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Role of social media Reels on Impulsivity and Communication Skills

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Abstract

Many young individuals consume short videos daily on platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, and concerns are being raised about the effects of this environment on their communication and behaviour. This study analysed the relationship between video content consumption, impulsivity and interactive language among 18-25-year-olds. Based on the reported screen time, 300 participants were separated into low, moderate & high users. A researcher-prepared language scale was used to measure communication patterns, and the Barratt Impulsiveness. Scale (BIS-15) was used to quantify impulsivity. Statistical analysis using ANOVA revealed disparities across participants, demonstrating that longer durations of watching short videos predict weaker planning and heightened motor- and attention-related impulsivity. Furthermore, their communication styles also differed, showing less restrained speech and an increased tendency to use slang or inappropriate language. Results reveal a dose-linked relationship between heavy engagement with short videos and changes in self-regulation and language functioning, although causality is not confirmed. This emphasizes the importance of balanced digital habits and further research using stronger methodologies and longitudinal methods to completely understand the cognitive and linguistic effects of short-form media.

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital age, social media has become an integral part of everyone's life, especially for young adults aged 18-25. Short-form video formats such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts rank among the most favoured media formats. These brief and captivating videos are designed to quickly grab attention. Consequently, users often binge-watch one video after another, often unaware of how much time they spend scrolling. Social media operates as a virtual platform that allows people to connect, share ideas, exchange information, and express their voices. It has developed into a dominant channel for virtual communication across the world. Through these services, users can post photos, videos, ideas, and personal life experiences. Beyond personal interaction, social media plays an important role in academic learning, career development, and community-related development.

Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, along with other short-term video formats, are generally designed with background music or audio and have now become a general feature on popular social networking platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. These clips generally last between 15 seconds and 1 minute; they allow users to present brief and creative content simply and appealingly. Throughout this paper, "reels" refers collectively to short video clips, especially Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, which were included in the data-gathering and analysis process.

One central concern is impulsivity in this context, which involves acting hastily without fully thinking through the outcomes of one's actions. With exposure to fast-paced, changing content, young adults may begin to develop a tendency to make decisions too quickly, both online and offline. Moller et al. (2001), impulsivity as "a predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or external stimuli without regard to the negative consequences of these reactions to the impulsive individuals or others." Savci and Aysan (2016) note that impulsive people tend to act without reflection, demonstrating reduced self-control.

Although the study title employs the term "communication skills" as a broad framework, the variable actually studied is communicative language. This especially includes how young adults articulate their thoughts and emotions, the vocabulary or the words they use, and their style of speaking or writing in everyday contexts. High consumption of short-form videos may shape their communication habits, possibly encouraging more casual, trend-influenced, or even aggressive, harsh, or slang-dominated communication. In India, this issue is particularly pronounced, given that the country, with more than 750 million internet users, represents one of the largest and fastest-growing consumers of short-form video content among youth aged 18-25 (Internet and Mobile Association of India [IAMAI], 2023).

A recent study highlights the worldwide dominance of short-form videos, particularly among the 18-25 age group. Globally, 81.7% of Gen Z users watch such content on an everyday basis, preferring Instagram Reels (58%) and TikTok (14%) (Global Gen Z Study 2024).

In India, the pattern of daily consumption is more significant, as 97% of young individuals engage with short-form videos every day. Approximately 95% view Reels daily, dedicating around 30-35 minutes to music and fashion-centered platforms. Reels also record higher engagement rates, largely driven by India's large youth creator community (Indian Digital Media Report, 2024).

Theoretical framework

According to Bandura's social learning theory (1977), individuals acquire patterns of speaking and behaving by observing others and imitating those around them in social media reels, repeated interaction with influencers, and their responses in everyday interactions.

Steinberg's Dual System Model (2010) described that the brain's emotional and regulatory systems and decision-making mature at different rates during adolescence. Because of this imbalance, young individuals may be more sensitive toward reward-seeking immediate gratification and act impulsively, especially when engaging with stimulating digital content like reels and brief videos.

