



The Influence of Instagram Reels on Content Consumption Trends among Gen Z

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Abstract: *The rise of Instagram Reels has transformed social media content consumption, particularly among Generation Z. In this work, the authors explore how these short-form video Reels format, transformed the viewing behavior, the levels of engagement and the content of preference among the Generation Z. The questionnaire used in the study was distributed among 120 respondents aged 18-25, which made it possible to identify such factors as ad entertainment value, the ability to discover the content, and the influence of Reels on fashion trends and buying patterns. The findings suggest that Reels have become a dominant platform for daily media consumption, with Generation Z favoring its quick, visually-driven content. The study also highlights how influencers and brands have effectively used Reels to engage this tech-savvy generation. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of social media's evolving landscape and its impact on content consumption behaviors.*

Keywords: *About Instagram Reels, Social Media, Generation Z, Fashion Trends.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of social media platforms has drastically changed the way content is consumed, shared, and created. Among the most significant recent developments in this domain is the rise of Instagram Reels, a short-form video feature introduced in 2020. Instagram Reels enables users to share and discover fun and entertaining videos of 90 seconds or less with audio, music, and effects. When it was launched, Instagram serve as a direct competitor to TikTok and was well-received, especially among the Generation Z consisting of people born between 1997 and 2012. Self-promotion and entertainment are some of the reasons that make people post videos and engage in other activities on the platform. The motivation to escape reality leads to higher levels of consumption and



participation, while entertainment motivation leads to higher levels of creation and interaction (Menon,2022).

In an era dominated by rapid content consumption, Reels aligns perfectly with the preferences of Generation Z, who seek quick, digestible, and visually dynamic content. With attention spans decreasing and multitasking becoming a norm, traditional long-form content struggles to capture and retain the interest of this generation. As a result, platforms like Instagram Reels, with their short and engaging video format, have seen a surge in use. This shift towards short-form content has raised significant questions about its impact on Generation Z's broader content consumption patterns (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023). How has the widespread adoption of Reels influenced the way Generation Z interacts with other media platforms? What are the key drivers behind the popularity of Reels, and how do they shape the behaviors and preferences of this young audience. Instagram Reels has transformed how we consume content and opened up exciting new possibilities for brands, influencers, and marketers. With the potential for videos to go viral and Instagram's smart recommendations, brands now have a unique way to connect with Generation Z in a natural, visually engaging style. For influencers, Reels has become an essential way to connect with and grow their audience. These short, creative videos give influencers a fun and dynamic platform to showcase their skills, share their lifestyles, and promote the products they believe in. Brands have also jumped on the Reels trend, using its popularity to promote their products and services (Sokolova & Kefi). By teaming up with influencers, they create ads that feel more genuine and less like traditional marketing. As a result, Instagram Reels has become a powerful tool for shaping trends, influencing culture, and guiding how Generation Z interacts with the world around them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of social media platforms has shaped content consumption behavior especially among Gen Z, a generation that appreciates active and interactive participation in whatever content they engage in owing to their high digital literacy. Instagram Reels which was launched in 2020 has come to dominate the short video segments alongside TikTok due in large part to its engaging and widespread users (Menon, 2022). Designed for quickly engaging glorious fast content, Instagram Reels has been very successful with Generation Z altering their content consumption tendencies. There are a number of research studies that have looked at the effects of short-video clip on user engagement with more focuses on motivations and behaviors of users. According to the Uses and Gratifications theory, individuals are driven by various psychological needs, including entertainment, social interaction, and escapism, when engaging with social media platforms (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974).Menon (2022) extends this theory with his study about Instagram Reels. He highlights the four main reasons why people use Instagram Reels: to have fun, to market oneself, to discover new things, and to relax oneself. His research shows that these sounds and visuals induce effects on Generation Z users who are fond of the provision of entertainment and being 'in vogue' for a short period on the app given their day to day busy and technologically advanced self. In line with this, other research suggests that Generation Z prefers platforms that offer instant gratification through short, impactful content (Sheldon &



Bryant, 2016). Instagram Reels allows users to upload videos of duration between 15 to 30 seconds – seems to encourage this behavior perfectly as the users are able to watch compressed volumes of content within a short time. This shift in strategy to shorter formats more so is not limited to only individual preferences, as it broadens out to more global media consumption patterns, whereby the users of this content – Generation Z – avers a decline in consumption of long duration media formats like television or even YouTube and embraces shorter and easy to access audiovisuals (Montag et al., 2021).

