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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF INSTAGRAM: FEATURES, ADVERTISING, TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS, AND MARKETING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyse both the evolution and the tactics of Instagram as a marketing tool in the 21st century, paying particular attention to the social media prospect. Instagram, which began as a simple photo-sharing application, has transformed within a decade into a multifaceted application with features including Stories, Reels, IGTV, Shopping, and Live Video. This study focuses on the primary functions of Instagram and how they influence user engagement, brand exposure, and the integration of online shopping. Special emphasis is given on marketing techniques such as business profile optimization, planning, influencer marketing, and post livestreaming features including Reels and Live to evaluate their effectiveness on engagement and conversion metrics. The study also focuses on types of ads and analyses demographic trends to evaluate Instagram users and consumer behaviour. The difference of the value for users and businesses is also explained where users receive personalized interactive engagement and businesses get precise marketing, lead capturing, and enhanced brand loyalty. This underlines the major contribution of Instagram which is its reliance on digital marketing as well as strategic brand communication which is rooted in the review of its ecosystem.

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Introduction:-

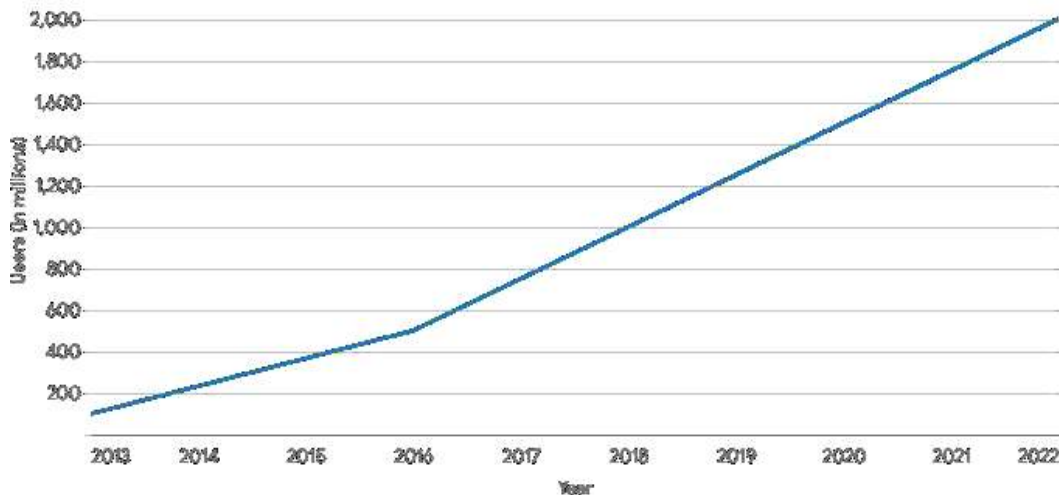
Instagram is a globally popular social media platform focused on visual content sharing. Launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, it quickly became a leading app for photo and video sharing.[1] With features like Stories, Reels, IGTV, and in-app shopping, Instagram has evolved beyond personal networking into a powerful tool for businesses, influencers, and marketers. Its user-friendly interface, engagement-driven algorithm, and diverse content formats make it a key platform for digital marketing, brand promotion, and community building. Today, Instagram continues to innovate, shaping trends in social media and e-commerce.

Background

Instagram was launched on October 6, 2010, by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger as a photo-sharing app. [1] Initially developed under the name "Burbn," the app was later refined to focus solely on photo sharing, leading

to its rebranding as Instagram. Within just two months of its launch, Instagram gained over one million users. Due to its growing popularity, Facebook (now Meta) acquired Instagram in April 2012 for approximately \$1 billion [2]. Over the years, Instagram has evolved from a simple photo-sharing platform into a powerful marketing tool, incorporating features such as Stories, Reels, IGTV, and Shopping. Its headquarters is situated in Menlo Park, California.

Instagram User Growth Over Time



(Fig.1):-

Instagram is a visually driven platform where users can connect, communicate, and share multimedia content. It plays a significant role in B2B and B2C marketing by generating brand awareness and creating engagement.

Businesses use Instagram to highlight their products and services through digital marketing, targeting the right audience at the right place and time. While platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are used for marketing, Instagram is particularly effective due to its high engagement rates and visually appealing content.[3] Marketers can leverage Instagram by creating business pages, posting creative content with product descriptions, and utilizing ads to attract customers and build relationships. Users, on the other hand, can enhance their profiles to build professional credibility, like a digital portfolio.

Features of Instagram

Instagram offers a wide range of features that enhance user engagement, content creation, and business marketing. These features are designed to provide a seamless and interactive experience for both individuals and businesses.

