

## How Instagram Shapes Teenage Fitness and Lifestyle Choices

Aanya Doshi

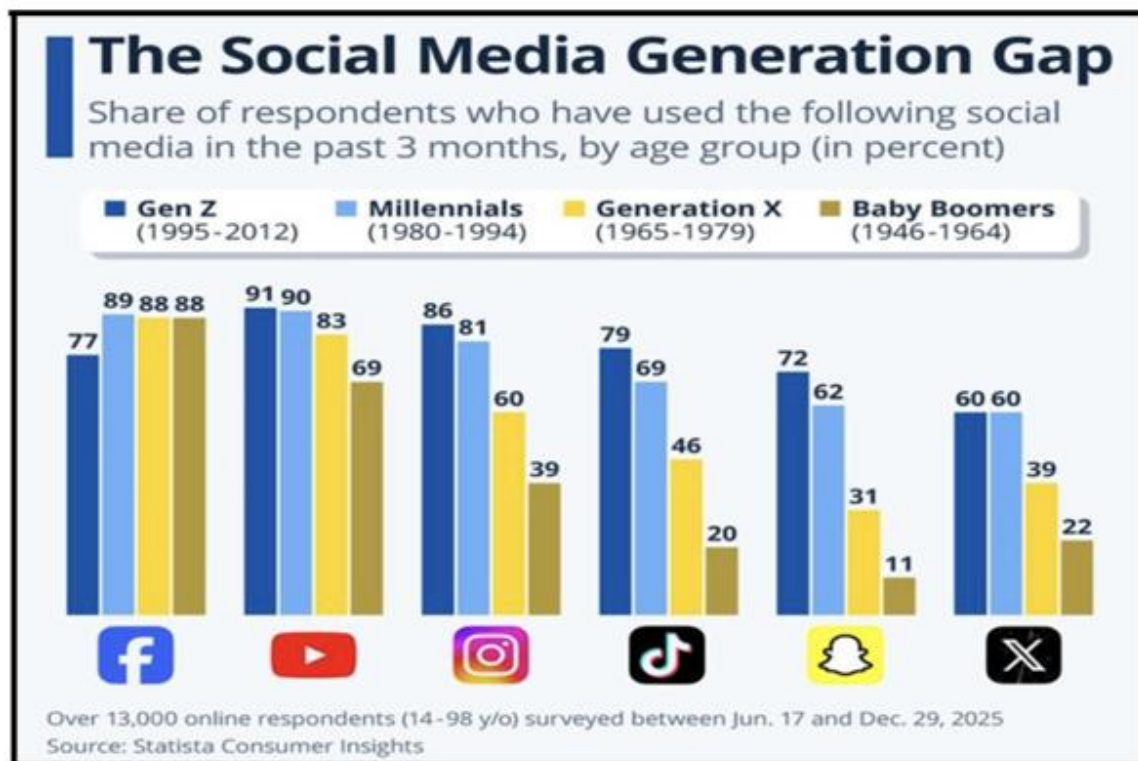
The Cathedral and John Connon School Mumbai

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2026.v11i05.042 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2026.v11i05.042>

Received: 17 May 2025 / Accepted: 24 May 2026 / Published: 30 May 2026

### Introduction

Instagram is one of the most used social media platforms among teenagers today and plays a big role in shaping their habits and decisions. Marketing promotions, fitness and health videos as well as fashion trends have a large influence on their lifestyle choices, affecting their personal health and body image. By studying how Instagram affects these decisions, this research aims to understand the positive and negative impacts of social media on the younger generation of this world. Instagram influences teenagers through influencer culture, comparison, and curated lifestyles — creating both motivation and pressure.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Social media platforms like Instagram have been getting more and more popular among teenagers and have become highly influential in shaping teenage decision making whether it's about fitness or lifestyle in general. The social comparison theory by Leon Festinger was made in 1954, way before social media was even created but it talks about how people naturally compare themselves to others around them to evaluate their own abilities, appearance and measure success. In today's world, teenagers compare their physical appearance, lifestyles or achievements to peers and influencers online which can have a detrimental effect on their self-esteem and confidence.

