

Use of Social Media as a Tool of Learning - "An Instagram Based Study"

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Abstract:

Social media has become a large part of our lives in the 21st century. With the advent of high speed internet and cheap data connections ,it has become accessible to everyone thus enabling the society to move away from one sided information transmission mediums like television and newspapers to platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube which allow for a two way sharing of information. While the prevailing presumption is that social media platforms tend to be addictive and a waste of time a much important and emerging aspect has been ignored 'learning'. This is especially true in relation to a platform like instagram. While its algorithms continue to popularise cat videos and eggs, there is a conspicuous shift in the content being consumed on Instagram. People nowadays are using the platform to learn new concepts and gain knowledge about a topic of their interest. While Instagram is playing catch up and trying to popularise this idea by collaborating with good content creators, major issues remain. Thus, with the goal of exploring this aspect of Instagram, the researchers plan to undertake a public survey regarding their opinion on the efficacy of Instagram as a platform for knowledge sharing and learning. The data for the same will be collected with the help of the questionnaire with a view to analyse and interpret.

Keywords: *Instagram, social media, learning*

Introduction

Instagram started as a simple photo sharing application in 2010 and has transformed over the past decade adding multiple unique features. These features were often made with the intention to capture the market created rival applications .For instance ,the stories feature was brought to rival snapchat while the reels feature was brought to capture the short video market after tik tok was banned in certain countries and IGTV feature was brought to rival YouTube.

Thanks to these features instagram users can now access information from all around the world regarding their topic of interest and consume it in whichever format they prefer to, whether it is through a post or a reel.

These new features have also given rise to a new set of audience: people who wish to learn and share knowledge via the application. At present application is now steadily growing into a hub for sharing educational information and ideas. But this growth has begun to face certain obstacles namely spread of false information and misleading advertisements.

The researchers thus, aim to analyse the user perspective on the scope of Instagram as a platform for learning new ideas and possible solutions to solve the obstacles faced by the platform.

Statement of problem

The research aims to analyse whether there is potential for instagram to develop as a knowledge sharing platform.

Conceptual context

The important concepts mentioned in the project are-

Instagram: Instagram is a photo and video sharing social networking service owned by Meta Platforms. The app allows users to upload media that can be edited with filters and organised by hashtags and geographical tagging. Posts can be shared publicly or with preapproved followers. Users can browse other users' content by tag and location, view trending content, like photos, and follow other users to add their content to a personal feed.

Social media: Social media are interactive media technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks.

Learning: Learning is the process of acquiring new understanding, knowledge, behaviours, skills, values, attitudes, and preferences.

Objectives of the project

- To understand the user consumption patterns on instagram.
- To analyse the trustworthiness of instagram as an information sharing platform.
- To verify whether Instagram can be used as a platform for learning.

Research methodology

The research is based on Quantitative data. Primary data have been collected through survey with the help of the questionnaire.

Sample Frame:

Respondents	Male	Female	Region
60	33	27	Mumbai metropolitan region

Significance of Research

The modern era is known as the age of social media with platforms increasingly becoming an integral part of our day-to-day life. The new generation spends a large part of their lives on these platforms consuming content in various forms like reels, posts, and stories for hours and hours indirectly ending up learning and gaining exposure to new concepts and ideas from all around the world.

This makes the process of moderation and maintenance of the authenticity of the content posted even more important. Thus, the researchers wish to explore the user interest in Instagram as a platform for learning and sharing of knowledgeable content and if there is a need to improve upon the existing structure of the application to make it a better experience for all the parties involved.

Scope and limitation of the study

The study is non doctrinal research into the viability and potential of Instagram as a tool for sharing knowledge and learning while the doctrinal research is there to support the non-doctrinal research by giving a historical background about the application

The sample size has been kept limited to 60 due to time constraint with all the respondents being resident in the territory of Mumbai.