Self-regulation theory (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) proposes that self-control functions as a finite resource that can diminish when used excessively. Frequent scrolling through engaging short videos may deplete this capacity, one's ability to stop and reflect before acting, which may lead to more immediate and less reflective behaviour.

Blumler and Katz (1974) used Gratifications Theory, which emphasizes that media consumers deliberately select participants that satisfy specific desires. Reels attract young individuals seeking entertainment and enjoyment, social bonding, or expressing themselves. These motivations can encourage spontaneous engagement and shape how they communicate in everyday life.

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), the linguistic individuals encounter, such as slang, abbreviations, and creative expressions, influence their daily interaction habits and cognitive patterns. When combined with other frameworks, this view demonstrates the complex relationship between short-form video use, impulsive tendencies, and transformation in communicative language among young users.

Developed by Aaron T. Beck in the 1967s, explains the strong relationship among cognition, behaviour, and thought. It proposes that impulsive action arises from automatic cognitive patterns that go unnoticed yet influence emotional states and decision-making within the context of social media. Continuous exposure to short videos & reels may reinforce patterns

such as fear of missing out or needing immediate satisfaction. CBT thus explains an important framework that continuous digital experience influences young adults' unplanned online behaviour or online actions, and they adopts trending or informal language.

Literature Review

This perspective is supported by Romer et al. (2010), who pointed out that engaging with multiple media formats may diminish focus and contribute to increasing impulsive behaviour. Savci and Aysan (2016) also reported that individuals exhibiting impulsive traits are more likely to use social media platforms more often and for extended periods. Chaudhuri and Sarkar (2020) discussed how online environments are gradually altering daily language use. Zhou (2021) pointed out that social media offers learners practical exposure to real-life language, informal spaces to practice, and opportunities to connect across cultures, all of which can support language growth. Bertaglia et al. (2021) found that social media platforms often host varying degrees of abusive language and that this language significantly influences the tone and style of online communication. Their findings indicate that exposure to such content can normalize aggressive communication and reduce users' sensitivity to abusive expressions.

Napitu and Suhardianto (2022) observed that many Instagram users adopt shortened and coded language-like acronyms and letter-number combos as a quicker way to communicate online. Das and Mishra (2023) noted that watching reels leads to a drop in continuous attention, supporting the view that this type of content may reduce concentration and self-control. *Xie et al. (2023)* showed that college students struggling with short video overuse often faced impulsivity issues and procrastinated academically. Singh & Prusty (2025) reported that problematic short-form media use significantly reduces attentional control and the ability to delay gratification in young adults, indicating higher impulsivity and poorer self-regulation among heavy short-video users. *Liu et al. (2025)* observed that students with weaker inhibitory control and a more present-focused mindset were more likely to develop problematic short-video habits, suggesting a link between these traits and impulsive patterns of use. Garg and Pandey (2025), although they examined social media in a broader sense rather than short videos alone, also reported a relationship between frequent online engagement and impulsive behaviour among young people. Their findings add supportive background to the concerns addressed in the present study.

Research Gap

Many studies have examined how social media affects psychological and language-related behaviours, but most of them have focused on general platform use or on traditional content such as text posts and long videos. There remains a significant gap in research specifically targeting short-form video content like Instagram Reels, especially in terms of its dual impact on impulsivity and communicative language patterns among adolescents and young adults. Additionally, existing studies often analyse either behavioural outcomes (e.g., addiction, loneliness) or linguistic shifts (e.g., use of slang, abbreviations) but rarely examine the intersection of both. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the impact of watching social media reels and short videos on impulsivity and communicative language among young adults. Although many studies have examined the effects of social media reels and short videos around the world, there is still very limited research available on this topic among Indian students, especially school- and college-going youth. Even the existing studies mostly focus on general social media use or look at only one aspect, such as impulsivity or language change, separately. There is hardly any research that examines both impulsive behaviour and communication style together in the context of short-form videos, specifically among Indian students. This study aims to fill that missing area.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the impulsivity among different groups by watching reels and on social media.

2. To study the communicative language among different groups by watching reels and on social media.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a survey method based on a quantitative approach. The aim was to understand how watching short videos and reels affects impulsivity and communicative language among young people.