Additionally, Influencer culture also has a major part to play in shaping teenage choice. Influencers promote products, fitness routines and lifestyles that appeal to young audiences, most of which are paid sponsorships or endorsements and not actual incorporations in their daily routines. As influencers are viewed as relatable or as a role model, teenagers are more likely to blindly follow whatever they do. By imitating online habits, following random trends and buying promoted products, teenagers fall into a trance trying to meet unrealistic expectations set by these influencers, impacting their mental health and confidence levels.

Moreover, several researchers and studies have examined the effect that social media and Instagram has on teenagers. According to Pew Research statistics, social media platforms are widely used by teenagers, which makes Instagram an important influence on their daily habits and choices. "The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Heidt talks about how an excess of social media or its overuse is a large contributing factor to anxiety, insecurity and low self esteem among teenagers. Similarly, Jean Tweng's research on technology and teenagers suggests that an increase in the usage of social media can create mental health issues like loneliness, stress and also depression.

## **RESEARCH : QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS**

A questionnaire is a primary data collection method that is conducted to gather quantitative data on how Instagram affects teenage fitness and lifestyle decisions.

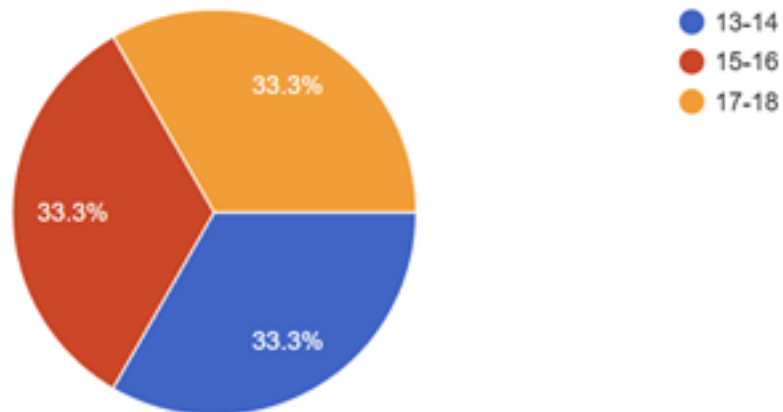
An interview is a primary data collection method that is conducted to collect qualitative data providing deeper insights into teenagers personal opinions and experiences about how Instagrams impact on lifestyle and fitness choices.

### **Main Questions:**

- 1) How often do teenagers engage with fitness and lifestyle trends on Instagram?

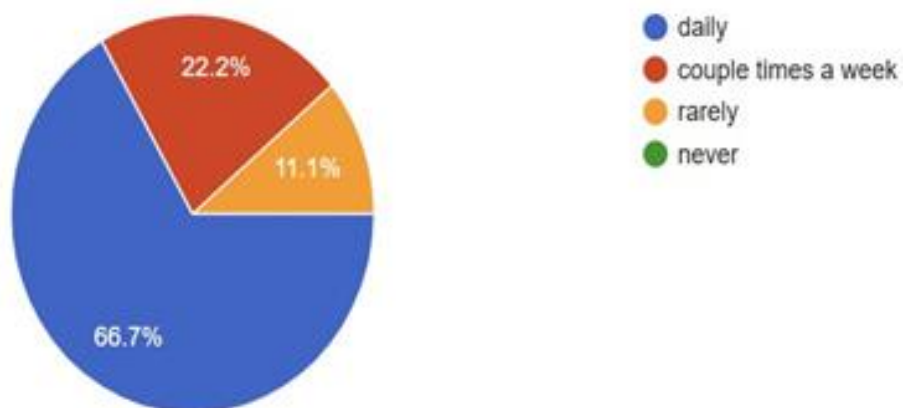
- 2) Which type of content has the strongest impact?
- 3) How aware are teenagers of the difference between real and fake curated content on instagram?

