STUDY ON REGULATING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS LIKE INSTAGRAM

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Abstract:

As social media platforms like Instagram continue to dominate digital interactions, concerns about user safety have become increasingly prominent. It is a known fact that Instagram is used by all the age groups, especially the teenagers who are exposed to the dark world of internet at such an early age.

This research examines the need for regulatory frameworks to create a safer environment for users, addressing issues such as cyberbullying, harmful content, data privacy breaches, and the psychological effects of social media usage. It explores Instagram's current safety measures, identifies gaps in protecting vulnerable groups, and evaluates the platform's role in fostering safe digital spaces. The study highlights the importance of the putting an age-limit on a platform like Instagram. Also at the same time, we are focusing on the community guidelines which are framed by a particular country are beneficial for that particular country. In such a situation, what rules should the other countries follow? The researcher has also emphasized the abuse faced mainly by women and the LGBTQ community on Instagram. For this study, the researcher will use primary data where a questionnaire will be prepared keeping in mind the aims and objectives of the study and circulated the Instagram users, mainly the younger population.

By proposing practical strategies and regulatory recommendations for every nation, this research aims to guide policymakers and platform developers toward ensuring Instagram is a secure and empowering platform for all users.

Keywords – *social media, social media platforms, Instagram, Instagram posts, reels, regulations, rules, cyber bullying.*

Introduction:

Social media platforms have become an integral part of modern life, influencing how individuals communicate, share information, and engage with the world. Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as one of the most popular, with billions of active users worldwide. Initially designed for photo and video sharing, Instagram has evolved into a powerful tool for social interaction, brand marketing, and digital activism. However, as its influence grows, so do concerns about its impact on privacy, mental health, misinformation, and digital ethics. These concerns have sparked global discussions about the need for regulatory measures to ensure the platform operates responsibly while protecting user rights.

One of the primary reasons for regulating Instagram and similar social media platforms is the growing issue of misinformation and harmful content. Despite Instagram's policies to curb the spread of false information, misleading posts, conspiracy theories, and harmful narratives continue to circulate widely. The ease with which misinformation spreads can have serious consequences, from affecting public health (as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic) to influencing political outcomes. Without effective regulatory oversight, social media companies often rely on self-

regulation, which may be inadequate or inconsistent in addressing these challenges.

Another pressing concern is data privacy and user security. Instagram collects vast amounts of user data, including personal information, location details, browsing behavior, and engagement patterns. While this data helps personalize user experiences, it also raises ethical questions about consent, data ownership, and potential misuse. Scandals involving data breaches and unauthorized data sharing have heightened calls for stricter regulations to ensure transparency in how companies handle user data. Many advocates argue that stronger data protection laws, similar to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), should be applied universally to platforms like Instagram.

The impact of Instagram on mental health, particularly among young users, has also fueled debates on regulation. Studies suggest that excessive social media use can contribute to anxiety, depression, and negative body image, especially among teenagers. The platform's algorithm-driven content recommendations often prioritize engagement over well-being, exposing users to unrealistic beauty standards and potentially harmful content. Regulatory measures could enforce stricter content moderation policies and require platforms to implement safeguards that promote mental well-being.

This research paper aims to explore the various dimensions of regulating Instagram, examining existing legal frameworks, ethical considerations, and the potential impact of new policies. By analyzing these issues, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on achieving a balanced and effective regulatory approach for social media platforms.

Aims & Objectives:

1. To study the current state of regulation on social media platforms like Instagram.

2. To analyze the impact of regulation on the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and other harmful content on Instagram.

3. To investigate the impact of regulations for the users.

4. To examine users' perceptions and habits.

5. To develop recommendations for better rules and regulations in every country for Instagram users.

Research methodology:

The researcher has used both primary and secondary data for this study. For primary data, a survey was conducted with the help of a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 16 questions with 13 closed ended questions and 3 open ended questions. In total, 64 respondents filled the questionnaire. For secondary data, the researcher studied cases like 'Bois Locker Room', 'Kolkata Rape case,' and 'Atul Subash Case.'