Population and Sample

The people included in this study were young adults around 18-25 years of age living in India. A total of 300 participants took part in the study. Based on

average daily time spent online, participants were categorized into three usage groups: low usage (less than 1 hour), moderate usage (1 hour to 3 hours), and high usage (more than 3 hours). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, meaning individuals who were accessible and willing to be involved. Participants were approached through online platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.

Tools for Data Collection

Data were collected using an online Google Form that included three sections. The first section asked questions about participants' age, gender, residence, occupation, and frequency of social media use. Average daily time spent online and preferred time to use social media.

Barratt Impulsiveness Scale – 15 *(BIS-15)*: To assess impulsivity among participants, the English version of the ***(Spinella, 2007)*** Barratt Impulsiveness Scale – 15 *(BIS-15)* was used. It is a shortened and validated version of the original *BIS-15* scale developed by *Spinella (2007)* and widely applied in behavioral and psychological research. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items, with 5 items for each subscale, divided into three subscales: attentional impulsivity (difficulty in focusing or concentrating), motor impulsivity (acting without thinking), and non-planning impulsivity (lack of future orientation or forethought).

Participants rated each item using a 4-point Likert scale where 1 represented "Rarely/Never" and 4 represented "Almost Always/Always." Higher scores indicate higher levels of impulsivity. Six items (questions 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 15) were reverse-scored as previously reported *(Spinella, 2007)*. The scale has shown good internal consistency ***(Cronbach's α > 0.70).***

Communicative Language Survey :

The communicative language scale was developed by the researchers. thorough review of existing literature on online communicative language patterns *(Nwala&Tamunobelema, 2019; Torres et al., 2020; Mut Atlin, 2019; Winarto, 2019; Azzawi &Ghizzy, 2020; Nakov et al., 2021; Abbasova, 2019; Hikmah et al., 2024; Chaudhuri & Sarkar, 2020; Yusuf et al., 2022; Napitu& Suhardianto, 2019; Bertaglia et al., 2021; Zhou, 2021)*. These studies provided insights into the nature of communicative language on social media platforms, especially in the context of slang, abusive, and unconventional language. The scale was designed to explore the role of short-form video consumption on language use in both written and spoken digital communication.

According to earlier studies, Five experts review were taken before the finalizing the scale. The three dimensions of communicative language are slang, abusive language, and unconventional language. The final version included 12 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Procedure

The Google Form was circulated online through social media platforms and email contacts. At the beginning, participants were given a short introduction along with a consent form explaining the purpose of the study. After providing their consent, they shared basic demographic details such as age, gender, and their average daily viewing time. Then they proceeded to complete the impulsivity and communication scales.

Data Analysis

After data collection, responses were downloaded and analysed using the SPSS software. First, the percentages and frequencies were calculated. Then, the researcher used ANOVA to compare groups of participants with high, moderate, and low usage of watching reels.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants at baseline (n=300).

Baseline characteristic	N	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	135	45.0
Female	165	55.0
Residence		
Rural	116	38.7
Urban	184	61.3
Occupation		
Student	285	95.0
Employed	6	2.0
Self-Employed	3	1.0
Unemployed	6	2.0
Frequency of social media use		
Instagram	197	65.67
YouTube—Instagram	103	34.33
Average daily time spent online		
Less than 1 hour (low)	86	28.7
1 hour to 3 hour (moderate)	115	38.3
more than 3 hours (high)	99	33.0
Preferred time to use social media		
Morning (6 AM-12 PM)	7	2.3
Afternoon (12 PM-4 PM)	48	16.0
Evening (4 PM-8 PM)	40	13.3
Night (8 PM - 12 AM)	141	47.0
Late night (After 12 AM)	64	21.3

Table 2 - Mean, SD, and F-value of low, moderate, and high usage groups of watching reels and short videos on different types of impulsivity.