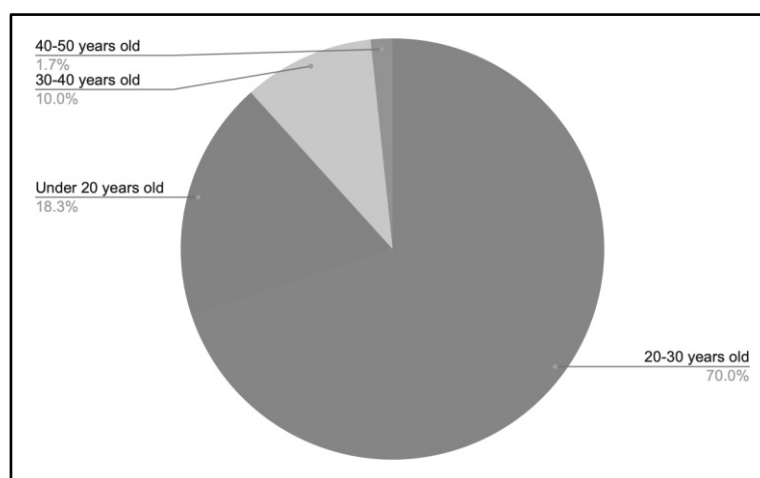
Data Analysis

A total sample size of 60 people of all age groups from ages under 20 till above 50 were surveyed to understand about the use of instagram as a learning tool. The survey had 17 questions including their name, age, and various questions about how they use instagram, about the learning they perceive through instagram.

The data is interpreted and incorporated in the graphs and diagrams below.

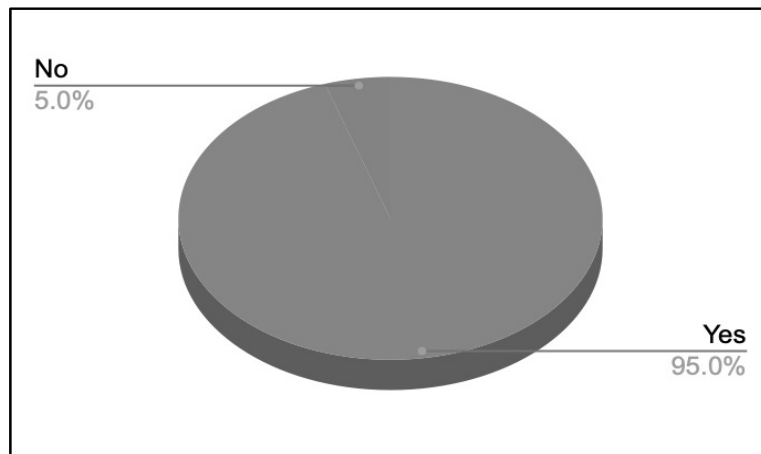
The survey produced the following results:

Q1. Which age group do you belong to?



Interpretation: From the sample size of 60 respondents 70% of our respondents were between the age group 20-30 years old and at the second place we have 18.3% of the respondents between the age group under 20 years old as they are the largest user group according to the latest survey conducted by nepoleancat.com. This data depicts that many of the young adults are using instagram and are attracted by the social media which makes them an ideal target.

Q2. Do you use Instagram?