Literature review :

Social media dynamics constantly shift. Yet, Instagram stands firm as a leader with over a billion active users. As Instagram's influence grows, so does the importance of adhering to its community guidelines. Understanding the rules to follow will help you avoid penalties and create a positive and engaging online presence.

As 2024 unfolds, staying informed on the latest Instagram guidelines is crucial. This article digs into the dos and don'ts, offering a comprehensive guide to help you thrive on this platform.

Understanding Instagram Community Guidelines

Instagram community guidelines are the rules the platform sets to create a safe and respectful environment. They cover various aspects of user behavior and content, aiming to ensure a positive experience for everyone. Violating these guidelines can result in content removal, account suspension, or shadowbans, severely affecting visibility and engagement.

These guidelines cover:

Content Safety: Prohibiting harmful or violent content. This ensures that Instagram remains a safe space for all users, protecting them from distressing or dangerous material.

Privacy: Respecting other users' privacy and personal information. Violating someone's privacy can lead to severe consequences, including legal action.

Authenticity: Encouraging authentic interactions and content. Genuine engagement fosters a trustworthy community and enhances user experience.

Respect: Promoting respectful behavior among users. Upholding respect prevents harassment and bullying, contributing to a supportive and positive environment. Understanding and adhering to these guidelines is essential to avoid penalties like having an Instagram post removed for a community guidelines violation.

DOs for 2024:

Following the Instagram post removed community guidelines help avoid penalties and enhances your account's credibility and engagement.

1. **Create Original Content**

    Originality is critical on Instagram. Always strive to produce unique, engaging content that reflects your personality or brand identity. This sets you apart from others and creates a deeper connection with your audience. Avoid reposting content without proper credit or permission, which can lead to copyright issues and penalties.

2. **Engage Respectfully with Your Audience**

    Interactions on Instagram should be respectful and positive. Respond to comments and messages courteously, and avoid engaging in arguments or negative discussions. This approach creates a welcoming atmosphere and encourages more people to engage with your content. Maintaining a respectful tone helps build a loyal and engaged following, which is essential for long-term success.

3. **Use Hashtags Wisely**

    Hashtags are powerful tools for increasing your content's visibility. However, overusing or misusing hashtags can lead to a shadowban, significantly reducing your reach. Use relevant and popular hashtags sparingly and mix them with niche-specific ones to reach your target audience effectively. This strategy helps you tap into broader trends while staying connected to your specific community.

4. **Respect Intellectual Property**

    Always respect the intellectual property of others. Use content you have created or have permission to use to avoid legal complications. Correctly attribute any content you share from other sources, and avoid posting anything that infringes on someone else's rights. This practice keeps you within legal boundaries and shows respect for the original creators.

5. **Comply with Instagram's Policies**

    Stay updated with Instagram's policies and guidelines. Instagram regularly updates its community guidelines, so ensure you are aware of any changes to avoid unintentional Instagram community guidelines violation. Regularly review the Instagram guidelines 2024 to stay compliant and ensure your content remains in good standing. [1]

Don'ts for 2024:

Knowing what to avoid is equally important to having a positive IG presence.

1. **Avoid Spamming**

    Posting excessively or sharing repetitive content can be considered spammy behavior. This can annoy your followers and lead to penalties from

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[1] https://www.spikerz.com/blog/instagram-guidelines-2024-dos-and-donts

Instagram, including reduced reach or account suspension. Maintain a consistent but reasonable posting schedule to keep your audience engaged without overwhelming them. A well-planned content calendar can help you stay organized and avoid the pitfalls of spamming.

2. Don't Use Banned Hashtags

Using banned or inappropriate hashtags can lead to a shadowban or other penalties. Banned hashtags are those that Instagram has flagged due to misuse or association with inappropriate content. Always research and avoid using such hashtags in your posts and use Spikerz banned Hashtag Checker. Using clean and relevant hashtags ensures your content remains visible and aligns with the platform's standards.