The interactivity of platforms like Instagram Reels fosters a more participatory media culture, where users are not just passive consumers but active creators and sharers of content (Leung, 2013). This aligns with Generation Z's preference for platforms that allow for greater user agency and creativity, further reinforcing Instagram Reels' popularity within this demographic. Menon (2022) also noted that narcissistic tendencies, which are more prevalent in younger populations due to the rise of social media, predict higher levels of content production and participation in Reels. This suggests that Instagram Reels not only serves as a consumption platform but also as a stage for self-presentation and social validation, two factors particularly important to Generation Z.

Many studies have demonstrated that short-form video platforms contribute to the evolving "always-on" digital culture, where constant content consumption is normalized (Bayer et al., 2020). This has raised concerns about the potential negative impacts of these consumption trends, such as decreased attention spans and the perpetuation of superficial content (Montag et al., 2021). However, for Generation Z, the ease of access to such content offers a convenient way to stay informed about trends, social issues, and pop culture, all while catering to their desire for instant gratification. Many research suggests that platforms like Instagram Reels fulfill key psychological needs such as entertainment, self-promotion, and escapism, making them particularly attractive to this demographic. As Generation Z still holds the majority of social media users, insights into their patterns of behavior on platforms such as Instagram Reels are important for producers of marketing content and researchers as well.

Research Questions

- A. What are the primary motivations for Generation Z using Instagram Reels?
- B. How does the consumption of Reels affect other media habits?
- C. What role do Reels play in shaping trends and purchases?

3. METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a mixed-methods framework to investigate the impact of Instagram Reels on the media consumption, engagement, and content tendencies of Generation Z. A quantitative survey was conducted among 120 respondents aged 18 to 25, selected using a convenience sampling method from different universities in India. The survey aimed to address the primary research questions concerning Generation Z's motivations for using Instagram Reels, how Reels affect their broader media habits, and the role Reels play in shaping trends and purchasing decisions. The online questionnaire was prepared with different types of questions such as multiple choice and Likert scale questions, in order to



understand parameters including entertainment, ease of finding content, engaging with influencer content, and purchasing behavior. This allowed for the collection of measurable data on the frequency of Reels usage, types of content consumed, and the overall impact on lifestyle choices such as fashion and trends.

For data analysis, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, identifying correlations between Reels usage and changes in media habits and purchasing patterns. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed to highlight recurring themes related to motivations for Reels consumption and its impact on social trends. This combined approach enabled a well-rounded understanding of Instagram Reels' influence on Generation Z's media behaviors and cultural trends.

Table1: Demographic details of respondents

Demographic category	Details	Percentage	Number
Age	18-25 years	100%	120
Gender	Female	52%	62
	Male	45%	54
	Others	3%	4
Educational Background	Undergraduate students	48%	58
	Postgraduate students	30%	36
	Working professionals	22%	26
Geographical Location	Urban	60%	72
	Rural	40%	48
Social Media Usage	Daily Instagram users	88%	106
	Instagram users a few times weekly	12%	14

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study analyzed the responses of 120 participants aged 18-25, focusing on their usage patterns of Instagram Reels, the motivations behind their consumption, and the influence of Reels on trends and purchasing behaviors. Below are the key findings from the quantitative survey, followed by relevant tables and graphs for better understanding.

A. Reels Usage Patterns

Most respondents use Instagram Reels daily, with varying amounts of time spent on the platform. The study delves into how frequently Generation Z engages with Instagram Reels. The results indicated that 78% of the participants spend their time watching Instagram Reels on a daily basis which is quite very high suggesting that Reels has become part and parcel of their day to day media consumption. This rising figure also emphasizes on the existing competition that the platform is available in terms of providing entertainment and content discovery amongs the young users.

