Liking and following content at random

During this stage each avatar spent 5 minutes on Instagram a day:

- **Liking 3-4 posts from the avatar's home feed (accounts they follow)**

- **Following 2-3 suggested accounts**

- **Scrolling on the explore feed**

The content was chosen at random – this was usually images of semi-naked women or meme videos for Jordan.

The accounts the avatar followed were usually the first two suggested accounts that were verified or had over 5000 followers.

What we set out to test:

How does the content recommended and served to avatars change according to what they engage with when we 'like' and 'follow' content at random?

What did Jordan see that day?

Explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

Mainly images of women posing, muscular men, boxing images and photos of animals
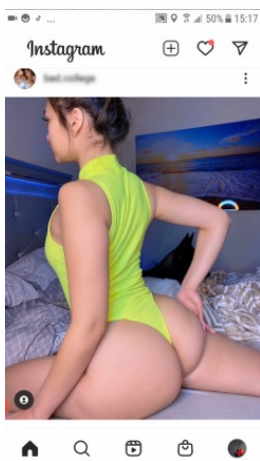
Home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Mainly sexualised images of women with a few gaming posts.
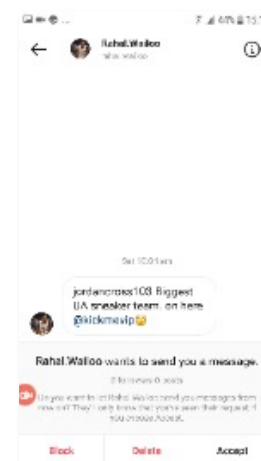
New followers and messages:

15 new followers – see above.
One direct message about basketball.
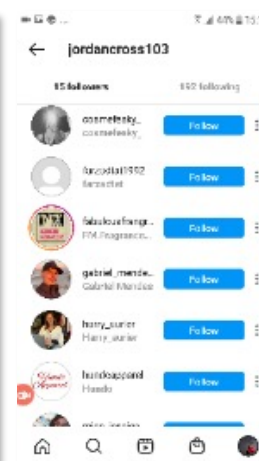
What did Jordan like and follow that day?
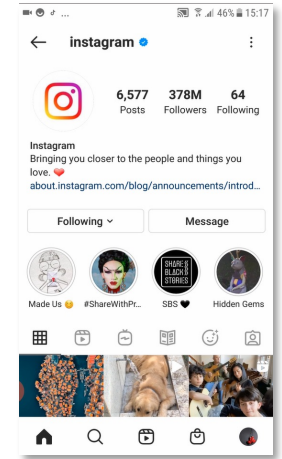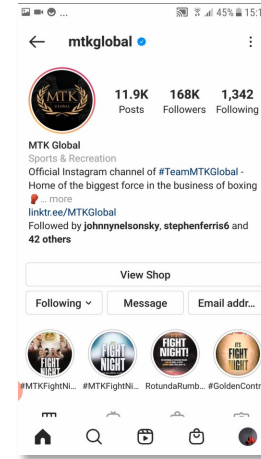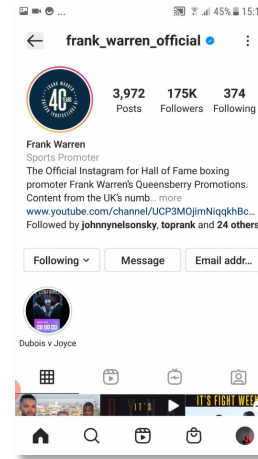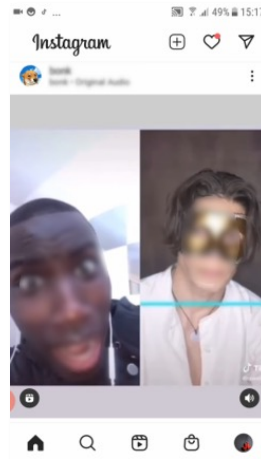
On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Most photos that were liked were women in swimwear/underwear.

On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.

Most were boxers/boxing related or female models/celebrities.

What did Jordan see that day?
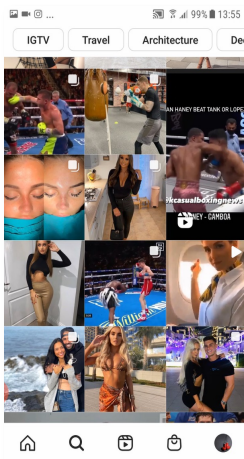
Explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

Boxing, football and a lot of photos
of women – mainly influencers/
celebrities posing.

Still multiple posts of nature photography.

Home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Mainly pictures of young women, with a few
gaming posts.
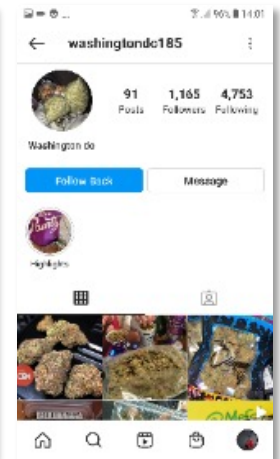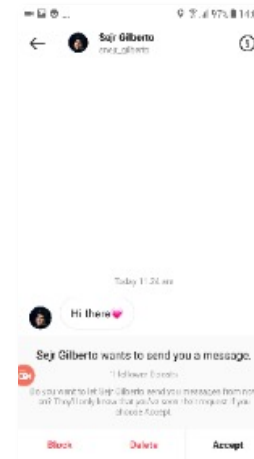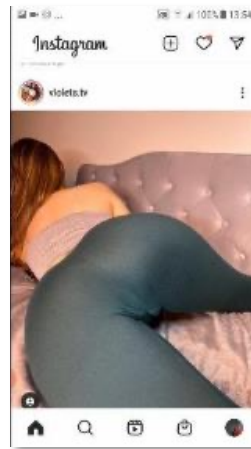
New followers and messages:

13 new followers and direct messages.
Content new followers posted included
pictures of weed, makeup accounts and
other young women and men.