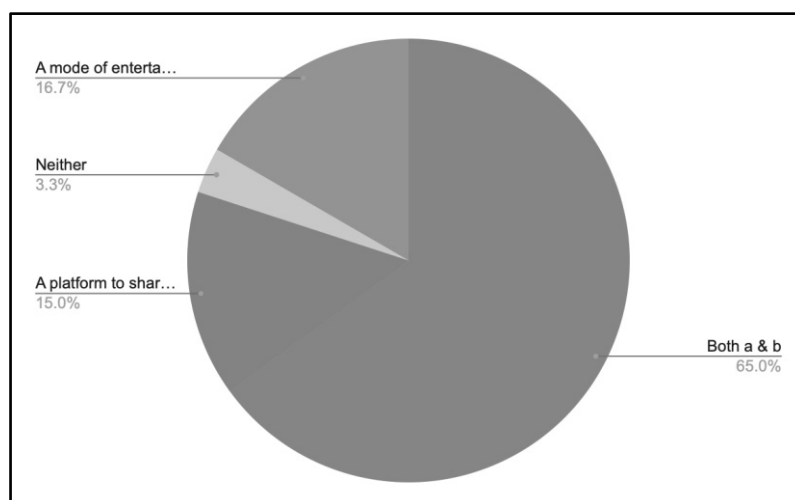


Interpretation: After the demographics, the first question which was the keystone of the survey was whether the respondents use Instagram. A whopping 95% of the respondents replied in the affirmative showing the ubiquity of the platform in our lives. Social media has been playing a very important role in everyone's life. While here we are only focusing on Instagram, people are using Instagram for many of the reasons.

When we talk about the pandemic, people sitting at home were bored so they started exploring themselves on social media. Instagram was a platform which earlier was common for photo sharing, now is used by the youth for self-expression, community building, self-identity, for gaining emotional support and for building real world relationships.

Q3. How do you view Instagram?

- ◆ A mode of entertainment
- ◆ A platform to share and learn meaningful content and meet like-minded people
- ◆ Both a & b
- ◆ Neither

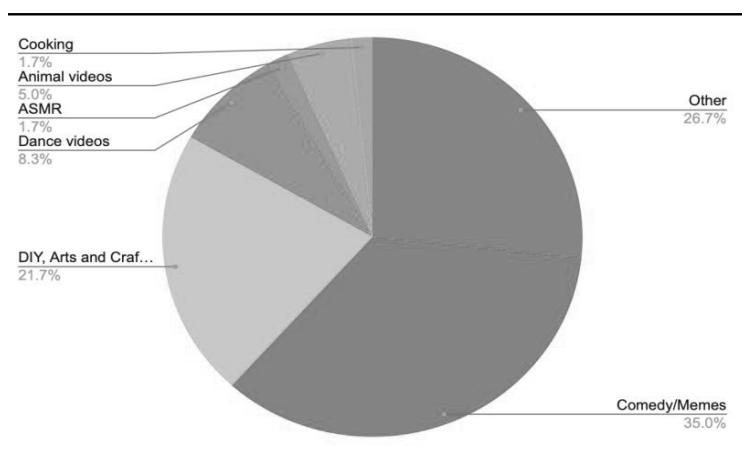


Interpretation: The above question which marks the start of the survey served as a primary gauge regarding the respondent's views about Instagram as a platform for learning.

And the responses have proved that it's indeed being used not just for entertainment but also to learn new content and have meaningful interaction with a massive 65 % of those surveyed replying in affirmative to both.

It was also surprising that almost an equal number of people perceive Instagram as a place of learning (15%) as those who just view it as a source of entertainment (16.7%). While looking at the percentage it is not bad that in comparison to 16.7% who view instagram as a source of entertainment there are 15% who are using instagram for building community.

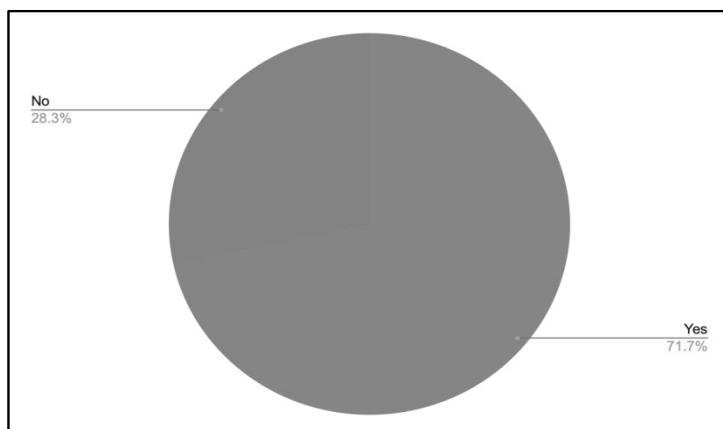
Q4. What kind of content do you follow on Instagram?



