

Decoding Algorithmic Impact

Investigating how Instagram Reels feed shape self-perception in young females

(Research for Design)



Why is this important?

More than 35% Americans said **physical attractiveness** is what society values most in women.

According to American Beauty standards, physically attractive women are white, **thin**, and blue-eyed.

Women trying to match these standards go through issues like: **body dissatisfaction, negative self-image and low mental health**.

In today's digital world, **social media** is the main platform for promoting beauty standards therefore, shaping how women perceive themselves.

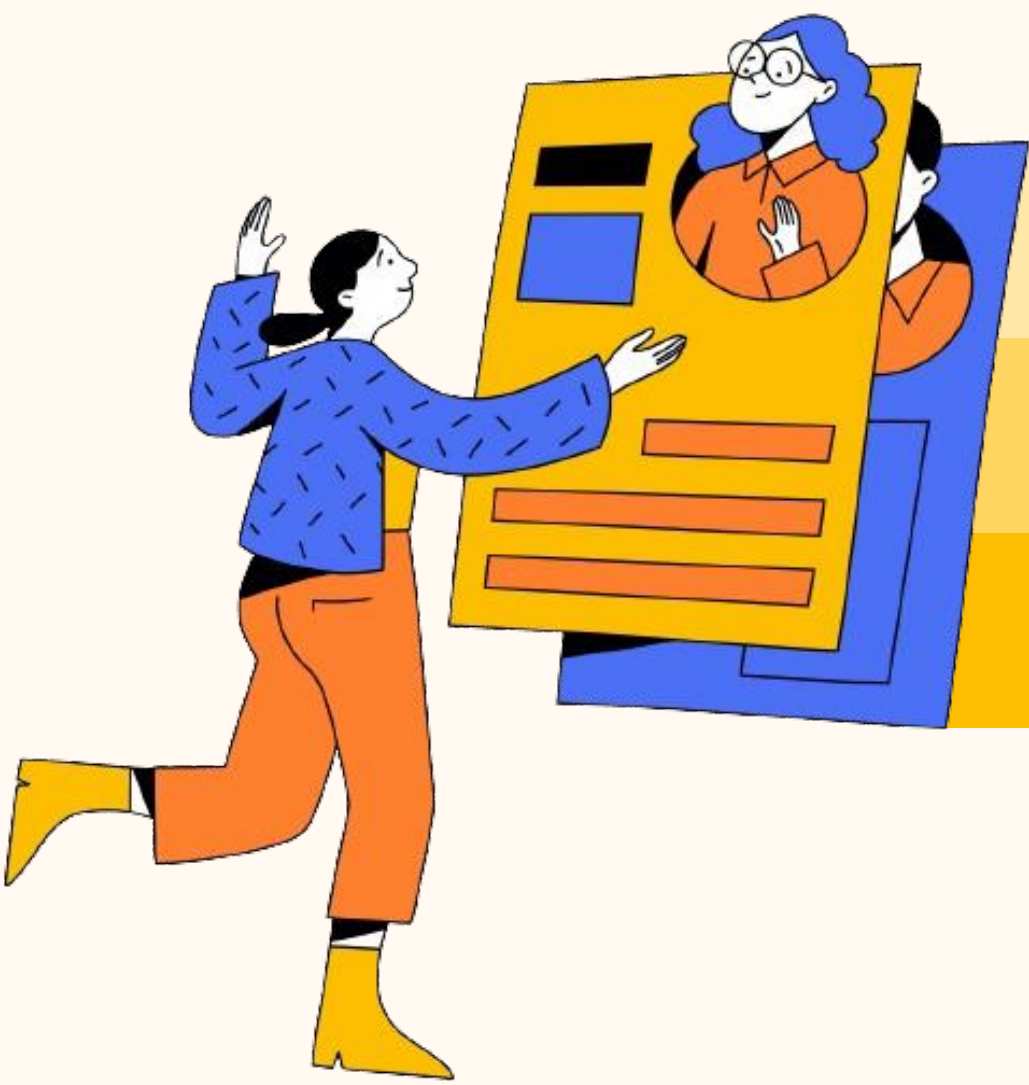
Instagram being the preferred platform for 54% American women.

Who is affected?

- Females, 18 - 24 years old
- Frequent social-media (Instagram) users
- Minimum 2-3 hours of reels scrolling daily
- Preferably comparison conscious



Exposure to such content for an extended period of time has multiple short / long-term impacts:



- Immediate Impact: neutral, entertained
- Short-term Impact: starts comparing
- Long-term Impact: low self-confidence

Self-perception (long-run)



Mood (short-run)

How do body positive posts on Instagram (reels) influence self-perception in short / long terms, particularly when women's mood is used as a lens?

Study Procedure (4 weeks, N=10)

Experimental Group:

5 participants were exposed to body - positive content on instagram reels

Control Group:

5 participants used their usual instagram account's reels feed for this study

Mood Tracking:

after every session of scrolling through Instagram reels.

Snapshot:

once everyday, participants are asked to click a picture of themselves and reflect about their feelings.

Focus Group:

weekly check-in to see if process is going smoothly and iterate experiment if needed.

Results

Artifacts generated by experimental group participants showed that exposure to body positive content in a balanced amount made them **think positively** about themselves. They admitted that they were **stuck in the loop** of contents that were making them think less about themselves subconsciously. When applying this particular case's results to a general scenario we can see that:

01

Interaction metrics (likes, comments) are insufficient for understanding user sentiment

02

Exposing users to positive content gradually led to more positive emotions.

03

Highlighting the potential for unconscious emotional manipulation through curated content.

04

Even after intervention, the Instagram algorithm continued to promote trending content, introducing negativity.

In conclusion, **showing** people more **positive content** on Reels and **giving more user control** on what they see most can actually help them feel better about themselves in the long run, even though the app's system can trick them into feeling bad.

Can we create a social media experience that promotes both positive self-perception and exposure to diverse viewpoints?

Finding the right balance could be key to a healthy online future for young people.