1. **Photo & Video Sharing** – Instagram allows users to share high-quality photos and videos on their feed, providing creative tools such as filters, editing options, and captions to enhance content. Users can also upload multiple images in a single post using the carousel feature.
2. **Stories & Reels** – Instagram Stories enable users to post temporary content that disappears after 24 hours, allowing for more casual and real-time engagement. Reels, on the other hand, are short-form videos designed for entertainment, brand promotion, and viral trends, offering features like music, effects, and creative editing tools.
3. **Instagram Live** – This feature allows users to broadcast live videos in real time, enabling direct interaction with followers through comments and reactions. Businesses and influencers use Instagram Live for Q&A sessions, product launches, behind-the-scenes content, and interviews.[4]
4. **Shopping & E-commerce Integration** – Instagram's shopping features allow businesses to utilize this tool to tag products in their posts and stories, providing visitors with direct purchase links.[5] Features like Instagram Shops, product stickers, and checkout streamline the buying process, enhancing the social commerce experience.

5. Direct Messaging (DMs) & Chat Features – Instagram provides private messaging, allowing users to communicate directly through text, images, and voice messages. Businesses use this feature for customer service, inquiries, and sales conversations.
6. Explore Page – The Explore tab curates personalized content based on user preferences, search history, and engagement patterns. It helps businesses and influencers reach a broader audience and increase brand visibility.
7. Hashtags & Geotags – Hashtags categorize content into searchable topics, making it easier for users to discover relevant posts. Geotags allow location-based tagging, helping businesses attract local audiences and improve discoverability.
8. IGTV (Instagram TV) – IGTV enables long-form video content, making it ideal for in-depth storytelling, interviews, tutorials, and brand promotions. Unlike Reels, IGTV supports videos longer than one minute, catering to users interested in extended content.
9. Collaboration & Tagging – Instagram allows users to collaborate by tagging others in posts, Reels, and Stories. Businesses and influencers frequently use this feature to expand reach and promote cross-marketing efforts.
10. Business & Creator Tools – Business accounts and creator profiles on Instagram gain access to professional insights, analytics, and advertising tools. These features help brands track performance, analyse audience behaviour, and optimize content strategies.

Functions of Instagram



(Fig.2):-

1. Social Networking & Communication – Instagram connects users worldwide through follows, likes, comments, and direct messages. It fosters relationships between individuals, influencers, and businesses, creating a dynamic digital community where users can engage with their favourite content creators and brands.
2. Content Creation & Sharing – Instagram allows users to share high-quality images, videos, and text-based content to express creativity and tell stories. With features like filters, effects, and editing tools, users can enhance their posts and attract more engagement.
3. Brand Promotion & Awareness – Businesses and influencers use Instagram to highlight products, services, and brand values. It serves as a powerful tool to reach a broader audience and capture their attention effectively [6].
4. E-commerce & Shopping Integration – Instagram has become a major player in social commerce. With features like Instagram Shops, product tagging, and in-app checkout, businesses can sell products directly within the platform, simplifying the shopping experience for users.
5. Advertising & Marketing – Instagram provides businesses with advanced advertising tools to reach specific demographics through targeted campaigns. Sponsored posts, story ads, and carousel ads help brands connect with potential customers and drive conversions.
6. Influencer Marketing & Collaboration – The platform is a hub for influencer marketing, where brands partner with influencers to promote products and services. These collaborations leverage trust and authenticity to attract niche audiences and boost engagement.
7. Community Engagement & Interaction – Through features like polls, Q&A stickers, and live streaming, Instagram fosters real-time interaction between users and businesses. This engagement helps brands maintain relationships with their audience and gather valuable feedback.

Marketing Strategies of Instagram-



(Fig.3):-

1. Optimizing Business Profile: An optimized business profile serves as the foundation for Instagram marketing. Businesses should ensure their profile is visually appealing and informative, including a high-quality profile picture (usually a brand logo), a well-crafted bio that clearly communicates their mission, and a link to their website or online store. Instagram also provides contact options such as email, phone, and direct messaging, allowing seamless communication with potential customers. A well-optimized profile enhances credibility, making it easier for users to trust and engage with the brand.
2. Content Strategy: A strong content strategy is crucial for maintaining audience interest and engagement. Brands should focus on creating a mix of content, including high-quality images, carousel posts, short-form videos, and interactive stories. Diversifying content formats ensures a brand remains visible in different sections of Instagram, such as the feed, explore page, and reels. Additionally, posting consistently and at optimal times increases

engagement rates. Research indicates that brands that maintain a regular posting schedule see a 60% higher engagement rate than those that post irregularly.

