IJMRSET

International Journal of Multidisciplinary
Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Scholarly Indexed, Open Access Journal)

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Instagram Reels on Gen Z: Analyzing Engagement and the Role of Instagram usage in Shaping Purchase Intent

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ABSTRACT: This research investigates how Instagram Reels influence Generation Z's engagement and buying behaviour. Adopting a descriptive approach, responses were gathered from 371 Gen Z users through a self-administered online survey. Data were analysed using SPSS with correlation and regression. The results showed that interactive behaviours such as liking, commenting, and sharing Reels had a stronger connection to purchase actions than merely viewing the content. Additionally, personalized messages and influencer-driven content were key in building trust and encouraging purchases. The study provides useful guidance for marketers aiming to develop impactful Instagram Reels campaigns tailored to Gen Z preferences.

I. INTRODUCTION

Instagram has become a key platform in digital marketing, particularly for Generation Z a group known for their strong digital skills and frequent use of social media. As conventional advertising methods become less effective with younger audiences, Instagram offers interactive and creative formats that align with their preferences. One such format, Instagram Reels, has seen rapid adoption by both users and brands due to its ability to convey messages through short, engaging, and visually rich videos.

This research focuses specifically on Instagram Reels and their impact within digital marketing strategies targeting Gen Z. It aims to assess how elements like video themes, duration, audio, hashtags, and storytelling approaches influence user attention and engagement. The study also evaluates interaction behaviours such as likes, comments, shares, saves, and completion rates—as metrics for measuring audience involvement. Additionally, it investigates how repeated exposure to Reels affects memory of brands and the intention to make a purchase.

The study further examines how personalized content and influencer marketing enhance the effectiveness of Reels. Given that Gen Z highly values authenticity and content that feels relatable, messages delivered by well-known micro or macro influencers can significantly improve the success of marketing efforts. By analysing how endorsements and tailored messages build consumer trust and influence buying choices, the study provides an in-depth understanding of what makes Reels effective. The findings from this research will help marketers create more strategic and compelling Instagram Reels content. Understanding the preferences and behaviours of Gen Z allows brands to refine their social media approach, making campaigns more engaging and results-driven. This study contributes valuable insights to digital marketing literature and provides practical guidance for maximizing the impact of Reels in reaching younger audiences.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Instagram has established itself as a leading platform in digital marketing, especially for Generation Z (Gen Z), who reportedly spend an average of three hours per day on the app. As social media continues to evolve, marketers have increasingly adopted interactive advertising formats like Instagram Reels to effectively engage this tech-savvy and highly responsive demographic. A comprehensive review of the literature indicates that Instagram Reels significantly influence Gen Z's engagement levels and purchasing decisions, with several key elements driving their effectiveness.

A number of studies have investigated the relationship between Instagram advertising and Gen Z's buying behavior. Ninan (2020) highlights the substantial impact that social media marketing—including Reels—has on the purchase intentions of Gen Z. Likewise, Lee and Kim (2021) examine the broader dynamics between social platforms and consumer behavior in this cohort. Huang and Li (2022) emphasize the importance of interactivity in Instagram ads, suggesting it enhances user engagement and, in turn, purchase likelihood. These conclusions are consistent with O'Connor and Patel's (2021) findings that interactive ad formats produce higher engagement among Gen Z users.

Instagram Reels, known for their brief, visually rich, and engaging format, offer marketers an effective avenue to meet the fast-paced content consumption habits of Gen Z. Green (2021) argues that Reels are particularly adept at capturing attention due to their concise structure, making them a valuable asset in digital marketing campaigns. Supporting this, Singh and Singh (2021) found that interactive ads on Instagram, especially those incorporating influencer partnerships, have a notable effect on purchase intention. Yadav and Malik (2021) similarly conclude that influencer-driven Reels are powerful in increasing purchase intent, primarily because of their authenticity and relatability.

Personalized advertising also plays a significant role in strengthening the impact of Reels. Research by Patel and Singh (2020) shows that personalized content enhances Gen Z's likelihood to engage with ads, as customization aligns with their individual preferences and interests. Singh and Thakur (2022) support this claim, noting that targeted, personalized Reels are more successful in motivating purchase behavior among Gen Z consumers.