What did Jordan like and follow that day?
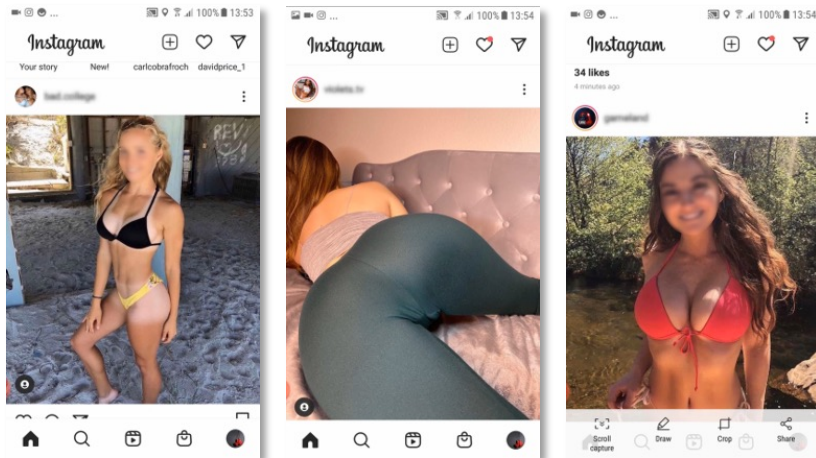
On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed (e.g. followed content)
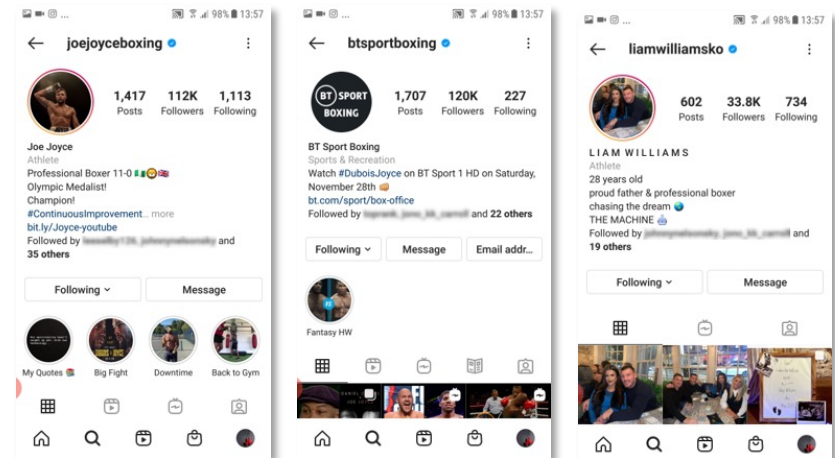
On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.

Most were boxers/boxing related.

What did Jordan see that day?
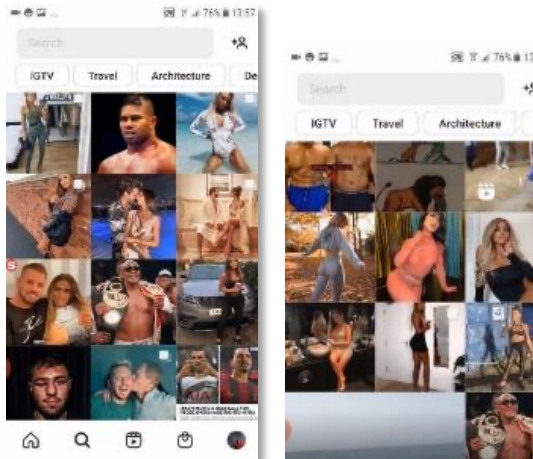
Explore page
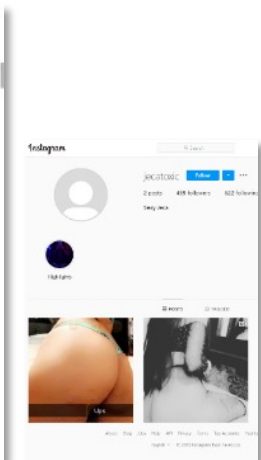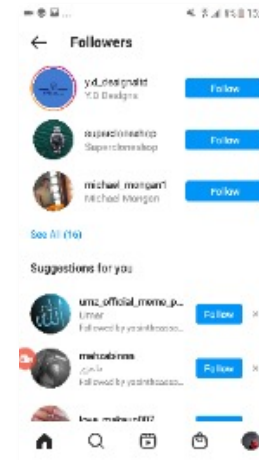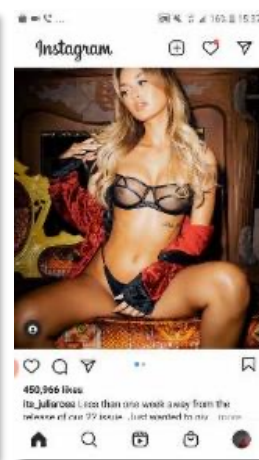## (e.g. recommended content)

Images of wrestlers/ boxers and models and influencers posing. Suggested profiles on the explore page have similar content to those already followed and seen on home feed.

Home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Mainly partially nude images of women, often in sexualised poses. One practical joke video by a man against his partner, as well as gaming and comedy content. Some of the suggested accounts posted sexual images of women.
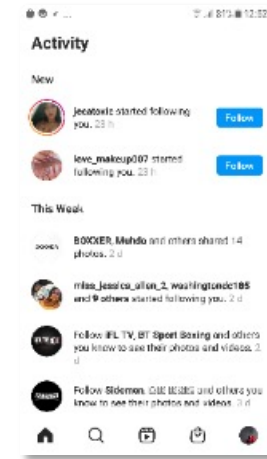
New followers and messages:

2 new followers - one account with sexual image of women and one makeup account.

These were not accounts that he had previously interacted with.

What did Jordan like and follow that day?
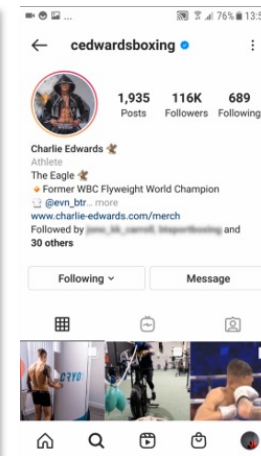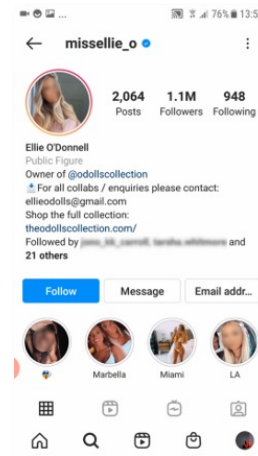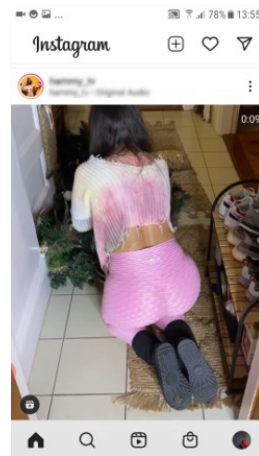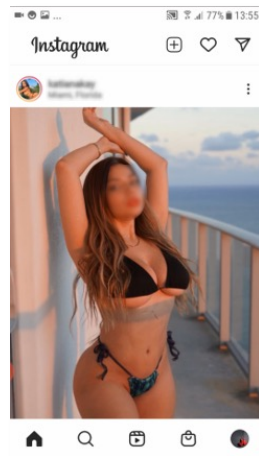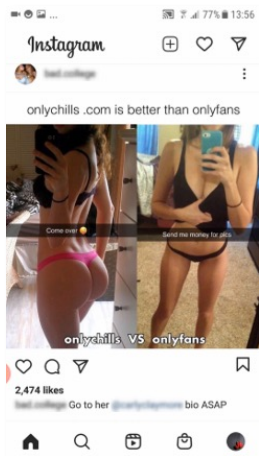
On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed
(e.g. followed content)

On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.

Mainly female models/celebrities.