**HOW OLD ARE YOU?**



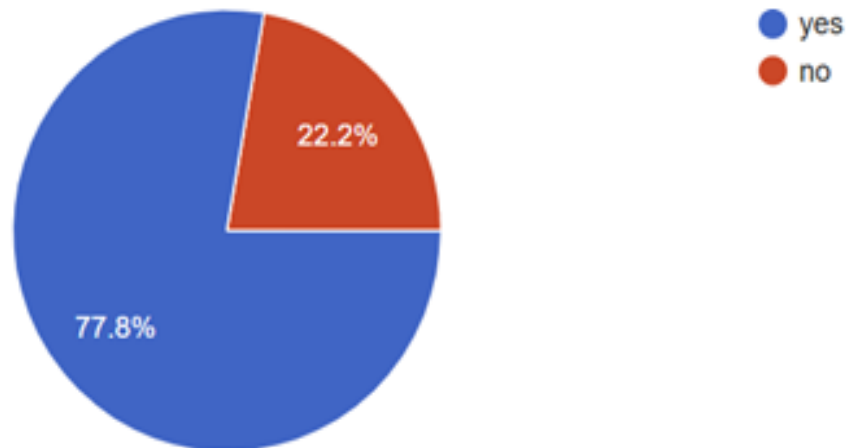
Participants were evenly distributed among all 3 age groups which helped ensure that every single perspective from different stages of adolescence was considered and represented, allowing for a well rounded analysis.

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE INSTAGRAM?**



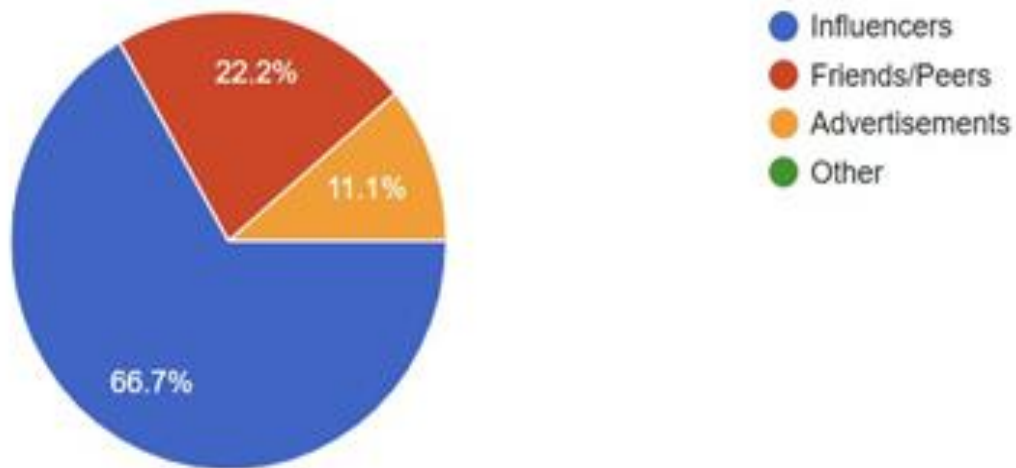
Most teenagers use instagram quite frequently, showing how it is a significant part of their daily routine, increasing its influence on lifestyle and fitness choices, indicating that it can alter perceptions and influence behaviour.

**HAVE INSTAGRAM POSTS INFLUENCED YOU TO BUY OR TRY SOMETHING?**



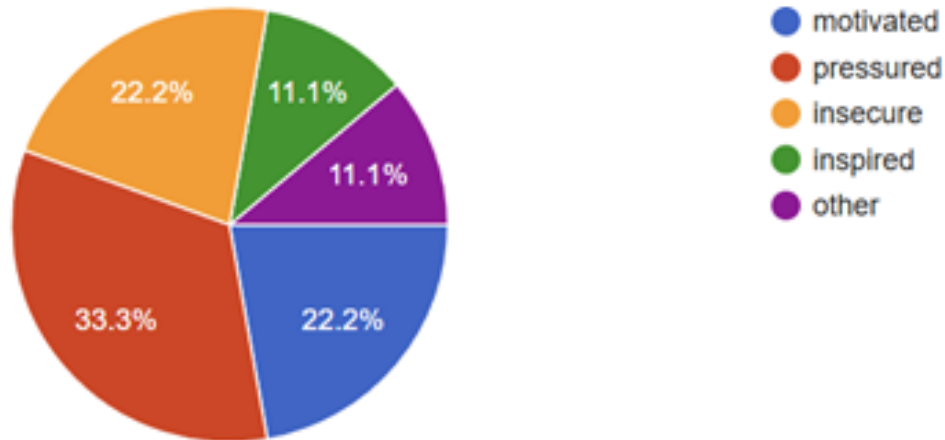
These findings show how instagram content strongly affects teenage decision making and consumer behaviour. Having such a large online identity and media exposure can greatly affect consumer behaviour.