Interpretation: With regards to the content consumed by the respondents on the application, comedy/meme videos came on top with 35%, the 'Other' category which stood at the second with 26.7% highlights the need for an even more detailed survey on this question in the future.

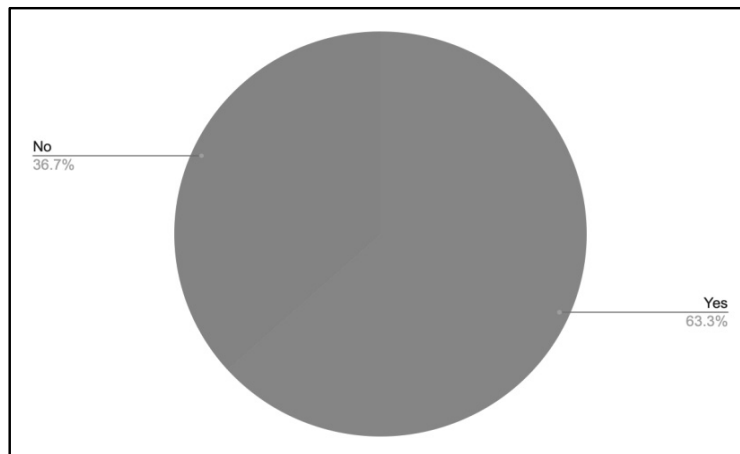
Art and crafts videos came a close 3rd with 21.7% showing that while entertainment is still the main feature of the application people are looking to learn something.

Q5. Have you ever searched for information regarding a particular topic on Instagram?



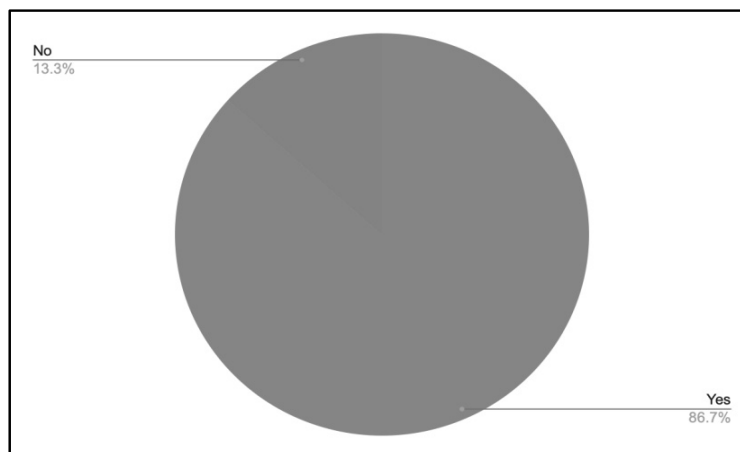
Interpretation: 71.7% of the respondents replied in affirmative to the above question, which is quite a large percentage. It highlights the potential for instagram as a platform for learning new ideas and concepts

Q6. Did you get the correct information on the topic so searched?



Interpretation: This question is a sub-question of the previous one. In comparison to 71.7% of the respondents who said yes to searching information on instagram, 63.3% of them agreed that they got the information which they searched for while the 38.7% replied in negative. This could either be because they used incorrect key words or that unlike Google, instagrams search algorithm is developed to show the most trending content, not the content which is relevant to the topic in question.

Q7. Has Instagram aided you in any way in enhancing knowledge of a particular subject? (By way of posts, reels)