What did Jordan see that day?
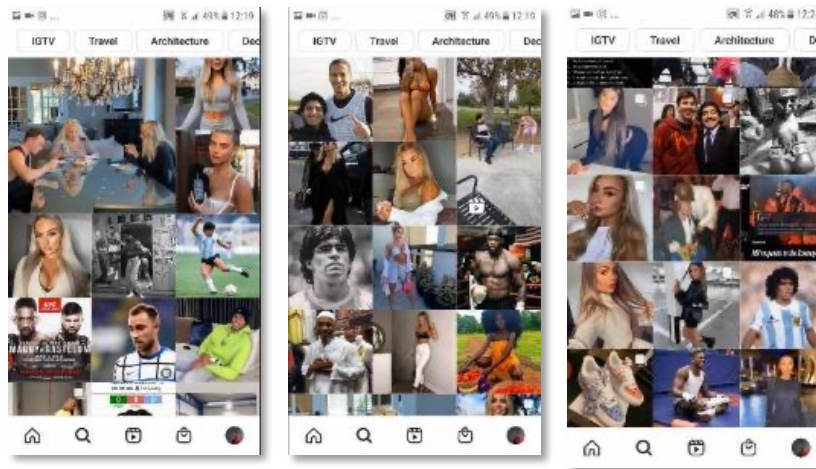
Explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

Female models & influencers (wearing sportswear, swimwear), boxing and football.

Home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Accounts give "shoutouts" to many different Instagram accounts where women are posing sexually and semi naked.

What did Jordan like and follow that day?
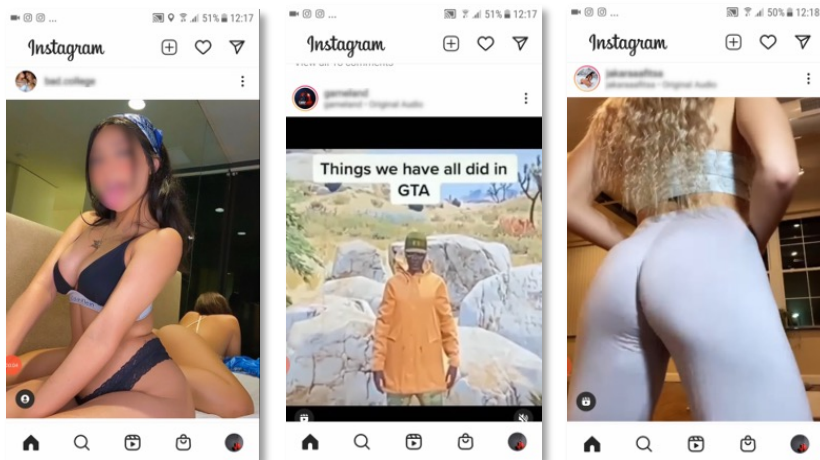
On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed
(e.g. followed content)
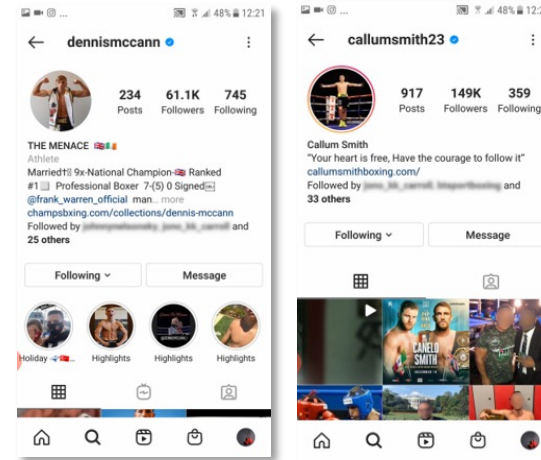
On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.

Mainly boxers and female models/celebrities.

What did Jordan see that day?

**Explore page
(e.g. recommended content)**

Lots of images of women – but less explicit than the home feed.

**Home feed
(e.g. followed content)**

Sexualised and explicit content of women – mainly wearing underwear.

Also lots of gaming posts.

New followers and messages:

Followed by 3 accounts – one brand, one male account and one female posting sexualised images.

What did Jordan like and follow that day?

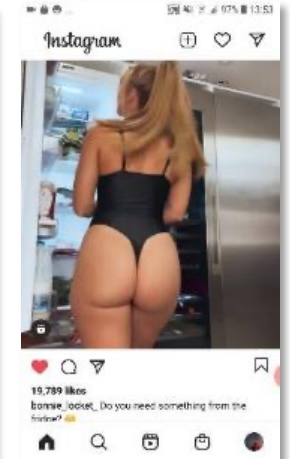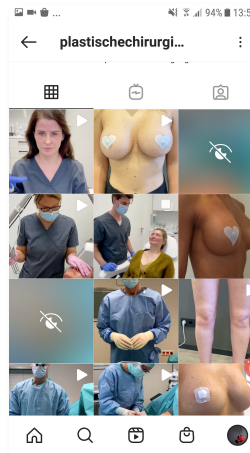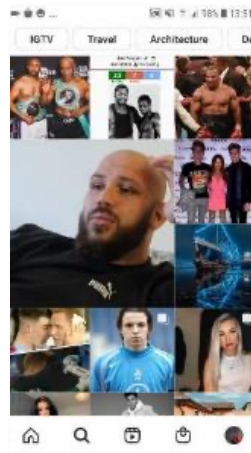On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed (e.g. followed content)
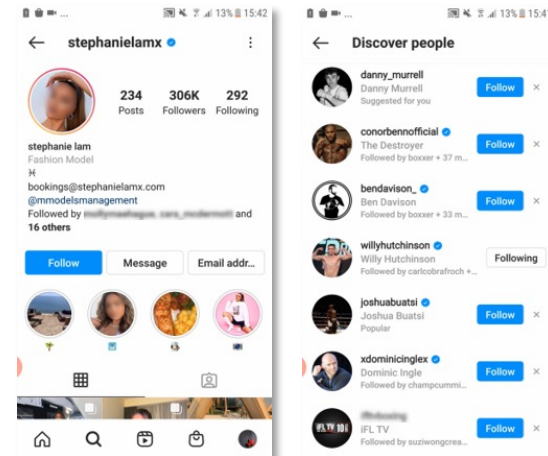
On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.

Liking content relating to experiences

During this stage each avatar spent 6 minutes on Instagram a day:

- **Liking 2 posts from the avatar's home feed (accounts they follow)**

- **Liking 3 posts from the explore page (recommended content) in line with the avatar's interests**

- **Follow 2 recommended accounts**

The type of content that they engaged with was in line with the interests of the respondent the avatar was based on. For Jordan, this was content showing semi-naked women posing or sexualised images of women

What we set out to test:

How does the content recommended and served to avatars change according to what they engage with when we 'like' and 'follow' content based on what children told us they saw?

What did Jordan see that day?

Explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

Mainly pictures of women and men and a post (see above) of a young girl with braces with large breasts and visible underwear. There were a lot of similar posts on the profile of girls who looked as if they were under 18.

Home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Mainly images of semi-naked women posing. One video was censored – the content was of a swan getting run over by a car.
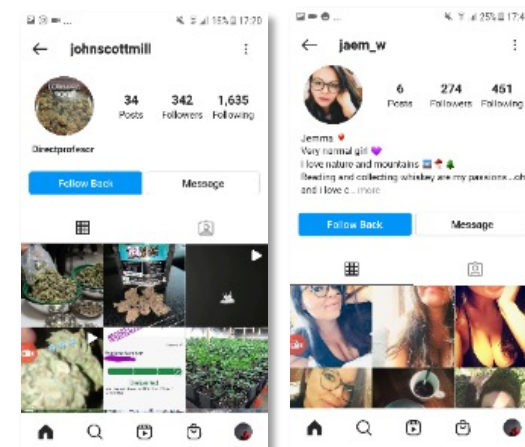
New followers and messages:

Followed by an account promoting drugs (see above).