3. Refrain from Posting Harmful Content

IG has strict policies against harmful content, including hate speech, violence, and graphic content. Posting such content can result in severe penalties, including account suspension or permanent removal. Ensure your content aligns with Instagram's safety and respect guidelines to protect your account and audience.

4. Avoid Engagement in Spammy Activities

Buying followers, likes, or engagement can harm your account's credibility and lead to penalties. Instagram's algorithms are designed to detect and penalize inauthentic engagement. Focus on organic growth strategies to build a genuine following, which is more sustainable and beneficial in the long run. Authentic engagement fosters trust and builds a loyal community.

5. Don't Share Misleading Information

Sharing false or misleading information can lead to a violation of community guidelines. Always verify the accuracy of the information you share and avoid spreading rumors or unverified news. This helps maintain trust with your audience and prevents penalties from Instagram, such as content removal or account suspension. Upholding integrity in your posts keeps you compliant and strengthens your reputation.

Addressing Shadowbans and Penalties:

Understanding shadowbans is crucial for maintaining your account's visibility. A shadowban can occur when Instagram restricts your content's visibility without notifying you directly. This happens when users violate community guidelines repeatedly.

How to Avoid a Shadowban:

To avoid a shadowban, adhere strictly to IG's community guidelines. Use hashtags responsibly, engage authentically, and avoid any behavior perceived as spammy or harmful. Regularly review your account for any potential violations and rectify them promptly.

Using Spikerz to Address Shadowbans:

Spikerz is a powerful social media security tool designed to help users identify and address shadowbans.The Spikerz Shadowban Calculator provides insights into whether your account is experiencing a shadowban and offers solutions to mitigate it. Additionally, the detailed Shadowban Calculator provides an in-depth analysis of your account's status, helping you understand the reasons behind the shadowban and how to resolve them.

Recovering from Penalties:

If your account has been penalized, immediately remedy the issue. Review the platform's community guidelines and identify where you went wrong. Remove any content that violates the guidelines and submit an appeal if you believe the penalty was misapplied. Maintaining a clean and compliant

account will help you recover from penalties more quickly.[2]

Bois Locker Room:

The group, "Bois Locker Room", is believed to comprise young schoolboys in the capital, Delhi.

Screenshots of chats on the group have been shared widely on social media.

The incident has caused outrage in Delhi, which is already seen as one of India's most unsafe cities for women.

Several Instagram users who had been made aware of its existence began posting about the group and calling out members for their behaviour.

It turned out that members were sharing images of their classmates and other underage girls without their knowledge or consent along with crude comments ranging from body shaming to jokes on sexual assault and rape.

The screenshots began to be widely shared on WhatsApp as well as Twitter and other social media platforms.

But Shubham Singh, a cyber expert who works closely with law enforcement and was one of the first people to begin investigating the group, has cautioned that many of these screenshots look edited.

He added that there appeared to be a mix of images from this group and some similar groups that exist on other social media platforms like Snapchat.

He said he started looking into the group after some Instagram users got in touch with him and sent him screenshots.

"I tried to investigate it properly but no-one was coming forward to file a complaint. So we tried to find out who was behind the group. They had deleted their Instagram accounts but through the screenshots and some tools, I was able to trace them," he said.

Mr Singh then passed on the information to the police, which has now led to one teenager being taken into custody. [3]

An online group allegedly involving teenage boys from Delhi schools casually talking about rape, sexual objectification and slut-shaming schoolgirls has set off a storm on social media. Delhi Police has filed cases linked to the Instagram group, which has now been deactivated.

The cyber-crime division of the police has also written to Facebook-owned Instagram for details on the group that is every parent's worst nightmare.

The controversy flared on Sunday after several social media users posted screenshots on Instagram and Twitter of an online group called "Bois Locker Room".

They show members of the group - said to be Class 11 and 12 students from some of Delhi's top schools - posting photos of teenage girls without their consent along with comments too crude to be reproduced.

