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STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA REELS: SCOPE FOR NEWS OUTLETS

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ABSTRACT

Youth in a country like India have undergone drastic lifestyle changes as a result of social media. Their engagement goes beyond just viewing or creating content. Since 230.25 million people use short videos, India is the biggest market for Instagram reels. Even after social activists, parents, and researchers point out a number of drawbacks, 54% of young people in India do not want to stop using social media, according to Pew Research (2012). The engagement ratio has also gone up to 800 likes on average (Daniel Ruby, 2022). In January 2022, India had 17.8% of its population using Instagram, among which the most frequent users were aged between 18 and 24. The use of social media reels among the Gen Z category has gone up. Hence, the present study tries to address the following objectives using a mixed-methods approach: a survey using a structured online questionnaire and a focus group discussion among students. The findings of the study would help media outlets market their news content to a wider audience on one side and develop the habit of consuming news among the Gen Z audience.

Keywords: Reels, News Stories, Perception, Credibility, Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has made tremendous changes in youngsters' media consumption. Though there are a lot of social media applications or sites available in the online space, a few applications are very popular among youngsters Tiktok Creators Report. (2020). For example, Tiktok's (in India until 2020) strategy of delivering content to young audiences ruled the world. Due to security reasons, the Government of India banned TikTok in India in 2020. This had a huge impact on the people who were involved in content creation and sharing with the digital communities Lenhart. To address this void in the corporate world, numerous social

media startups and industry leaders have launched their own platforms and services for creating short videos, catering to a wide audience. In 2020, several Indian and foreign social media businesses, including Firework, Huddles, Dubsmash, YouTube, Josh, Moj, MX Taka Tak, and Instagram Reels, entered the rivalry by launching short video apps TechCrunch. (2020). Among these, Instagram has grown enormously in popularity since it launched "Stories" in 2016 Moreno & D'Angelo (2019). The stories' feature is now one of the most prevalent sharing methods on all social media platforms. Instagram's prime focus at the time of its launch in 2010 was to feature photographs taken on a mobile phone. The software engineers and designers made the Instagram platform something different from the rest of the social media platforms in terms of user experience and user interface, such as visual appeal, space, and colours used, and a dedicated file format to be used for uploading pictures and videos. The flexibility and affordance of the tools on Instagram make the user more convenient. Towner & Muñoz (2022)

The advancements in social media allow its users not only to interact with each other but to consume a lot of information about each other. Tik Tok was a social media application that helps its users showcase their talents by creating videos in various genres such as politics, cinema, fashion, cooking, technology, spiritual stories, kids care, general relationship advice, science experiments, education, games, travel, fitness, health tips, movie reviews, home videos, Comedy, lifestyle, etc., A 15-second video platform that supported 15 regional languages allowed millions of people to join together with a variety of content. After the Indian government banned 53 Chinese apps (including Tik Tok) in 2020, Instagram began to occupy the Indian market by replacing Tik Tok. The very next year, Facebook introduced a short video-uploading service in India. The users of Instagram welcomed 'Reels', a short video platform where the application allows its users to create indigenous video content on various topics for a duration of 90 seconds.

Since the popularity of short video applications has tremendously grown, a lot of marketing professionals use this option as a success formula. In addition to this, ads are also shown to specific users based on what they have looked at in the past. In order to ensure audience, reach, conventional media platforms such as newspapers, Radio, and Television adopt a lot of strategies in terms of the types of stories they cover, presentation format, etc. Since anyone can use social media and young people use it a lot, the rate of engagement is relatively higher. In the recent past, most youngsters' favourite sources of information were social media. Young people wouldn't choose to read the newspaper or listen to the news on the radio or TV for a variety of personal reasons. Since the reach is greater on social media, the present study tries to find out how the major news outlets could use ‘Reels’ on social media to reach out to their audiences.