**WHICH TYPE OF CONTENT INFLUENCES YOU THE MOST?**



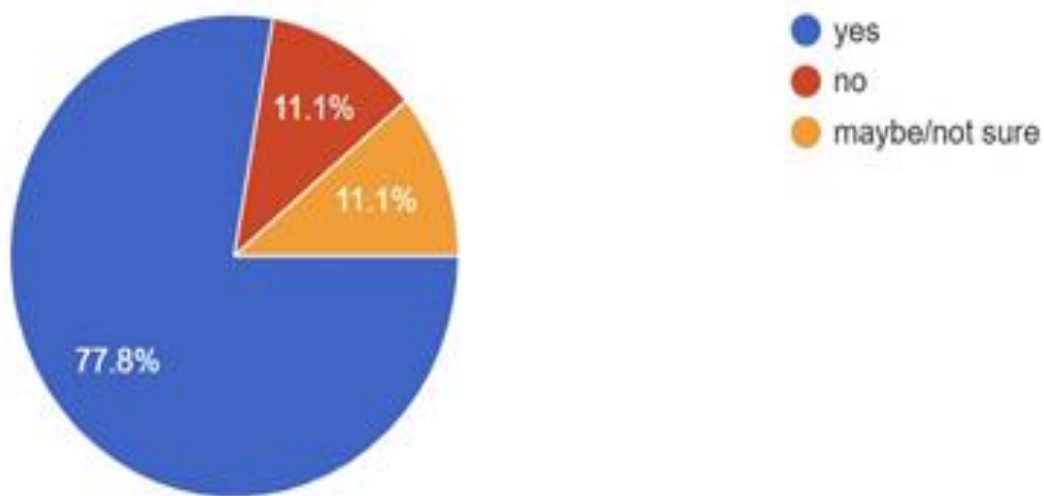
This shows how influencers have the greatest impact on teenage opinions and lifestyle choices, maybe because they are portrayed as role models whose opinions can appear trustworthy and aspirational to many teenagers around the world. Whereas, lesser people were influenced by friends, peers and advertisements. Unrealistic expectations set by them can lead to body dissatisfaction, social pressures and constant comparison.

**HOW DO FITNESS AND LIFESTYLE POSTS MAKE YOU FEEL?**



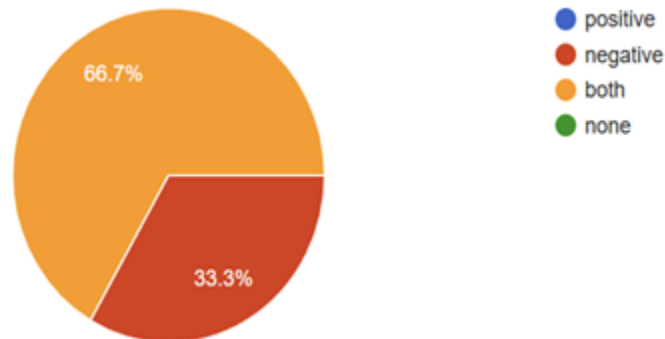
This varied response reveals how Instagram has both positive and negative effects on the emotions of teenagers. Some may feel motivated or inspired by the online content - positive influence can boost productivity, self confidence and increase healthy habits. Whereas some may feel pressured and insecure due to the unrealistic beauty standards set by society and the lifestyles that are curated and carefully edited online, leading to mental strain and self doubt.

**DO YOU COMPARE YOUR LIFESTYLE TO OTHERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA?**



This suggests that instagram heavily encourages comparison socially which can have a large impact on teenage confidence and body image, highlighting its emotional impact and dissatisfaction.

