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The Impact of Instagram Reels on Consumer Engagement and Brand Perception

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ABSTRACT

Instagram Reels have completely changed the way brands connect with their audience. What started as a response to TikTok has now become a major platform for storytelling, entertainment, and promotion—packaged in a format that fits today's fast-scrolling generation. This study explores how Reels influence consumer engagement and brand perception, especially among young Indian users. With the help of marketing frameworks like AIDA and RACE, and real survey data, the study highlights how Reels grab attention, build emotional connections, and even influence trust and buying decisions. Authentic, visually strong content tends to perform best. The takeaway? Reels aren't just trendy—they're a powerful tool for modern marketers who want to create lasting impressions in a matter of seconds.

Keywords: Instagram Reels, Consumer Behaviour, Engagement, Brand Perception, AIDA, RACE, Influencer Marketing, Visual Content, Digital Marketing

I. INTRODUCTION

Short-form video has taken over the digital world. Platforms like Instagram, once focused purely on images, have shifted to video-first experiences to keep up with user demand. Instagram Reels, in particular, have become the heartbeat of the app—pushing out bite-sized content that's fast, fun, and full of personality.

In a world where attention spans are shrinking, Reels are more than entertainment—they're currency. They help brands boost visibility, drive engagement, and build trust—all within a few seconds. Especially for Gen Z and Millennials, Reels are now a key part of how they discover and connect with brands. Fast, relatable, and real—that's the kind of content people are looking for, and that's exactly what Reels deliver.

II. EVOLUTION OF SHORT-FORM CONTENT

Short-form content isn't new, but the way we consume it today is. From Vine to TikTok, quick videos have become a staple of online culture. What's different now is how central they are to our everyday scrolling—and how seamlessly they've been woven into major platforms like Instagram.

With Reels, Instagram created a space where creators and brands can be discovered organically. The format is designed for virality: full-screen, mobile-first, often looping, and driven by trending sounds or clever storytelling. Today, short-form video isn't a novelty—it's what people expect.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MODELS

To understand the power of Reels, this study draws from classic and modern marketing models:

- **AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action):** Reels fit naturally into this structure—they're crafted to capture attention quickly, hold interest, build desire through storytelling, and drive action through links, follows, or purchases.
- **RACE (Reach, Act, Convert, Engage):** Reels can achieve all four stages—from discovery through Explore, to actions like follows or purchases, to deeper engagement via comments and shares.
- **Customer Journey Mapping:** Today's consumer journey is fluid. A single Reel can introduce a brand, create interest, and lead to a purchase—all in one scroll.

IV. INSTAGRAM REELS AS A MARKETING TOOL

Brands are no longer using Reels just to be seen—they're using them to connect. Reels allow brands to show different sides of themselves: funny, educational, aspirational, or real. In under 60 seconds, they can tell stories that make them feel more human.

Features like product tags, influencer tie-ups, and direct shopping links turn Reels into more than just content—they become mini-marketplaces. Plus, the visual, fast-paced nature of Reels lines up perfectly with what Gen Z looks for in a brand: authenticity, quick storytelling, and strong visuals.

V. USER ENGAGEMENT PATTERNS

Survey results showed that the vast majority of users spend significant time watching Reels every day—many for 2–4 hours. For this audience, Reels aren't a "nice to have." They're part of the daily digital routine.

Users engage with Reels in various ways:

Passive viewing

- Likes and comments
- Sharing with friends
- Following the brand
- Even making a purchase

Content that's funny, visually striking, or genuinely helpful (like tutorials) gets more attention. Storytelling—especially when it's emotional or personal—takes engagement to the next level.

VI. INFLUENCER IMPACT AND BRAND PERCEPTION

Influencers have a massive influence on how people perceive brands on Reels. Audiences often find influencers more trustworthy than official brand pages—especially when the content feels candid, not overly polished. When someone users already like endorses a brand, it adds credibility instantly.

Reels also let brands shift perception in real time. A single well-made Reel can make a brand seem cooler, more current, or more relatable. And in the fast-moving digital world, that kind of shift can make all the difference.

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A structured survey was conducted among Instagram users aged 18–34 using convenience sampling. Data was collected through Google Forms and analyzed with basic statistical tools.

The survey explored:

- Daily time spent on Instagram
- Frequency of watching Reels
- Content preferences
- Brand interactions
- Influence of creators
- Purchase behavior

Most respondents were students or early-career professionals—giving a clear picture of how Reels impact younger audiences.

VIII. SURVEY ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Key Findings:

- High Usage: Over 85% of respondents watch Reels daily or often.
- Content Favorites: Fashion, comedy, how-to videos, and travel came out on top.
- Brand Engagement: 60% followed a brand after watching a Reel. Over 75% purchased a product afterward.

- Key Influencers: Humor, visuals, music, and familiar creators had the biggest impact.
- Audience Expectations: People want more real, behind-the-scenes content from brands.

These findings underline how Reels influence not just how users feel, but what they do—making them powerful tools for emotional and behavioral engagement.

IX. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Like any research, this study has its limits:

- Sample Bias: The focus was on young, urban users—not fully representative of the broader population.
- Platform Specificity: This research looked only at Instagram Reels, not platforms like TikTok or YouTube Shorts.
- Self-Reported Data: Responses may not always reflect actual behavior.
- Time-Bound: The study reflects current trends, not long-term changes.

X. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that Reels work seamlessly within AIDA and RACE models, collapsing the traditional customer journey into a quick, emotionally engaging moment. The best-performing content is both beautiful and believable.

Influencers and raw, behind-the-scenes content stood out as key trust builders. Music, humor, and relatability weren't just "nice touches"—they were strategic drivers of engagement and perception. Reels are redefining how brands speak—and how consumers listen.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- For Brands: Be real. Partner with smaller, relatable influencers and mix style with substance.
- For Marketers: Don't just track likes. Saves, shares, and profile clicks say more about real engagement.
- For Creators: Follow trends but keep your voice consistent. Aim to educate, not just entertain.
- For Researchers: Future studies should include cross-platform comparisons and long-term behavioral analysis.

XII. CONCLUSION

Instagram Reels are far more than just another content format. They've evolved into a branding and engagement powerhouse. Their design—short, immersive, mobile-friendly—helps brands capture and keep attention in ways that older formats can't match.

In a world where ads get skipped in seconds, Reels offer brands the chance to be seen—and more importantly, to be remembered. This study reinforces their impact, while paving the way for deeper research into the emotional side of digital content.

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