Table 2: Frequency of Instagram Reels Usage

Frequency of Usage	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Daily	78%	94
Several times a week	15%	18
Once a week	5%	6
Rarely	2%	2

With such daily usage numbers at 78%, Generation Z has fully incorporated Reels into their media consumption practices, which to some extent, explains their fondness for short videos that are entertaining and easy to watch. This is most likely due to the fact that the content is presented to the viewers in a way that they find appealing and constantly keeps them occupied by serving them with interesting video clips tailored to their tastes, thus high daily usage statistics.

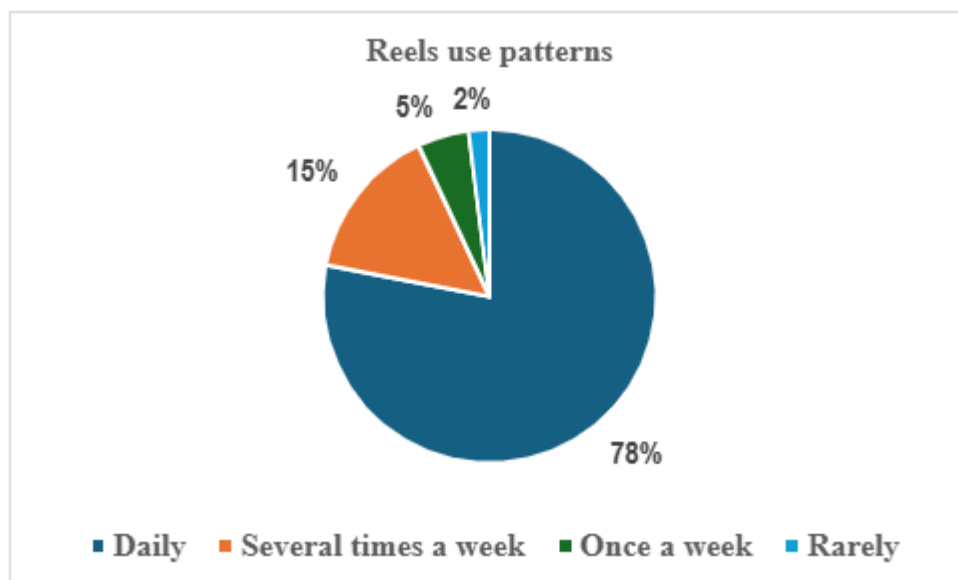


Fig1: Pie chart for percentage of reels use pattern

As shown in the pie chart, a significant 78% of respondents use Instagram Reels daily, indicating that Reels are a major source of entertainment and media consumption for Generation Z. The short duration of Reels coupled with the fast-paced motion graphics satisfies the Generation Z media consumption needs and therefore is a great tool to engage this target audience.

B. Time Spent on Reels

The time spent on Instagram Reels varies, with most users engaging with the platform between 30 minutes to 2 hours per day. The data suggests that an impressive proportion of Generation Z, about 62%, manages to spend anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours daily on Reels which shows that it forms a decent share of their media time. The largest proportion,

35%, takes 30 minutes to 1 hour, which indicates the role of Reels in the daily lives of Generation Z as a quick source of entertainment and information.

Table 3: Average Time Spent on Instagram Reels

Time Spent Daily	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Less than 30 minutes	20%	24
30 minutes to 1 hour	35%	42
1-2 hours	27%	32
More than 2 hours	18%	22

This is evidenced by the fact that 18% of consumers watch Reels for longer than 2 hours which depicts the level of immersion that such a platform can create courtesy of its highly targeted algorithm. This highlights the addictive nature of short-form video content, where users quickly scroll through diverse videos, often losing track of time.