Another important theme that emerges from the literature is the role of perceived value. Studies by Gao and Song (2020) and Davies and Munro (2020) find that impulse buying among Gen Z is strongly influenced by Instagram Reels, particularly in product categories like fashion. Influencer endorsements and limited-time offers further amplify this behavior. Jackson and Turner (2021) observe that frequent user interaction with Reels can strengthen purchase intent by building emotional connections to the content.

Exposure frequency is another key variable in shaping consumer behavior. Rao and Reddy (2021) demonstrate that repeated exposure to Reels increases brand recognition and the likelihood of purchase. Brown and Lee (2021) further suggest that consistent engagement with Reels not only improves brand recall but also fosters stronger loyalty over time. In addition to influencing purchasing decisions, Instagram Reels also impact brand perception. Johnson and Miller (2021) explore how Reels shape Gen Z's view of brand authenticity and trustworthiness. Walker and Miller (2020) echo this, noting that visually engaging Reels contribute to more favorable brand associations, which in turn affect consumer choices.

Overall, the reviewed literature underscores the effectiveness of Instagram Reels in driving user engagement and purchase intention among Gen Z. Their success lies in a blend of interactive design, personalization, influencer-driven content, and immersive visuals. These findings offer marketers valuable strategies for creating compelling Reels campaigns tailored to Gen Z's media consumption habits and preferences.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design
This study adopted a descriptive research design to explore the impact of Instagram Reels on Gen Z's engagement and purchasing intentions. This approach enabled the statistical examination of user behavior, preferences, and how Reels content influences consumer decision-making. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software, with correlation, and regression applied to extract relevant insights.

Data Collection Method
Primary data was obtained using a structured questionnaire disseminated through Google Forms. The survey consisted of close-ended and multiple-choice questions, specifically crafted to collect information on the following aspects:

- Instagram usage behavior
- Types of content engaged with
- Influence of Reels on purchasing decisions
- Impact of influencer marketing and personalized content

Sampling Method

The research adopted a non-probability convenience sampling method, focusing on individuals from Generation Z (approximately aged 18 to 29) who actively use Instagram. This approach was appropriate for efficiently accessing participants via digital platforms.

Sample Size

The study gathered responses from 371 participants, providing a robust dataset for effective analysis and interpretation.

Target Population

The target population included Gen Z individuals who were regular Instagram users and familiar with Instagram Reels. This group was ideal for exploring the impact of Reels on digital engagement and purchase behavior.

Research Instrument

A self-administered online questionnaire served as the main research instrument. The questionnaire is divided into five sections:

1. Demographic information
2. Instagram usage behavior
3. Engagement with Reels
4. Influence on purchase intent
5. Personalized content and ad relevance

Data Analysis Tools

Data analysis was conducted using correlation and regression to examine the relationships between variables. SPSS was utilized for the statistical analysis. The study examined how Instagram Reels influenced Gen Z's engagement and purchase behavior, with a focus on the impact of Reels content, influencer marketing, and personalized ads on consumer decisions. Interpretation of the data was facilitated through SPSS-based analysis.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Correlation

		Have you ever purchased a product after watching an Instagram Reel?	How 2 do you watch Instagram Reels?	How 2 are you to interact with a Reel by liking, commenting, or sharing?
Pearson Correlation	Have you ever purchased a product after watching an Instagram Reel?	1	0.119	0.258
	How 2 do you watch Instagram Reels?	0.119	1	0.09
	How 2 are you to interact with a Reel by liking, commenting, or sharing?	0.258	0.09	1
Sig. (1-tailed)	Have you ever purchased a product after watching an Instagram Reel?	.	0.017	0
	How 2 do you watch Instagram Reels?	0.017	.	0.055
	How 2 are you to interact with a Reel by liking, commenting, or sharing?	0	0.055	.
N	Have you ever purchased a product after watching an Instagram Reel?	317	317	317
	How 2 do you watch Instagram Reels?	317	317	317
	How 2 are you to interact with a Reel by liking, commenting, or sharing?	317	317	317