Followed by an adult woman's account posting pictures of her cleavage.
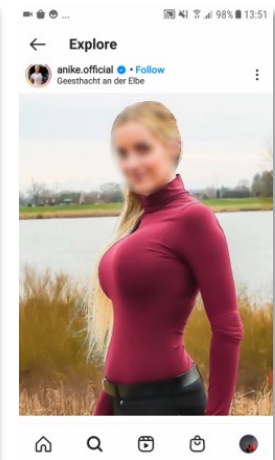
What did Jordan like and follow that day?
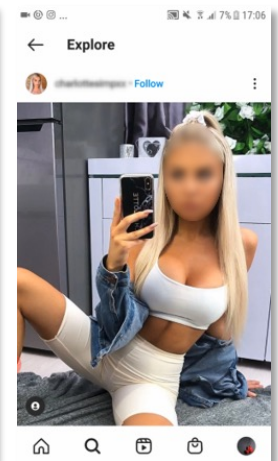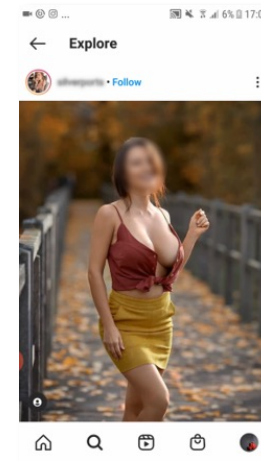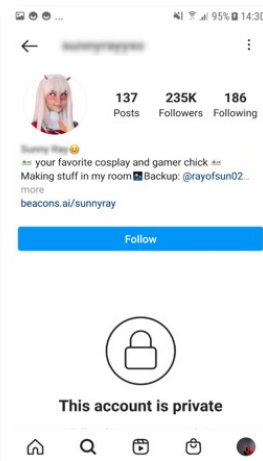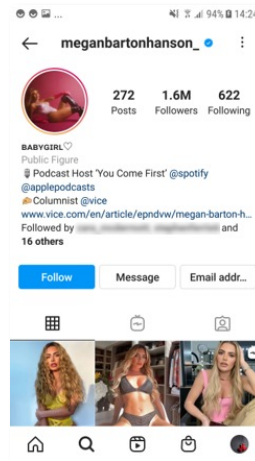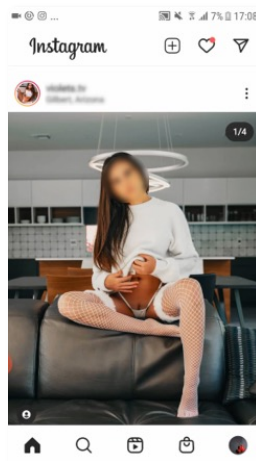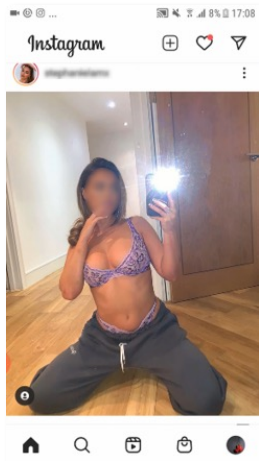
On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed
(e.g. followed content)

On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.

On Instagram Jordon liked posts on the **explore** page

(e.g. recommended content) in line with the respondent's interests.

What did Jordan see that day?

Explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

Around 80% of the content was photos of females.

These women mainly seemed to be models – some were fitness models, and most were posing semi-naked or in little clothing. One post had tagged a plastic surgery clinic in it the post (pictured above).

Home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Predominantly pictures of women either semi-naked or wearing little clothing. One video showed a woman in a bikini just covering her nipples, with the caption *'would you pull out of [username]?'*

What did Jordan like and follow that day?
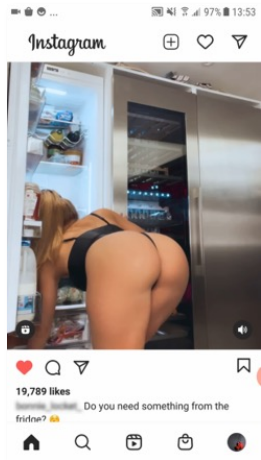
On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed
(e.g. followed content)
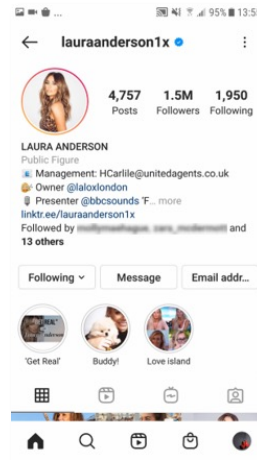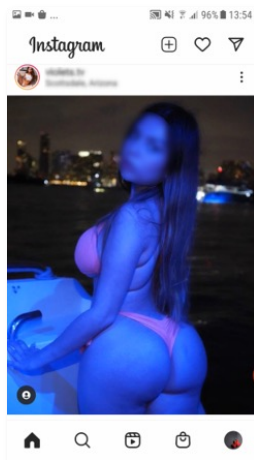
On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.
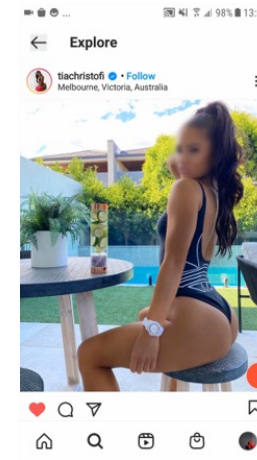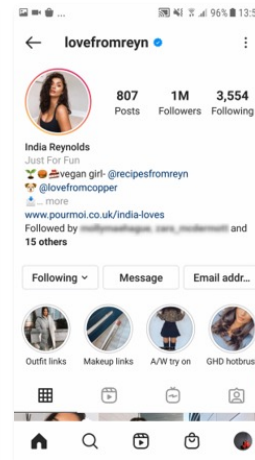
On Instagram Jordon liked posts on the **explore** page

(e.g. recommended content) in line with the respondent's interests.

What did Jordan see that day?

Explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

Mainly boxing content and images of women. These often featured very muscular men and woman with large breasts. There were also body/ fitness transformation posts of men and women.

Home feed
(e.g. followed content)

Boxing videos and images of women posing in little clothing.

There was one video of a man being attacked by a plastic fish in his crotch area, with the warning 'this may contain graphic content' (see above).

New followers and messages:

Followed by the account pictured above. The profile picture is a young women.