#BoysLockerRoom. A Delhi Students' Group Chat Is Every Parent's Nightmare

Members of the Instagram group "Bois Locker Room" posted photos of teenage girls without their consent along with obscene comments.

New Delhi:

An online group allegedly involving teenage boys from Delhi schools casually talking about rape, sexual objectification and slut-shaming schoolgirls has set off a storm on social media. Delhi Police has filed cases linked to the Instagram group, which has now been deactivated.

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[2] Ibid 1

[3] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52541298

Twitter of an online group called "Bois Locker Room".

They show members of the group - said to be Class 11 and 12 students from some of Delhi's top schools - posting photos of teenage girls without their consent along with comments too crude to be reproduced.

A number of conversations purportedly showed members talking about sexual assault often against their own classmates, raising questions about normalising of rape, misogyny and objectification in schools.

Leaked screenshots showed rape threats on the group. The allegations triggered outrage on social media with the top trending hashtag #BoysLockerRoom amassing thousands of posts on Twitter and other platforms.

The Delhi Commission for Women Chairperson Swati Maliwal called for the arrest of those associated with the group.

"The DCW has sent notices to Instagram and Delhi Police. We want these boys to be arrested immediately and the strongest action to be taken against them," she told NDTV.[4]

Kolkata Rape Case:

Tens of thousands of women in West Bengal state marched through the streets on Wednesday night in protest against the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at a state-run hospital in Kolkata last week.

The Reclaim the Night march was the culmination of nearly a week of frenzied protests ignited by the brutal killing of the 31-year-old at the RG Kar Medical College last Friday. [5]

Hypothesis:

There should be strict regulations on social media platforms like Instagram

Null hypothesis

There should not be strict regulations on social media platforms like Instagram.

Limitations:

1. There was time constraint due to which data could not be collected from many people.
2. Non users of Instagram could not take part in this study.

Observations & Findings:
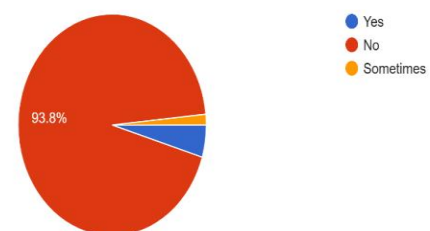
Some of the findings from primary data are as below:-

Do you follow the community guidelines of Instagram?
64 responses

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
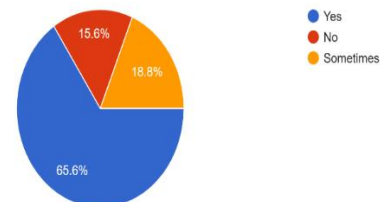
Primary Data

65.6% - Yes, 15.6% - No, 18.8% - Sometimes

Have you ever misbehaved on Instagram and used inappropriate words for someone?
64 responses

- Yes
- No
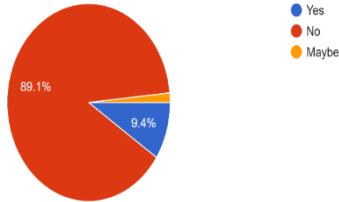- Sometimes

Primary Data

93.8% - No

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[4] https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/boyslockerroom-bois-locker-room-delhi-schoolboys-chat-on-gang-rape-on-instagram-2223185
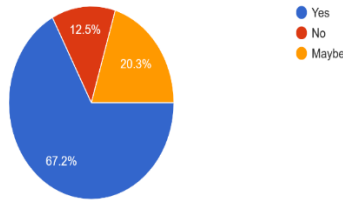
[5] https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crmwj4z1xpko

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Have you been a victim of abuse on Instagram by someone?
64 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

89.1%   9.4%

Primary Data

89.1%- No, 9.4% - Yes

Do you think Instagram should have stricter rules?
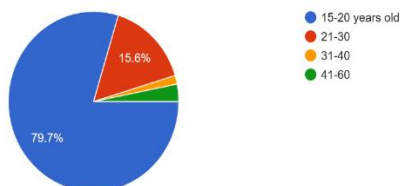64 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