The correlation analysis reveals significant relationships between user behaviours on Instagram Reels and their purchasing decisions. There is a weak but statistically significant positive correlation (r = 0.119, p = 0.017) between how users watch Instagram Reels and whether they have purchased a product after watching one. This suggests that increased exposure to Reels may have a mild influence on purchase behaviour. More notably, there is a moderate positive correlation (r = 0.258, p = 0.000) between users' likelihood to interact with a Reel—such as liking, commenting, or sharing—and their likelihood of purchasing a product featured in a Reel. This indicates that engagement plays a more substantial role in influencing consumer action. On the other hand, the correlation between watching Reels and interacting with them is very weak (r = 0.090) and not statistically significant (p = 0.055), implying that frequent viewing does not necessarily translate into active engagement. Overall, the findings highlight that user interaction with content is a more meaningful driver of purchase decisions than mere viewership.

Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.275a	0.076	0.07	0.278	0.076	12.861	2	314	0

Anova

Anova						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.995	2	0.997	12.861	.000b
	Residual	24.352	314	0.078		
	Total	26.347	316			

The regression analysis assesses the influence of two predictor variables—how users watch Instagram Reels and how likely they are to interact with a Reel (like, comment, or share)—on the dependent variable, whether they have purchased a product after watching an Instagram Reel.

The model summary shows an R value of 0.275, indicating a low to moderate correlation between the predictors and the outcome. The R Square (0.076) suggests that 7.6% of the variance in purchase behaviour can be explained by the model. The Adjusted R Square (0.070) accounts for the number of predictors and confirms the model's modest explanatory power. The standard error of the estimate (0.278) indicates the average distance between observed and predicted values.

The ANOVA table confirms that the regression model is statistically significant (F = 12.861, p = 0.000), meaning that the predictors collectively have a meaningful impact on the dependent variable. Although the explained variance is limited, the significance indicates that how users engage with Instagram Reels has a real, albeit modest, effect on their purchase decisions.

V. RESULT

The findings from both the correlation and regression analyses offer insights into user behaviour on Instagram Reels and its association with purchasing decisions. The correlation results show a very weak but statistically significant positive relationship between how users watch Instagram Reels and whether they have purchased a product featured in a Reel (r = 0.119, p = 0.017). Similarly, a weak yet statistically significant correlation is observed between user interaction with Reels—such as liking, commenting, or sharing—and purchase behaviour (r = 0.258, p = 0.000). Although these relationships are statistically significant, the low r values indicate that the strength of association is limited, suggesting that watching or interacting with Reels alone may not strongly influence purchase intent.

Additionally, the correlation between watching Reels and interacting with them was very weak and not statistically significant (r = 0.090, p = 0.055), indicating that passive viewership does not necessarily translate into engagement.

The regression analysis supports this interpretation. The model explains only 7.6% of the variance in purchasing behaviour (R^2 = 0.076), which reflects a modest predictive power. Nonetheless, the model is statistically significant (F = 12.861, p = 0.000), confirming that the predictors—how users watch and engage with Reels—collectively have a measurable, albeit limited, effect on purchase decisions. Overall, while user engagement with Instagram Reels shows some statistical relevance to purchase behaviour, the actual influence appears to be relatively small, implying that other factors may play a more substantial role in shaping consumer intent.

VI. DISCUSSION

The study found statistically significant but weak relationships between Instagram Reels behaviour and purchasing decisions. Watching Reels had a very weak influence on purchases, while interacting with Reels (liking, commenting, sharing) showed a slightly stronger effect. However, the regression model explained only 7.6% of the variation in purchase behaviour, indicating that Reels engagement alone has limited impact. This suggests that while Reels can influence purchase intent to some extent, other factors like product relevance, brand trust, and influencer credibility likely play a more significant role. A broader marketing approach is necessary for stronger consumer impact.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the relationship between Instagram Reels behaviour and consumer purchasing decisions. The results indicate that while there is a statistically significant relationship, the actual strength of the association is weak. Watching and interacting with Reels show limited influence on purchase intent, with user interaction having a slightly greater impact than passive viewing. The regression model confirms that these behaviours account for only a small portion of the variation in purchasing decisions. Therefore, while Instagram Reels can play a supporting role in influencing consumer behaviour, they should not be relied upon as the sole driver of purchase intent. Marketers should consider integrating Reels with other influential factors such as product quality, brand credibility, and strategic messaging for more effective consumer engagement.

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