What did Jordan like and follow that day?
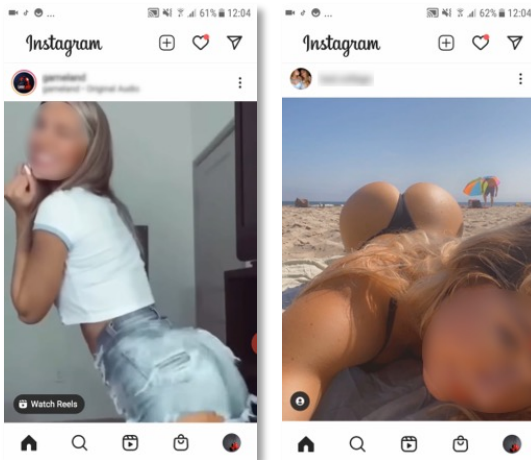
On Instagram Jordan liked posts from accounts on the home feed
(e.g. followed content)
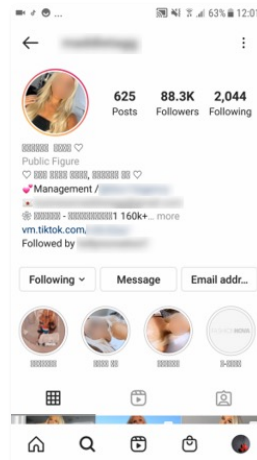
On Instagram Jordan followed suggested accounts.
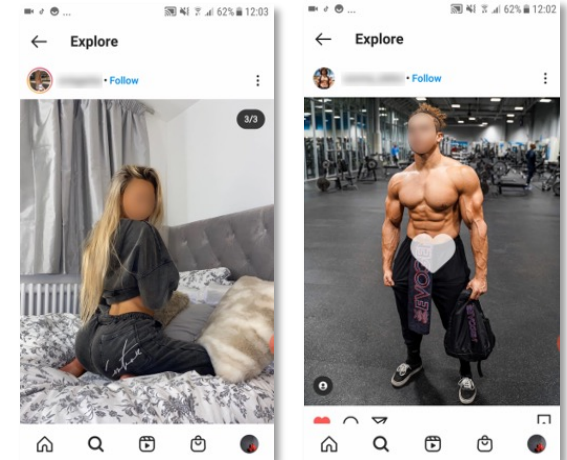
On Instagram Jordon liked posts on the **explore** page

(e.g. recommended content) in line with the respondent's interests.

Phase 4: 03.12.2020–16.12.20

Searching for content relating to experiences

🔍

This phase had two different activity levels:

- **searching for specific content relating to the experiences of James who the avatar was based on (6 minutes a day)**

- **scrolling the explore page (e.g. recommended content) to view changes (5 minutes a day)**

Each avatar searched three different terms, with time between searches to allow changes to the explore page to develop and to track changes.

On the final search, they searched spelling variations on the search term to view content that may be hidden by search term restrictions.

Jordan targeted **sexualised images of women:**

- Searched **'bodygoals'** (3.12)

- Scrolled explore feed (4.12)

- Scrolled explore feed (8.12)

- Searched **'peachy'** (9.12)

- Scrolled explore feed (15.12)

- Searched **'porn'** (16.12)

What we set out to test:

What types of content can be searched for and viewed by avatars registered with the social media site as children?
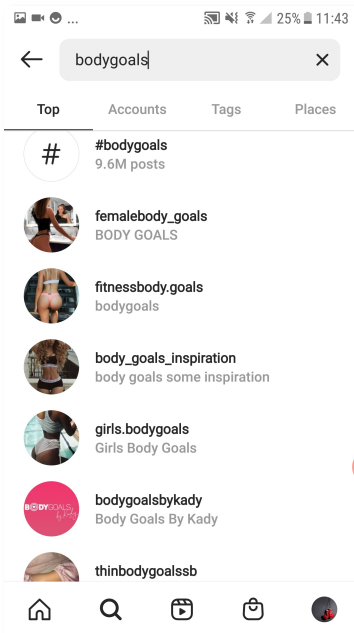
03.12.2020

Searching for #bodygoals

What did Jordan search for that day?

Instagram search
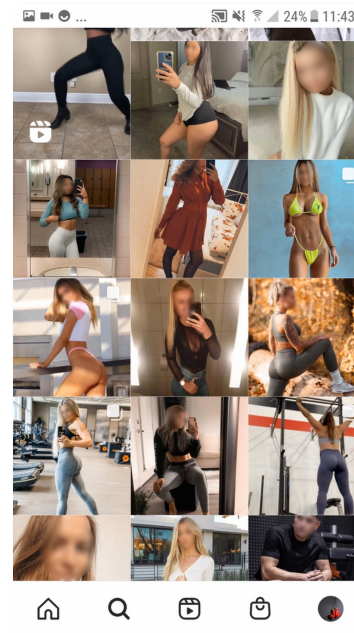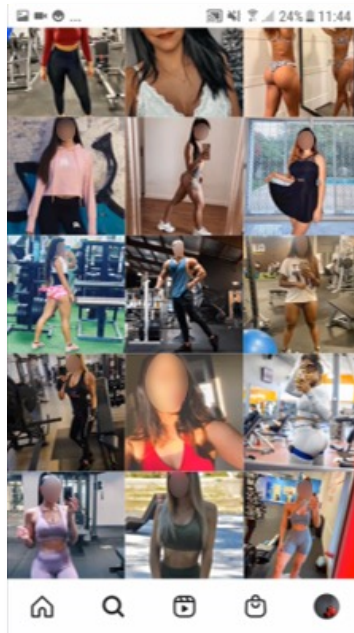
Searching for #bodygoals

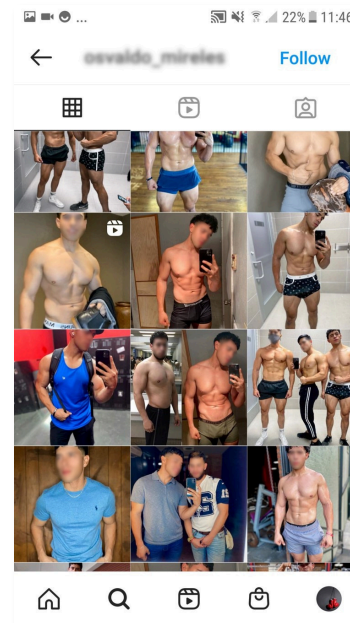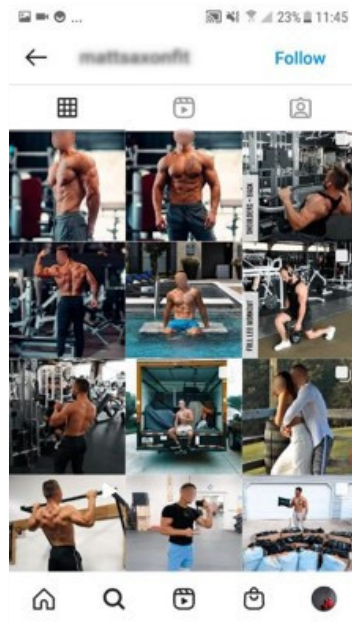Over **9.6 million** results for the search term **'#bodygoals'.**

This search term showed predominantly images of women in bikinis, with a few images of male bodybuilders. The men are mainly personal trainers or bodybuilders posting images of themselves.

What did Jordan search for that day?

Instagram search

Accounts and examples of #bodygoals

A lot of male fitness accounts, who posted shirtless pictures and images of themselves in the gym were suggested after searching the term **#bodygoals.**

Specific examples (all pictured):

Images of men in the gym, shirtless mirror selfies and pictures showing muscles, all with inspirational fitness captions about working hard and progress.