12.5%   20.3%   67.2%

Primary Data

67.2% - Yes, 12.5%- No, 20.3%- Maybe

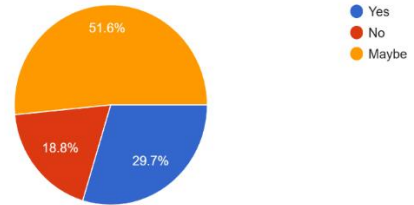Do you think there should be a age limit on Instagram?
64 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

85.9%
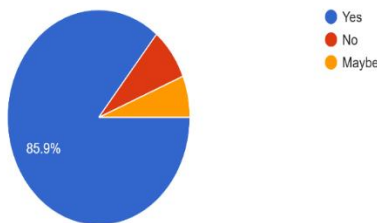
Primary Data

85.9% - Yes

Who do you think misuses Instagram the most (age group)
64 responses

- 15-20 years old
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-60

15.6%   79.7%

Primary Data

79.7% - 15-20 years old, 15.6% - 21- 30 years old

Do you think other countries have better rules on Instagram than India?
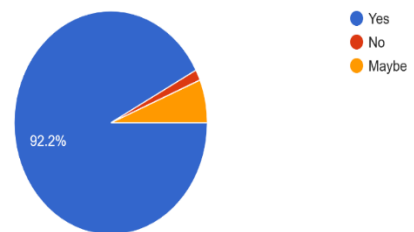64 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

51.6%   18.8%   29.7%

Primary Data

51.6% - Maybe

Do you think the bot profiles & fake profiles are responsible for the inappropriate behavior on Instagram?
64 responses

- Yes
- No
- Not always

34.4%   59.4%
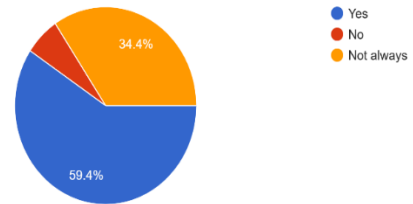
Primary Data

59.4% - Yes, 34.4% - Not always

Do you think these bot profiles & fake profiles should be banned?
64 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

92.2%

Primary Data - 92.2% - YES

Analysis:

The primary data contained a questionnaire with 16 questions. Some of the questions are mentioned above in the observation. All the questions were directed to the app – Instagram. Most of the users of Instagram believed that we need stricter rules and regulations for

Instagram and also, we need a strict age limit factor for Instagram.

Most of the participants of this study follow the guidelines of Instagram. Also, they have never misbehaved on Instagram and at the same time, they have never been abused on this app. On apps like Instagram – bullying and harassing is mainly and give and take. If you abuse someone, then they abuse you back. Majority of them believed that Instagram should put an age limit factor. This will keep away the younger population who mainly indulge in such inappropriate and abusive behavior. Also, Instagram can take help of AI to filter the abusive comments not just in English language but other languages as well. This will help in finding out the problematic content from across the world.

Conclusion:

The major focus of the study as discussed in the aims and objectives was to find whether age limit is the real problem behind the inappropriate behavior on Instagram. And through both secondary as well as primary data it was found the age factor is one of the major culprits of indecent behavior on Instagram. Along with this, the lenient rules and regulations also contribute to his problem.

Therefore, these two points should be taken into consideration to make Instagram a safe place for the users. The age-limit factor must be taken seriously and some id proof should be asked while making an account. Also, Mr. Zukerberg can make use of AI to generate tools that would find out the problematic content in almost all the languages.

References:

1. *Spikerz. (2024, February 1). Instagram guidelines for 2024: Do's and don'ts. Spikerz.*

2. *BBC News. (2020, May 5). Bois Locker Room: Indian teens' lewd Instagram group causes outrage. BBC News.*

3. *NDTV. (2020, May 4). *'Boys Locker Room': Delhi schoolboys chat on gang rape on Instagram. NDTV.*

4. *BBC NEWS. (2024, August 15). Indian women lead night protests after doctor's rape and murder. BBC.*