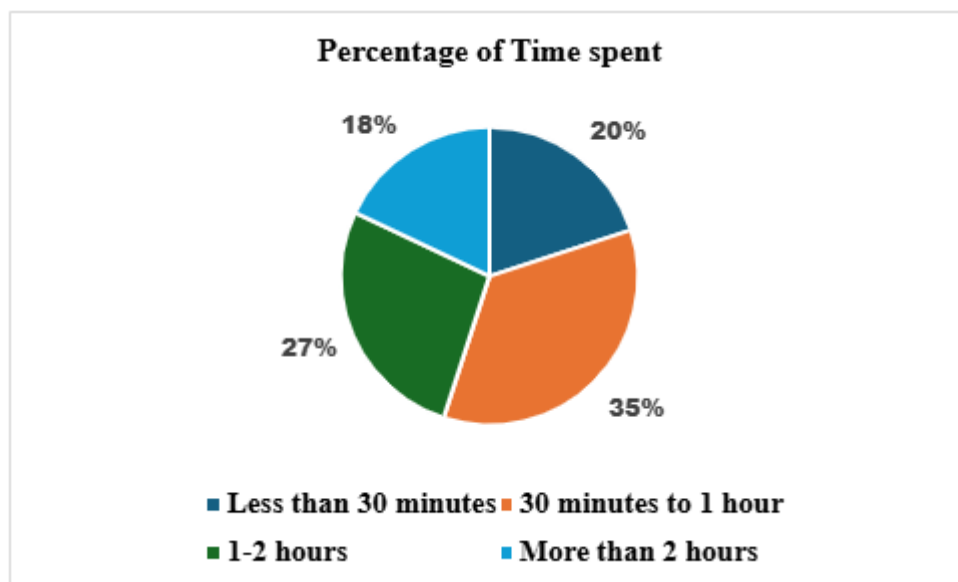


Fig2: Pie chart for percentage of user time spent

C. Motivations for Using Reels

The primary motivation for using Instagram Reels is entertainment, followed by content discovery and keeping up with trends. The findings show that 85% of respondents use Reels primarily for entertainment, highlighting its role as a platform for quick, enjoyable, and visually appealing content that captures attention. The short-form video format is ideal for providing a steady flow of engaging and digestible videos, often humorous or creative, which aligns with the fast-paced nature of Generation Z's content consumption. On the other hand, 65% of the users use Reels for content discovery, where they search for the appropriate videos, accounts or ideas available on the platform that appeal to them.

Table 4: Motivations for Using Instagram Reels

Motivation	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Entertainment	85%	102
Content Discovery	65%	78
Keeping Up with Trends	45%	54
Influencer Engagement	42%	50
Learning New Skills	30%	36

A considerable percentage 45% of the participants use Reels for following the trends particularly on fashion, lifestyle and culture. The users are also influenced as 42% of the users stated that they follow the influencers for trend and other product suggestions. This highlights how Reels has emerged as a very effective tool for chasing trends in particular aspects of fashion and beauty where the presence of the influencers enhances its usage for reaching the young populations. Lastly, 30% of the respondents mentioned using Reels for purposes such as learning new skills from short tutorials, tips or do it yourself crafts which is content identified as skill-oriented. This points to the ability of Reels to educate and moreover helps in the rapid assimilation of information systematically.