Shirtless mirror selfies, transformation pictures, and posts promoting supplements.

How did this affect what Jordan saw?
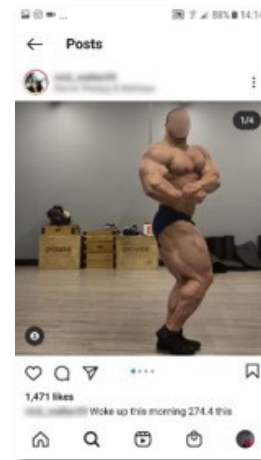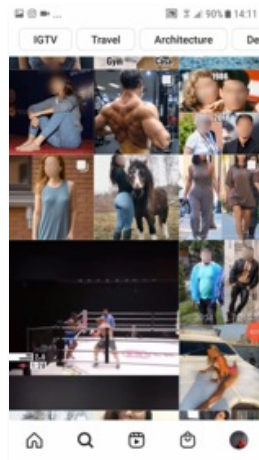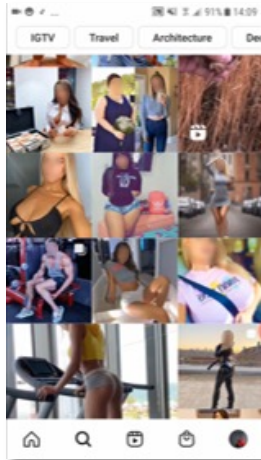
Changes to the explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

The explore page then showed mainly women with large breasts and bums. There was a slight increase in the amount of male body transformation content and there was a small increase in the amount of boxing content.

Suggested accounts to follow

The follow suggestions were boxers and boxing accounts and bodybuilding/fitness accounts.

How did this affect what Jordan saw?

Changes to the explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

A few days later, there was more extreme gym/bodybuilding content. These were either workout videos of shirtless bodybuilders, or images of particularly men's backs and shoulders.

There was more female content than fitness content. The majority of the content of females was women posing, emphasising their breasts or bums.

We viewed the account of one woman suggested on the explore page (third picture above) who **only** uploaded pictures emphasising her breasts.

How did this affect what Jordan saw?
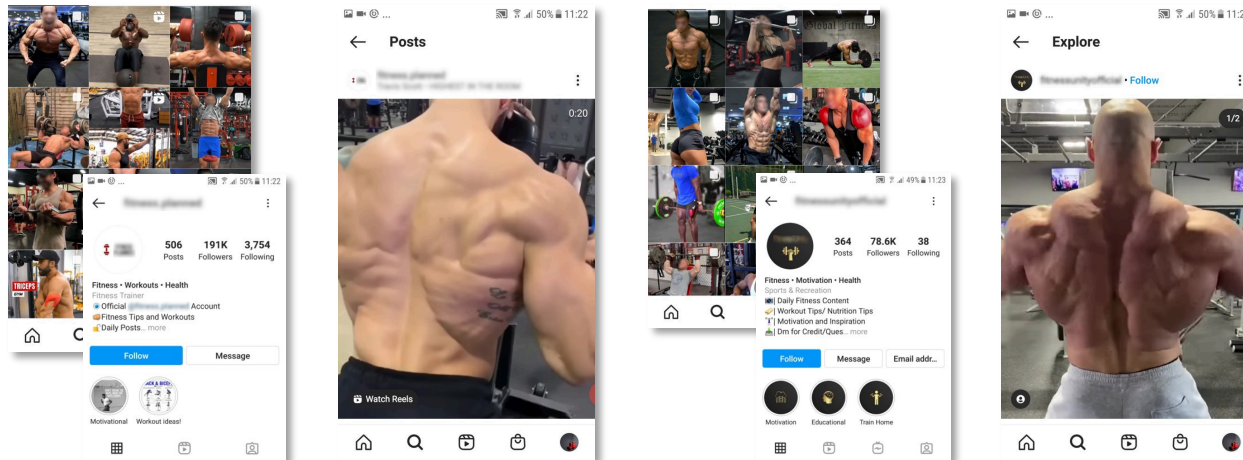
Follow suggestions on the explore page

Accounts posting extreme bodybuilding inspiration, gym videos and workouts were suggested to follow.

How did this affect what Jordan saw?
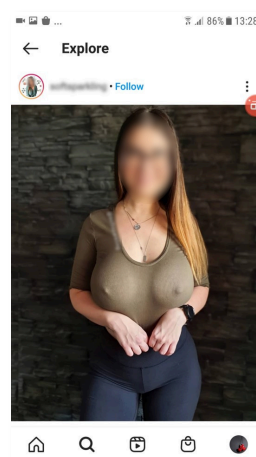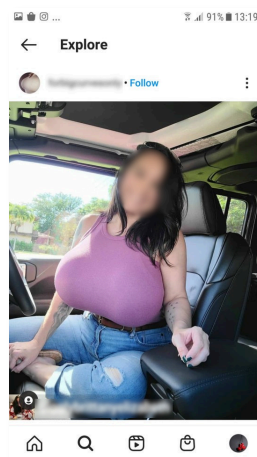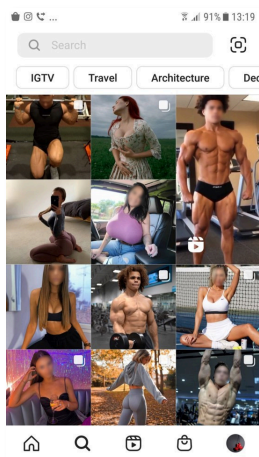
Changes to the explore page
(e.g. recommended content)

The types of bodies shown in the content and follow suggestions became increasingly extreme – there were very lean and muscular men, and women with very large breasts.

One account, (middle three images above) showed **only** women with very large breasts.

How did this affect what Jordan saw?
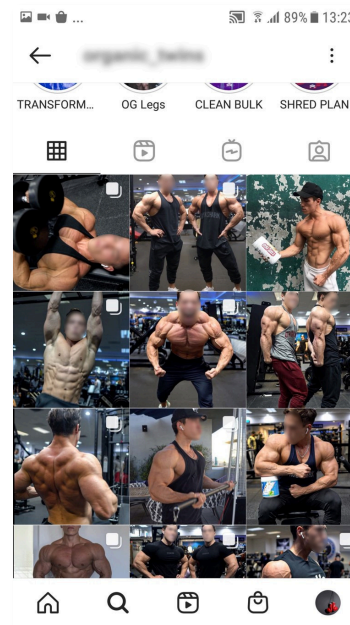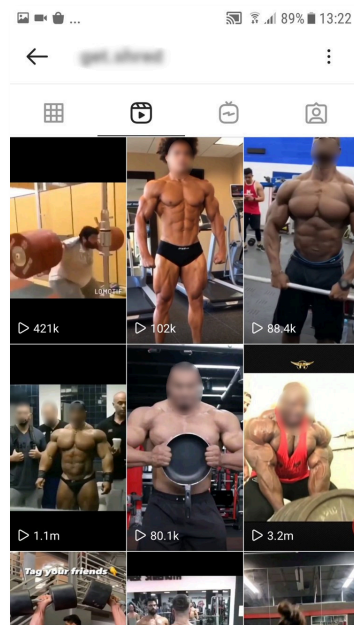
**Changes to the explore page
(e.g. recommended content)**

One male fitness account showed unnatural muscular body types.