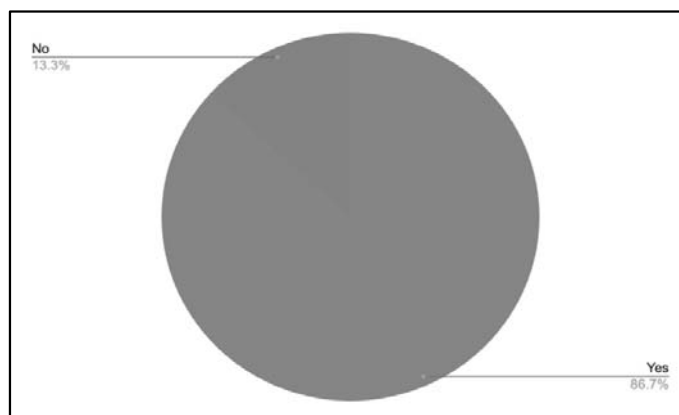


Interpretation: The response to the above question has proved the researcher's hypothesis regarding the feasibility of instagram as a source for sharing knowledge. A massive 86.7% of the respondents agreed to the fact that in some or the other way instagram has helped them enhance knowledge either by way of posts, reels, or advertisements.

The platform which was originally started as a photo sharing platform is now witnessing a paradigm shift with various profiles using a creative mix of communication techniques to deliver learning to the users

Reels are being used as a tool for sharing knowledge about Stock market, Crafts, DIY, General knowledge, History, Current issues, Language learning and Communications on the platform. Videos have been known as a powerful means of communication and instagram is proving it right through the increasing audience engagement levels.

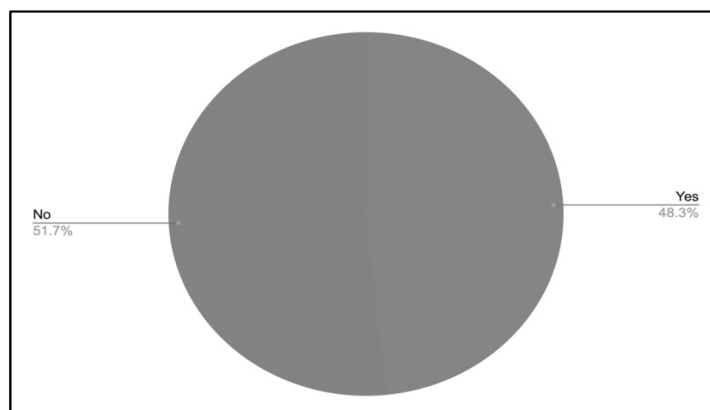
Q8. Have you ever come across any awareness or information sharing posts or reel on instagram which was an advertisement?



Interpretation: Content creators advertise their videos and circulate them across the platform to increase their views and engagement with the users. These advertisements are created in such a way so that the audiences get attracted and enticed towards those profiles. While this gives users exposure to new ideas and information, it also puts them at risk of falling prey to scams or false news and information.

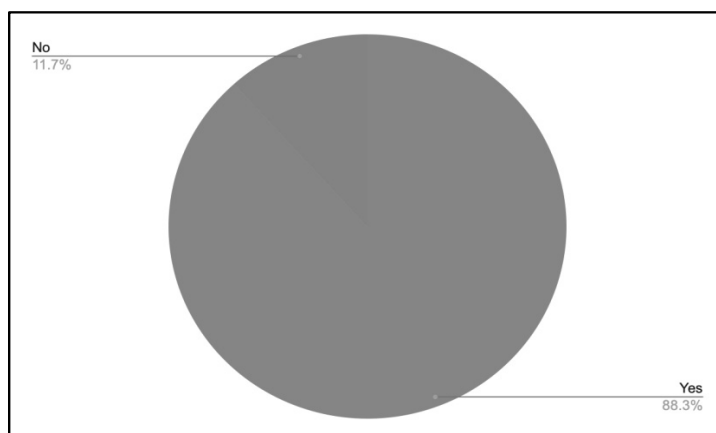
The fact that 86.7% of respondents replied in affirmative about such posts means there is an urgent need for enforcement of proper content labelling guidelines so that users can distinguish information from advertisements.