- To determine whether students have the habit of consuming news.
- To analyze whether students consume brief news stories they come across on social media.
- Investigating the brief news students watch on social media motivates them to consume more news.
- To identify students' perceptions of the credibility of news stories they view on social media.
- To explore if students are interested in consuming elaborate news stories on social media.
- To examine if there are any differences between media students and others in terms of news consumption patterns.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Young people are increasingly engaged in social media activities. A variety of social media challenges with a variety of goals are also popular among young people Roth et al. (2021). With reels, you can inform your audience, entertain them, and attract potential customers by telling an engaging, immersive story about your brand. At Reels, people collaborate with the community and discover new ideas through cultural trends Instagram. (2022). As part of the production and consumption of cultural content online, user-generated media has become increasingly important. The availability of 4G internet connectivity along with the accessibility of smartphones has resulted in the emergence of vertical video-sharing platforms across the globe that support user-generated media. A number of previous research studies have found that short videos on mobile devices are effective in engaging users' attention and retaining it Scherr & Wang (2021) .

2.1. VERTICAL STORYTELLING

One of the newest trends in the social media ecosystem is the sharing of vertical videos. Following the inclusion of vertical video-sharing features and possibilities on social media platforms like Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram, the culture of user-generated vertical video-sharing gained popularity. The portable mobile communication device gives the audience the feel of an effortless viewing experience because of its form factor. The user need not change the orientation of the phone when he or she watches content in vertical videos.

2.2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEWS CONSUMPTION

Social media have become an important news delivery route not just in rich Western civilizations but also in emerging nations of the Third World. 72% of Indians get news via their cell phones, making India a mobile-centric market Krishnan (2022). Due to the significance of this new environment, mass media strategists have turned to social media to expand the reach of their content and increase audience interaction. This suggests that a new model of user-led multidirectional dissemination has replaced the unidirectional paradigm of mass-mediated news delivery Francisco et al. (2019).

Twitter and Facebook have become channels through which users are exposed to social and political issues. Traditional mass media no longer monopolize the distribution of content and information about current events. Social networking sites and platforms like Twitter and Facebook have evolved into channels through which users are exposed to social and political issues. Social media have become an important news delivery platform not just in rich Western civilizations but also in emerging nations of the Third World Francisco et al. (2019).

News aggregator websites and apps like Google News (53%), Daily Hunt (25%), and InShorts (19%) have become important ways to get news and are valued for their ease of use. Popular social media platforms in India include YouTube (53%), and WhatsApp (51%). Along with numerous other Chinese applications, the short-form video app TikTok was prohibited in India in 2020 for security reasons. It is being replaced with homegrown apps such as Moj, Roposo, and Josh, as well as platform-based features such as Instagram Reels Krishnan (2022).

2.3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Network theory analyses the transmission of information and ideas within networks, such as social media platforms like Instagram, where students interact with reels. By applying this theoretical framework to the present research, the paper can gain useful insights into how news outlets can effectively utilize these networks to connect with and captivate student audiences.

1) Network theory is useful for identifying the most influential individuals in the student social media network. These influencers, such as prominent student accounts or content providers, possess a substantial following and exhibit high rates of engagement. News outlets have the option to collaborate with or showcase content from these influencers in order to expand their reach among students and enhance the exposure of their news items.
2) Examining Information Diffusion: Network theory enables the monitoring of the dissemination of information, such as news articles or popular topics, across the network of student social media feeds. Through the examination of dissemination patterns, news providers can gain insights into the specific forms of material that strongly engage students, enabling them to customize their strategy accordingly. News outlets may discover that concise, visually captivating videos accompanied by attention-grabbing titles are more likely to be shared and watched by students.
3) Fostering Communities: The application of network theory can assist news organisations in establishing communities centered around particular news subjects or areas of interest that are pertinent to students. News providers can cultivate more involvement and trust with their intended audience by establishing or joining online forums centred on student matters. This can result in a higher number of people reading, sharing, and engaging in discussions about their news material.
4) Comprehending Network Dynamics: Network theory offers methods to examine the dynamics of the student social media reel network. This entails examining variables such as network density, clustering, and homophily. To enhance their ability to connect with and captivate pupils within the network, news outlets can devise more efficacious approaches by comprehending these dynamics.
5) Combating Misinformation: Network theory can be employed to monitor the dissemination of false or misleading information on social media platforms such as Instagram. News outlets have a vital role in verifying and rectifying misinformation that students come across while interacting with reels. It can facilitate the development of media literacy and critical thinking skills in young viewers.