This content increasingly was being shown on the explore page.
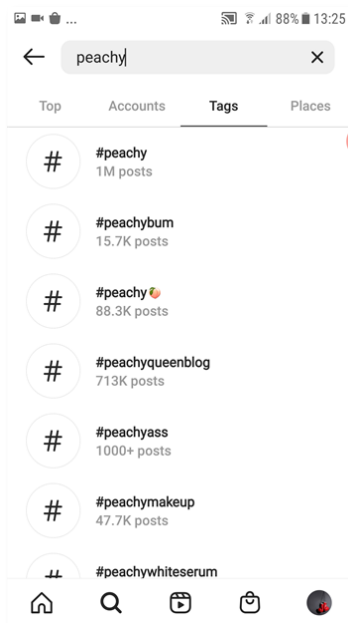
09.12.2020

Searching for #peachy

What did Jordan search for that day?
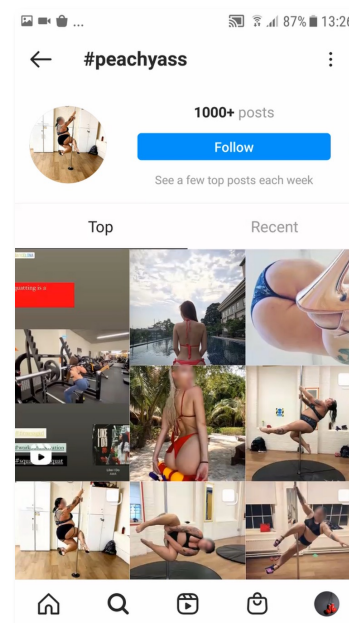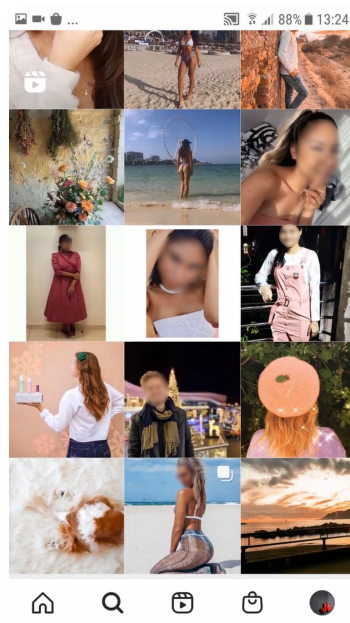
Instagram search

Searching for #peachy
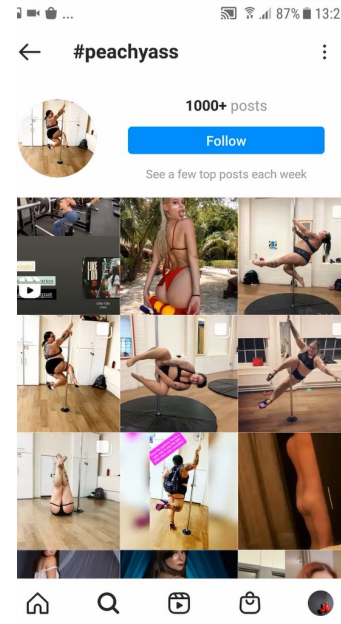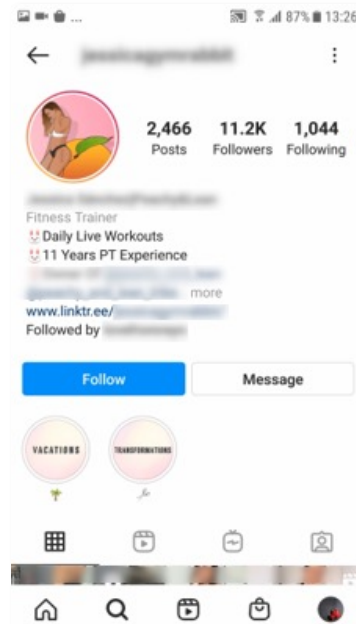
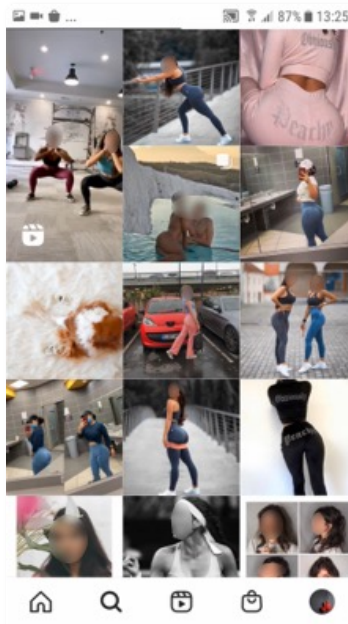Over 1 million results for the search term **'#peachy'.**

Instagram suggested similar hashtags, two of which mentioned 'bum' and 'ass'. The content then shown focused on female fitness content, particularly bums.

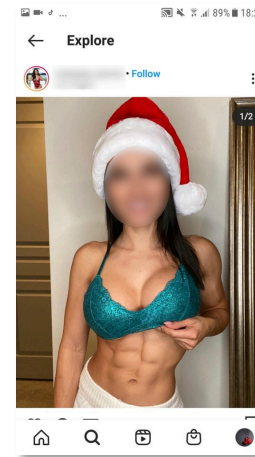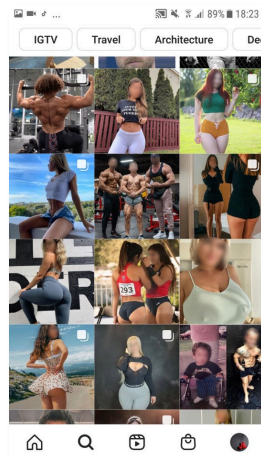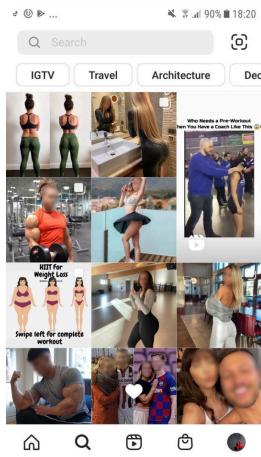# What did Jordan search for that day?

Instagram search results

Accounts and examples of #peachy

Many of the accounts posted female fitness content focused on exercises and different ways to increase the size and/or shape of people's bums.

How did this affect what Jordan saw?

Changes to the explore page
### (e.g. recommended content)

The images on the explore feed became increasingly extreme in terms of showing muscular bodies or exaggerated features. The women pictured were usually in the gym or in clothing with their nipples showing through.

Follow suggestions on the explore page:

The accounts suggested on explore page were mainly muscular women.