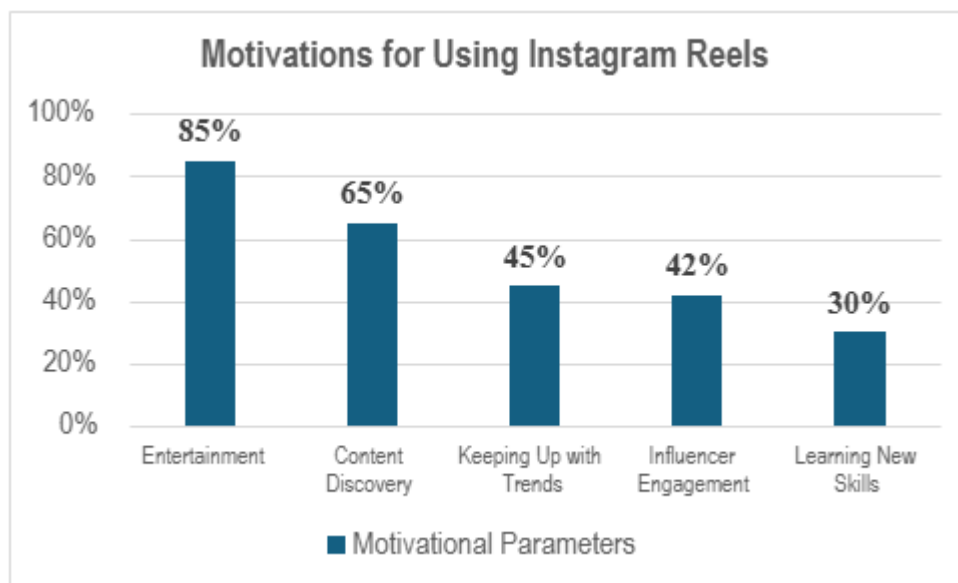


Fig3: Percentage wise motivation for using Instagram Reels

D. Impact on Media Habits

The study revealed that Instagram Reels has led to a decline in the consumption of traditional media and long-form video content. The findings indicate a noticeable shift away from traditional media and other long-form content platforms due to the rise of Reels.

Table 5: Impact of Reels on Other Media Habits

Media Habit Change	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Reduced TV/Streaming	60%	72

Usage		
Reduced YouTube Viewing	20%	24
No Significant Impact	20%	24

60% of respondents reported a reduction in their TV or streaming service consumption since they started regularly using Reels. 20% noted a decrease in the time they spend on platforms like YouTube, which typically offer longer videos. Only 20% stated that Reels had no significant impact on their overall media habits.

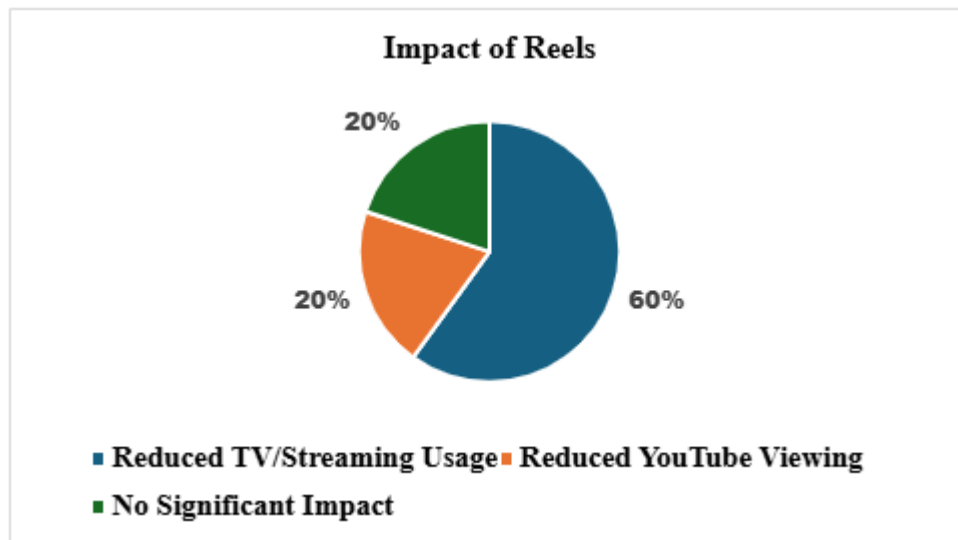


Fig4: Pie chart for impact of reels on other platforms

The results indicate that users are not only hooking up with Instagram Reels but also substituting it for other media. It is fast-paced and short in a manner of providing entertainment which appeals to the Generations Z who are avoiding watching any long and boring media such as TVs and even YouTube Videos. This highlights the influence of social networks and Reels in particular on the content experience of the younger generation that is growing up in the digital age.

E. Influence on Trends and Purchases

Instagram Reels significantly influences fashion choices and purchasing behavior among Generation Z. The research indicates that Instagram Reels are important determinants of fashion choices and purchasing decisions of Generation Z.

Table 6: Influence of Reels on Fashion and Purchases

Impact on Purchases/Trends	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Influences Fashion Choices	50%	60
Leads to Product Purchases	30%	36
No Significant Influence	20%	24

The data revealed that 50% of the respondents altered their fashion choices after watching reels whereas 30% stated that they bought something after watching it on Reels especially those marketed by influencers. This proves that Instagram Reels are not merely a source of fun, but rather serves as an effective mechanism of setting trends.