**DO YOU THINK INSTAGRAM HAS A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PEOPLES FITNESS CHOICES?**



These results show how teenagers are aware of both the advantages as well as the disadvantages that come with using instagram. It can surely encourage healthier habits through motivation and encouragement but through that it can set unrealistic expectations for teenagers, creating pressure, anxiety and insecurity.

**CONCLUSION**

The results of the questionnaire showed that Instagram has a significant impact on the fitness and lifestyle of teenagers. People are always using Instagram. The biggest influence for them is online influencers and trends. The platform impacts on adolescents' purchasing decisions, mental health and their perceptions of self and others. The research found that its impact on teenagers is beneficial and harmful depending on the nature of the content one interacts with and the way one uses the social media platform.

**Interview Questions :**

- 1) Have you ever bought a fitness product or made a lifestyle decision based on something you saw on instagram ?
- 2) Whose posts affect you the most and why?
- 3) How do such posts make you feel about yourself?
- 4) Do you think the things shown on instagram are realistic for people your age? Why or why not?

**Results:**

The interview responses across all 3 age categories revealed several common themes when talking about Instagram's influence on teenage fitness and lifestyle choices. Two major ones were:

- **Mixed emotional impact**

Instagram has a strong influence on teenagers whether its skincare trends or fitness/workout routines. Some felt inspired to improve their habits, lifestyle and appearance whereas some felt insecure, comparing themselves to online influencers.

- **Unrealistic content**

Influencers have professional help, time and money to make a curated, edited, “fake” version of their life. They only show the best and most glamorous parts of their life. This creates an unrealistic standard that teenagers are pressured to meet as this kind of external help is inaccessible to teenagers.

## **COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION OF SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS**

While the interview offered deeper personal insights and emotion based answers that weren't possible in the survey, both had similar results.

Both sets of responses agreed that Instagram strongly influences teenagers especially via trends and influencers and a lot of the content is edited not fully representing real life causing mixed emotions of motivation and insecurity.

Teenagers are constantly exposed to influencers' opinions, routines and product recommendations as it is presented in a highly appealing way, making teenagers more likely to imitate and admire it. Following them closely and sometimes blindly starts to shape their own lifestyle and fitness choices.

Many online posts are heavily edited, have a lot of applied filters or are taken under deliberate lighting and effects which are then carefully selected so that it shows only the highlighted, glamorous parts of their lives and not the unedited realistic parts. Teenagers will then compare themselves to this idealised version of influencers without realising that it doesn't fully reflect their reality which can then lead to frustration and dissatisfaction in their own life or about their appearance.

## **ETHICS, LIMITATIONS AND REFLECTION**

All survey and interview answers were kept anonymous and no personal details were taken during the whole process for privacy issues. Teenage lifestyle choices and views of one's self should always be approached with sensitivity. The limitations for this research that may affect accuracy and generalisability are a small sample size (limited demographic range) which may not be fully representative of all teenagers and interview responses were self-reported which

could have affected accuracy. This study helped gain experience on analysing surveys and interview data.

Instagram behaviors do impact teenagers behaviour, emotions and self perception. I was surprised to see the commonality of teenagers comparing themselves to people online and the extent to which it influences all their decisions.

### **Bibliography**

Pew research center - "teens, social media and technology"  
[https://www.pewresearch.org/?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=23853897313&gbraid=0AAAAA-ddO9GgaE0oHTI7pOOOHIVKqNGvs&gclid=CjwKCAjw8uTOBhAdEiwAVvtJyi9RILtZLGS-U-kpRt8mDUTOIUzoSli3rqi1UZiE-sAvBq\\_jXMPrvBoCNM8QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.pewresearch.org/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23853897313&gbraid=0AAAAA-ddO9GgaE0oHTI7pOOOHIVKqNGvs&gclid=CjwKCAjw8uTOBhAdEiwAVvtJyi9RILtZLGS-U-kpRt8mDUTOIUzoSli3rqi1UZiE-sAvBq_jXMPrvBoCNM8QAvD_BwE)

Haidt, Jonathan. The Anxious Generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness.

Tweng, Jean M. iGen: why today's super connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy-and completely unprepared for adulthood.