3. **Influencer Marketing:** Collaborating with influencers has become one of the most effective ways to expand reach and build trust. Influencers, whether macro or micro, have loyal followings that businesses can tap into for brand promotion. While macro-influencers provide large-scale visibility, micro-influencers tend to generate higher engagement rates due to their niche audiences. Businesses can leverage influencer partnerships for product placements, sponsored posts, and brand collaborations. Studies show that influencer marketing results in a higher return on investment compared to traditional advertising methods [7].
4. **Hashtag Strategy:** Hashtags play a significant role in improving content discoverability on Instagram. Brands should use a mix of branded, industry-specific, trending, and niche hashtags to reach the right audience. Hashtags help categorize content, making it easier for users interested in specific topics to find relevant posts. However, excessive use of hashtags can appear spam-like, so businesses should limit themselves to 5-10 relevant hashtags per post. Posts with an optimized hashtag strategy experienced 50% more engagement than those without hashtags.
5. **Live Streaming & Reels:** Instagram Live and Reels provide businesses with opportunities to engage audiences in real time. Live sessions help brands connect with their followers on a personal level by hosting Q&A sessions, product launches, and behind-the-scenes content. Reels, on the other hand, cater to short, engaging videos that often go viral due to Instagram's algorithm favouring them. By leveraging these features, brands can increase engagement, attract new followers, and stay relevant in an ever-changing digital landscape.
6. **User-Generated Content (UGC):** Encouraging customers to create and share content related to a brand builds authenticity and trust. When users post about a brand's products or services, it acts as social proof, influencing potential customers to make purchasing decisions. Brands can motivate users to generate content by running contests, featuring customer testimonials, and sharing user-submitted posts on their official page. Studies show that promotional self-presentation posts generated the highest level of enjoyment when post engagement level is low [8].
7. **Shopping Features:** Instagram has integrated shopping tools that make it easy for users to purchase products directly through the platform. Features like Instagram Shop, product tags, and checkout allow businesses to turn their Instagram page into a digital storefront. This eliminates the need for users to leave the app to complete a purchase, resulting in higher conversion rates. Brands that utilize Instagram's shopping features experience an increase in direct sales and improved customer retention.
8. **Analytics and Performance Tracking:** Monitoring Instagram Insights is essential for evaluating marketing performance. Brands should track key metrics such as engagement rates, follower growth, reach, and conversion rates to understand what content resonates best with their audience. By analysing this data, businesses can refine their strategies, optimize their content, and improve audience targeting. Regular performance tracking ensures continuous improvement and better decision-making for future campaigns.
9. **Community Engagement & Customer Interaction:** Engaging with the audience is crucial for building strong customer relationships. Responding to comments, liking and sharing user content, and actively participating in discussions create a sense of community [9]. Brands should also use Instagram's interactive features such as polls, quizzes, and question stickers to increase engagement. A brand that actively communicates with its followers fosters loyalty and improves overall customer experience, resulting in long-term growth.
10. **Instagram Ads:** Paid advertising on Instagram allows businesses to reach targeted audiences more effectively. Instagram offers various ad formats, including feed ads, stories ads, carousel ads, and shopping ads, each tailored for different marketing objectives. Businesses can use Instagram's advanced targeting tools to filter audiences based on demographics, interests, and behaviours [10]. Running well-structured ad campaigns helps brands drive traffic, generate leads, and increase sales, making it an essential component of Instagram marketing.