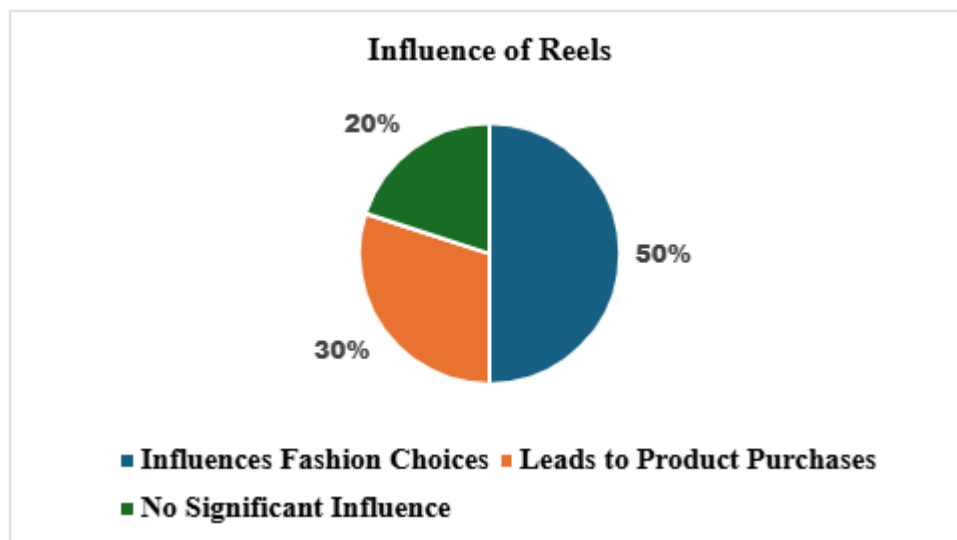


Fig5: Pie chart for influence of reels

Reels provide fast-moving and illustrated content that provides an excellent platform for making fashion trends, products, and lifestyles visible. This is due the fact that influencers and brands have been able to use the content in a way that is real and appealing to the target consumers. The impact of social networking sites is mostly seen in the case of the influencers. Quite a number of the respondents indicated that they use Reels by watching selective influencers for their posts which contain fashion, lifestyle and product based Reels. This in turn prompts the users to want to dress and make purchases just like the influencers they engage with which helps to make a purchase in some instances via a Reels vision.

5. CONCLUSION

This study gives a comprehensive insight into how Generation Z's media usage, interaction, and lifestyle adaptation is significantly affected by the Instagram application of Reels. The results show that Reels have become the most used daily content consumption feature among the participants, with 78% engaging in that feature often encroaching into the use of conventional media such as TV and long videos on YouTube etc. One of the key conclusions of this study is that Reels offer an ideal format for Generation Z, catering to their preference for quick, visually appealing content that can be consumed in short bursts. This aligns with broader shifts in media consumption behavior, where attention spans are shortening, and the demand for fast, engaging content is rising. The platform's algorithm-driven personalization also ensures that users are constantly exposed to new and relevant content, which further encourages frequent usage. This research reveals that Instagram Reels significantly contribute to fashion trends and purchasing behavior of Generation Z. Almost half of the participants



stated that they had bought items from the Reels, especially those advertised by an influencer. This further reiterates the growing trend of the platform as a marketing tool with the ability of shaking up users with relatable images and videos from brands and influencers. Reels, thus become indispensable for influencer marketing and brand activations.

This research also suggests a wider media shift amongst Generation Z in relation to the patterns of Reels consumption. 60 % of those surveyed reported less use of traditional television and streaming services, suggesting that Reels occupy the space of other forms of recreation. This change illustrates a more general scenario in which young users are increasingly engaging with short-form content platforms as part of their everyday lives. Instagram Reels are changing the way the youth, primarily Generation Z, interacts with the media, sets up trends, and makes purchases. Instagram Reels is used primarily for entertainment but also serves as a platform for content discovery, trend-following, influencer engagement, and learning. Its versatility caters to Generation Z's diverse interests, making it an essential part of their social media experience. Because of its mix of entertainment, the ability to find the latest trends, and be engaged by influencers, it is a strong space in the changing scope of social media. As brands and influencers are still leveraging the power of Reels, the effect it has on the Generation Z will likely increase further, thus making it an essential part of not only the media circuits but also the marketing strategies in this digital era.

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