Q9. According to you has instagram been able to stop the spread the malicious or false knowledge (ex; information about miracle cures aka chamatkari totke)



Interpretation: The response to the above questions raises a very big concern about the ability of the platform to control the spread of false content. The fact that more than half the respondents (51.7%) replied in negative goes to show that the platform has a long way to go before it can claim to be a source of trustworthy and authentic knowledge

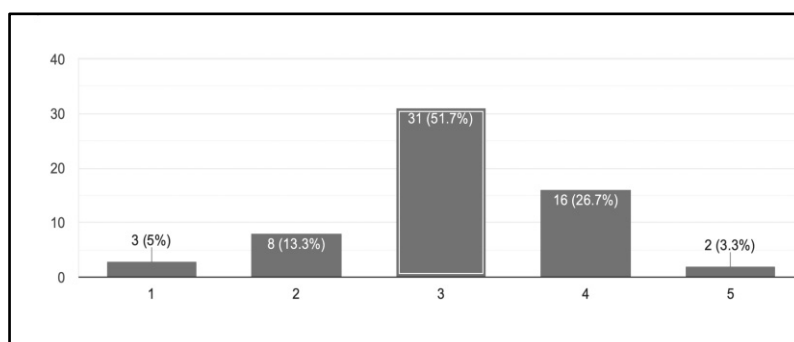
Q9. Do you think there is a need for stricter norms regarding posting and propagation of knowledge regarding sensitive fields like cooking, education, and medicine on Instagram?



Interpretation: Cooking, Education and Medicine are very sensitive topics. Any mistake or misconduct regarding the subject matter in any of these topics can have disastrous consequences and can even put lives at risk as could be seen during the misinformation boom during covid.

88.3% of the respondents agreed that sensitive information which is posted on the platform should be properly scrutinised before it is made available to the public to avoid any adverse impact on the society. There must be proper guidance for the people sharing information and proper review should be done beforehand.

Q10. As it stands currently, on a scale of 1 to 5 what would you rate the credibility/trustworthiness of knowledge currently available on Instagram?



Interpretation: 51.7% of the sample respondents gave the 'average' rating of 3 when asked about the credibility or trustworthiness of the information available on the platform. This shows that a lot of people are in two minds about the authenticity of information that is available on the application. This group

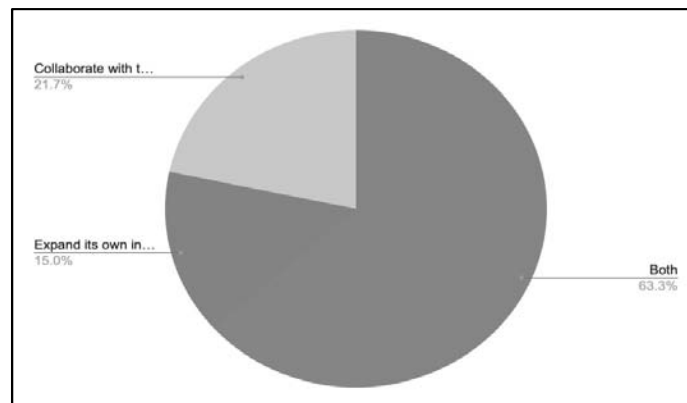
of respondents could be swayed either way depending on how instagram works on the prevention of misinformation on the platform .While the current trend is on the positive side as can be seen with almost 1/3rd of respondents[18] giving the application a rating of 4 and above,11 respondents have given a bad trustworthiness rating of 2 and below .

Q11. Which of the following approaches do you think should be taken by Instagram in the future to ensure safety propagation of information and ideas.

Collaborate with third party fact checking platforms for moderation and verification

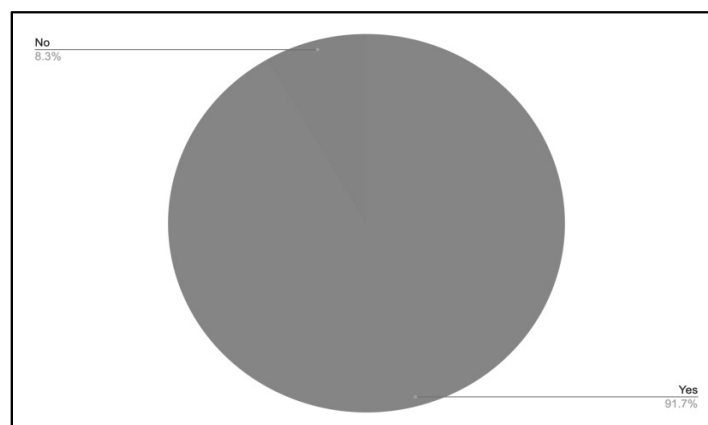
Expand its own inhouse content moderation team