News outlets can optimize their engagement and impact in student social media networks by identifying influential individuals, monitoring information diffusion, fostering communities, understanding network dynamics, and countering misinformation. This theoretical framework not only allows news providers to increase their audience but also allows them to have an important role in teaching media literacy and critical thinking skills among young viewers, which contributes to a more knowledgeable and discerning student community.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a mixed-methods approach. At first, 100 samples were surveyed through Google Forms. The questions in the questionnaire was pre validated by the academicians in the media department and with two news readers. A questionnaire tool was used to get responses from the samples. During the process of cleaning up the data, the researcher saw that some respondents didn't finish the questionnaire. After eliminating all the incomplete responses, the final data came from 89 samples. As far as inclusion is concerned, the present study has taken responses from only those who consume news. From the overall samples collected (N = 100), 83 samples have been identified as the correct samples for this study. The study excluded all the incomplete responses given by the respondents (N = 11) and the respondents (N = 6) who reported that they do not consume news. The rest of the samples were excluded from the study. A self-administered online questionnaire was made, and students and scholars between the ages of 18 and 30 were given the link to it. The questionnaire consists of questions related to the subject variables, such as age, gender, and educational qualifications, as well as where they live.

In addition to that, the present research includes focus group discussions as well. Samples were identified based on the purposive sampling technique. Particularly homogenous sampling helps the researcher identify the samples based on the predefined purpose. Samples were drawn from the departments of Media Studies, Journalism, and Mass Communication for this study. For the group discussion, moderators were put in charge of each of the five groups. All of the group conversations were recorded with the participants' permission using a Zoom professional voice recorder. Since the sampling method used was "non-probability sampling," the researcher did not use any statistical formulas to look at the results. As a result, the researcher performed a percentage analysis on the data collected.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this study, 93 percent of the respondents who took part agreed that they get their news from different sources, such as print, TV, and new media, and 7 percent of the people who answered said they don't care about any kind of news. The proportion of females who read news exceeds 50 percent, while the proportion of males who read news falls below 39 percent. The respondents who took part in the focus group discussion confirmed this. They shared mixed responses, like consuming news in one-liner format, and if they wanted to listen to detailed news, they said they would switch to news on YouTube. The majority of those who responded and read the news (54%) live in Bengaluru's urban areas. In one of the previous research studies, the finding was that nearly seven out of ten people in the United States use social media today to keep up with news, talk to each other, and share information and entertainment. But the fast growth of social media has not only made people more interested and involved in sharing news, but it has also made them more worried about how social media affects the way people read the news. Nearly half of the people who took part in this study agreed (50%) that they get news from social media. According to these findings, when people come across news that they are interested in or that is relevant to them, they immediately share it with their family and friends via social media.

Among young people, the practice of reading newspapers has declined drastically. In the present study, 46% of respondents who come from urban areas picked social media as their major news source. In the focus group discussion,

respondents said that they find social media a very convenient place to access a variety of contents, including news. This shows the shift in terms of news consumption from print to new media. However, only one-third of the total respondents read newspapers. Even people who get their news from TV, mobile apps, or websites still only get about 10 percent of it. Mitchell, Gottfried, and Matsa looked at a report from the Pew Research Center that said, "Among millennials, Facebook is the most common source of news about government and politics." This makes Facebook the most popular social media site for getting the news.