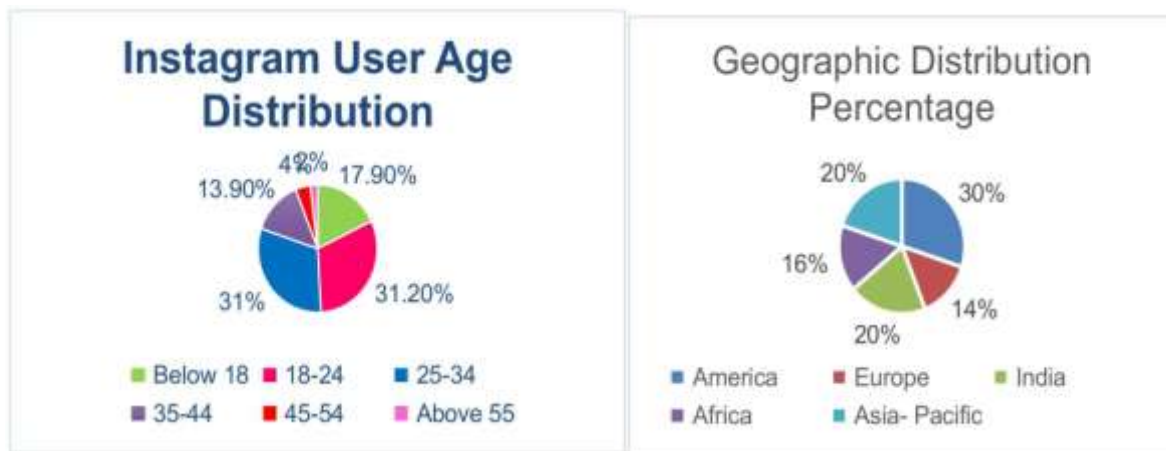
Types of Ads on Instagram

1. **Sponsored Content:** Sponsored posts appear in users' feeds with a "Sponsored" label, blending naturally with organic content. They can be images, videos, or carousel ads that let brands show off their products, tell stories, or get people to do something. These ads use Instagram's powerful targeting tools, which let brands reach users who are extremely interested in what they have to say.
2. **Instagram Stories Ads:** Stories Ads are full-screen vertical ads that show up between users' Stories. These ads have stickers, swipe-up links (or link stickers), polls, and animations that make them very immersive and grab people's attention right away. They are great for telling stories about your brand, promoting events or limited

time offers, or all three in an interesting way.

3. Instagram Reels Ads: Reels Ads show up between organic Reels and use short-form video content, which is one of the fastest-growing types of content on Instagram. These ads are great for viral campaigns, brand awareness, and reaching younger, entertainment-driven audiences because they encourage high visibility, engagement, and interaction.
4. Instagram Shopping Ads: With these ads, businesses can tag products right in their posts or Stories. Users can look at product details and buy things without leaving Instagram, which makes for a smooth shopping experience that leads to sales.
5. Influencer Partnerships: Brands work with influencers to promote their items organically using influencer content. This strategy leverages the influencer's credibility, community trust, and engaged following, making it an excellent tool.
6. Lead Generating Ads: Lead Generation Ads have pre-filled forms for collecting user information such as name, email, and phone number. This structure is extremely successful for creating email lists, collecting leads, and delivering promotions, optimizing the lead acquisition process, and reducing friction for users.

Demographics Analysis



(Fig.4):-

Understanding Instagram's user demographics is crucial for businesses to optimize their marketing strategies. They are as follows: -

1. Age Groups: Instagram is most popular among users aged 18-34, making it an ideal platform for brands targeting millennials and Gen Z consumers.
2. Gender Distribution: The platform has a balanced gender ratio, with a slightly higher number of female users engaging in content.
3. Geographical Reach: Instagram has a global presence, with high user engagement in countries like the United States, India, Brazil, and Indonesia.
4. Device Usage: The majority of Instagram users access the platform via mobile devices, making mobile-optimized content essential.
5. Engagement Patterns: Users are highly active on the platform, with over 500 million daily active users on Instagram Stories and significant engagement with visual and short-form video content.
6. Purchase Behaviour: A significant percentage of Instagram users follow brands, research products, and make purchase decisions based on content shared by influencers and businesses.

Benefits for Customers

Instagram has evolved into a customer driven social networking platform where users interact with brands, discover products, and connect with communities. Users can create profiles which highlights their interests, skills, and experiences. The Instagram algorithm suggests content based on their preferences, helping brands reach potential customers successfully. Customers can contact businesses through comments, direct messages, and shopping posts.

Moreover, users can stay updated with the latest trends by following profiles of influencers and businesses of their interest or field.

Benefits for Businesses

Instagram plays a vital tool for promoters, allowing businesses to increase brand visibility and customer engagement. Companies create business profiles with optimized content, professional images, and engrossing headlines. Through visually appealing posts, videos, and Stories, brands can highlight their products effectively. Therefore, the businessmen should take into consideration of how to use this trend into their marketing strategies.[11] Promoters can use paid promotions and collaborations with influencers to boost their reach. Consistent engagement with the audience through Stories, polls, and giveaways encourages brand loyalty. Businesses can convert leads by responding to customer queries through direct messages and email follow-ups. The information collected from these interactions is used by sales teams for further enhancement and transformation.

Conclusion:-

Instagram has established itself as a leading platform in the digital marketing world, transforming how businesses and consumers interact. Its visual interface, combined with innovative features like Reels, Stories, and in-app shopping facility, provides massive opportunities for brands to increase visibility and engagement. Businesses can explore Instagram's extensive marketing tools, influencer collaborations, and targeted advertising to increase their reach and transitions. The constant evolution of Instagram ensures that promoters must stay updated with trends and technical changes to maintain a competitive edge. As social media continues to shape consumer behaviour, Instagram remains a powerful and essential tool for brands looking to flourish in the digital marketplace.

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