How did this affect what Jordan saw?
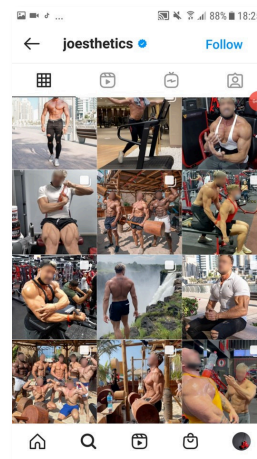
Follow suggestions on the explore page:

Accounts suggested to follow were predominantly very muscular men and women in little clothing.
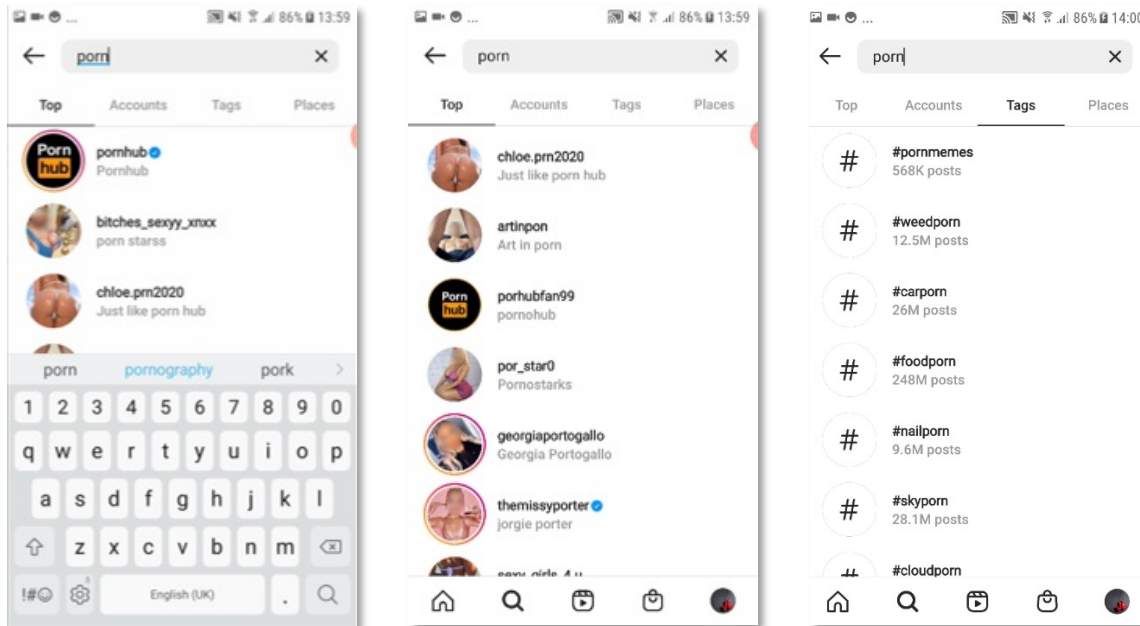
16.12.2020

Searching for #porn

What did Jordan search for that day?

Instagram search

Searching for #porn

Over 568,000 results for the search term **'#porn'**.

The top result is one of the world's most famous free porn sites *"Pornhub"*. Instagram suggested hashtags related to other topics, such as #carporn and #foodporn.
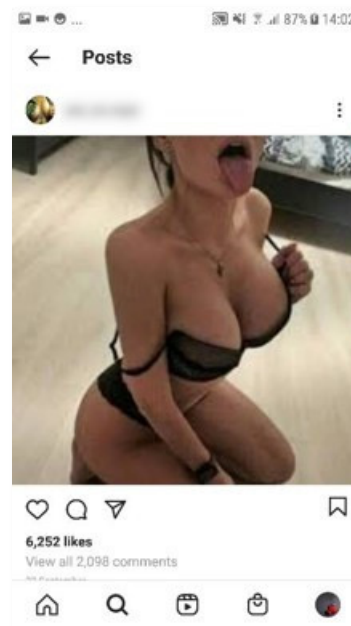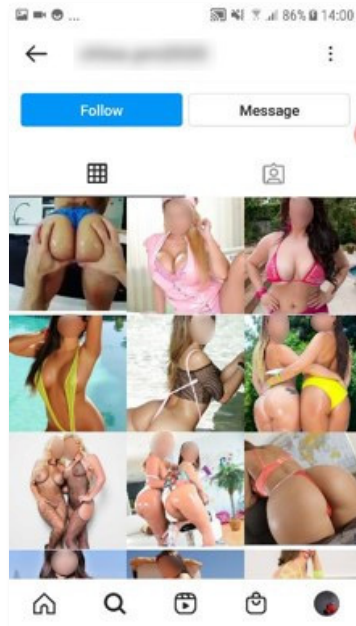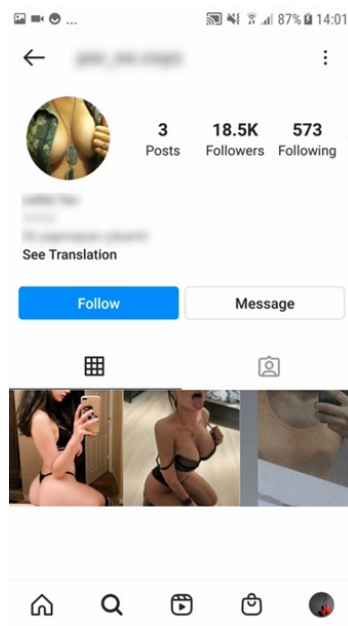
On Justin's account (identical avatar) there was explicit sexual images, but Jordan's search content largely contained to underwear/swimwear posts with some showing breasts.

What did Jordan search for that day?

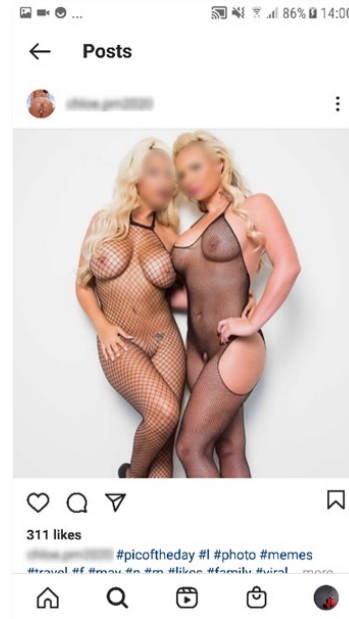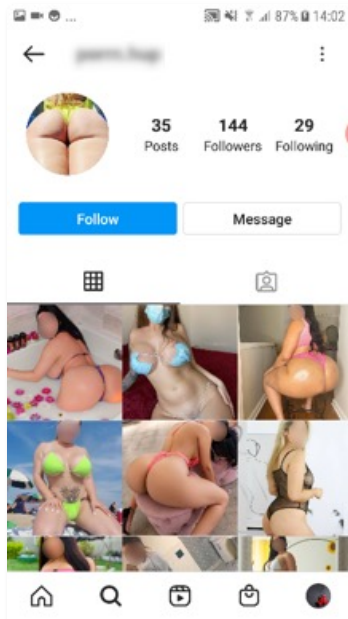*Instagram search results*

Accounts and examples of #porn

The top account for porn is an account promoting images and pictures of porn stars.

What did Jordan search for that day?

Instagram search results

Accounts and examples of #porn

The accounts became increasingly sexually explicit as the avatar scrolled through the suggested search terms. They did not post images of people engaging in sex, but they posted images of women in underwear or swimwear. Some were showing their breasts.