One of the earlier studies also found that social media news has a huge effect on how much people read news online. The user's Facebook feed may include shared content from a news source they have subscribed to. The title of the news story and a link to the entire article on the news organization's website are standard for a post Levy (2021). More than one-third of the respondents (30%) in the present study responded that the kind of new stories they want to read from social media is based on their mindset. They stated in the focus group discussion that they have a personal preference for the news genre. During the focus group discussion, they said that the news genre is the one they like best. One-third of them said that they read more soft news and human-interest stories than hard news and editorial stories. Particularly, they preferred short news, which is not their area of interest. In a 2021 study by Levy, the author discovered that many people get their news from Facebook, which produced a similar kind of result. Fifty-two percent of U.S. residents said they rely on Facebook for news in 2019, which is more than the percentage who said they rely on any other social media site. The results of Levy's study only apply to the United States, but it is important to understand how Facebook has changed things for this research.

In the present study, young respondents between the ages of 18 and 25 think that newspapers and social media are reliable places to get news. The respondents, who are from urban areas, strongly feel that newspapers are the best source of information compared to other media platforms such as broadcast media and social media. Four-fifths of those surveyed in the present study said Instagram is their primary source for keeping up with the news. Absolutely no distinction may be made on the basis of gender. Ahmad et al. (2018) says that the user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) of Instagram's reels make it easy for users to view more content. More than half of the people who took part in this study (54%) follow news media professionals on their own to find out the latest news. 93 percent of the users can make the video better using the built-in editing tools and then share it with their friends and followers. User-generated short video-sharing platforms like Reels have reshaped the video-sharing market.

In the current study, 75% of respondents said they watch Reels on Instagram during their free time. Female respondents who come from urban areas (54%), in particular, watch Reels videos more than male respondents (37%). The respondents' other preferences for watching Reels videos belong to travel and movies. At the same time, 75% of the respondents expect the media outlets to start their professional news service via Reels. The majority of respondents (43%), who are from urban areas, expressed this. In the focus group discussion, a few respondents expressed their view that reels are not meant for news. But they expected credible news channels like Quint, Brut India, etc. to start their news service on social media in both short and long form. Earl and Kimport (2011)

Also, 83 percent of the people who answered expect traditional news stories to be shown on "reels," which are short videos that last between 60 and 90 seconds. On Instagram Reel, there isn't much of a difference between men and women in

terms of what they expect from traditional news stories. 66% of those who answered still think that this way of getting news would help them learn to get their news from reliable sources. Even in the group discussion, the majority of the respondents gave reasons why social media could be the ideal place to put authentic content because of its most user-friendly features and convenient way to get news.

5. CONCLUSION

72% of Indians get their news through their cellphones, compared to 35% who use desktops. It's not a secret that news aggregator websites and apps like Google News (53%), Daily Hunt (25%), Inshorts (19%), and NewsPoint (17%) have become more popular because they're easy to use Jha (2022). This data shows that the style of news consumption has changed from newspapers to social media. The most recent audit by the Audit Bureau of Circulation in 2022 for the months of January through June unequivocally demonstrates that newspaper circulation has decreased by 20 to 30 percent. Several newspapers said that COVID-19 and other restrictions were to blame for the sudden drop. This led to an increase in the price of the newspaper Staff (2022). But on the other hand, the ban enforced on TikTok also led to the start of different non-Chinese short video applications in India. Among all other short video applications, Instagram and Facebook captured the top spots. The vast follower base, the user interface, and the addition of short video applications made Instagram a success. Most of the people who took part in this study think that social media can make it easier for them to get news. They welcome the emergence of approved and legitimate news sites, such as News Laundry, The Quint, and some of the news aggregator/curated applications like 'Flipboard' and 'Pocket' to generate news articles in short video form. The results of the current research show that broadcast news networks could reach a lot more people if they tried making news stories (called "vertical storytelling") in the form of short videos.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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