Both



Interpretation: This question is an extension of the previous questions about the trustworthiness of the platform and spread of misinformation on the platform with 63.3 of the users affirming that the platform should either develop and increase its internal moderation teams to verify content or work with third or it should outsource the same to a third party so that the information and ideas can be shared in a safe and welcoming environment.

Q12. With the development of better user experience do you think Social media platforms like Instagram can be used as an effective knowledge sharing forum?



Interpretation: 91.7% of the respondents agreed that if better and safer user experience is developed by the platform, it could become the knowledge sharing platform of the future.

This once again proves that the platform has massive potential to become an open-source learning platform of the future

Observations

1. The researchers had aimed at a target audience belonging to the age group of 0-30 years since that is when the maximum learning tends to happen in a person's life and were successful in doing the same with 88.3 % percent of the respondents belonging to the age bracket while exactly 50% identified as students.
2. A vast majority of the respondents [65%] viewed instagram as a platform where they share and learn meaningful content alongside getting their daily dose of entertainment.
3. A similar percentage [71.7%] had also searched for a topic of interest on the application while an astounding 86.7% stated that instagram had helped them enhance their knowledge of a particular subject.
4. But there are major problems faced by the users as well with 36.7 percent of users not getting the correct information on the topic of interest which is a very large number.
5. The issue of disguised advertisement is very prominent as well with 85 % of the respondents having seen such advertisements masquerading as informative posts or reels.
6. Instagrams ability to stop the spread of false information has come across as insufficient as well with 51.7% of respondents replying in negative to the question on the same while a staggering 88.3% affirmed the need the need for stricter norms in relation to sensitive information. The user trust also remains average with half the respondents giving the platform a rating of 3.
7. The response to the last two questions shows that as an application instagram has a very massive potential to make learning a fun and engaging experience [91.7%] but for that it will have to work on creating an atmosphere of trust and safety by either expanding its own team or working with third parties.

Suggestions

1. Need for better content verification systems

A big takeaway from the survey was the fact that half the users agreed that instagram has been unable to stop the spread of false information.

This would be a major impediment in its endeavour to be a trustworthy information sharing platform with the only solution for this problem being improvisation in the content verification systems of the application.

2. Stricter advertising norms

While the ASCI [Advertising standards council of India] has created norms for influencers regarding advertisements on the platform, they are rarely followed or enforced putting users at risk of fraudulent schemes.

It is high time Instagram created its own advertising protocol which can help users distinguish the genuine knowledge from the false clickbait advertisements.

3. Development of better user experience

In the continuation of the final question where more than 90 percent of users agreed that a better user experience is the need of the hour, it is high time that Instagram walks the talk and moves away from the negative user experience it tends to offer at present.

It is important that the platform makes a shift from the trolling and negative ideologies that often spread faster than positivity and genuine content.

Then and only then shall it truly emerge as a great platform for learning of new ideas....

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to Investigate about the potential for Instagram to develop into an authentic and trustworthy knowledge sharing platform through primary data collection from the respondents through proper surveys. More than half of the participants believe that social media platforms like Instagram are currently advantageous in knowledge gaining and indirect learning if used correctly.

A lot of participants also depicted their view about the trustworthiness and credibility of the information that is shared among the platforms. According to them stricter norms and procedures shall be depicted before any content posting happens on Instagram. This practice will develop a trust relationship between the users of Instagram.

Slowly there is a shift happening from entertainment towards learning on Instagram. Looking forward in the future it can happen that schools, colleges and Universities will become a part of Instagram and will teach the students who are a part on Instagram through open learning.

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