Dimensions of Impulsivity	Groups	Mean	N	SD	F-value
Motor Impulsivity	Low	1.85	86	.67	**15.683*** **
	Moderate	2.08	115	.61	
	High	2.37	99	.63	
Attentional Impulsivity	Low	1.89	86	.56	**24.950*** **
	Moderate	2.24	115	.59	
	High	2.53	99	.65	
Non-Planning Impulsivity	Low	2.01	86	.60	**3.652***
	Moderate	2.12	115	.62	
	High	2.24	99	.59	
Total	Low	1.92	300	.42	**26.119*** **
	Moderate	2.15	300	.43	
	High	2.38	300	.47	

******p< .001, **p< .01, *p< .05***

The study's results revealed statistically significant differences in the three dimensions of impulsivity—motor, attentional, and non-planning—among participants categorised into low, moderate, and high groups based on their use of **reels.**

Participants with high usage reported the highest mean score on motor impulsivity ***(M = 2.37, SD = 0.63)***, compared to moderate users ***(M = 2.08, SD = 0.61)*** and low users ***(M = 1.85, SD = 0.67)***. The ANOVA test yielded an F-value of 15.683 and a p-value of 0.001, indicating a statistically significant difference among the groups. It means motor impulsivity also increases, suggesting frequent exposure to short-form content may heighten quick and behavioural impulsivity. That means motor impulsivity; a similar pattern was observed in attentional impulsivity. High usage of social media watching reels again scored the highest ***(M = 2.53, SD = 0.65)***, followed by moderate ***(M = 2.24, SD = 0.59)*** and low users ***(M = 1.89, SD = 0.56)***. The F-value was 24.950, and the p-value was .001, indicating a statistically significant difference. A significant difference is also found in attentional impulsivity across the three groups. The scores indicate that as short-video usage increases, individuals report more difficulty maintaining attention and resisting distractions, consistent with higher attentional impulsivity.

Non-planning impulsivity showed the highest average score (M ***= 2.24, SD = 0.59)***, moderate scores ***(M = 2.12, SD = 0.62)***, and participants in the lowest scores ***(M = 2.01, SD = 0.60)***. The obtained F-value for this dimension was 3.65 with a P-value of 0.5, suggesting a significant difference across the groups. The pattern of results indicates that participants who spent more time on short-form videos predicted weaker future planning or future orientation.

The analysis revealed significant differences in impulsivity scores across participants with low, moderate, and high Reel consumption ***(F = 26.119, p < .001)***. This suggests that greater engagement with short-form videos is typically demonstrated with higher impulsivity levels. The findings indicate a significant association between frequent Reel consumption and greater motor, attentional, and non-planning impulsivity, without implying direct causation. These findings are consistent with prior research by *Romer et al. (2010)*, who found that frequent media multitasking was linked to lower attention control and increased impulsivity. Similarly, *Xie et al. (2023)* reported that short video addiction contributed to impulsive behaviours and academic delays among college students. Das and Mishra (2023) found that excessive Reels exposure weakens attention span, reinforcing concerns around impulsive and distracted digital behaviour.

Table 3- Mean, SD, and F-value of low, moderate, and high usage of watching reels and short videos on different types of communicative language.

Dimensions of Communicative Language	Group	Mean	N	SD	F-value
Slang Language	Low	2.24	86	.98	**20.506*** **
	Moderate	2.75	115	.84	
	High	3.05	99	.79	
Abusive Language	Low	2.79	86	.69	**8.761*** **
	Moderate	3.01	115	.70	
	High	3.23	99	.74	
Unconventional Language	Low	2.39	86	.86	**15.118*** **
	Moderate	2.86	115	.72	
	High	2.98	99	.70	
Total	Low	2.48	300	.76	**20.062*** **
	Moderate	2.87	300	.64	
	High	3.09	300	.63	

****.001,**p< .01,*p< .05***

These table findings show a statistically significant difference in the use of slang, abusive, and unconventional language among low, moderate, and

high reel usage groups *(p < .001),* suggesting that reel consumption may influence slang, abusive, and unconventional usage.

Participants' high usage demonstrated the highest users' score on slang language ***(M= 3.05, SD= 0.74),*** moderate users' score ***(M= 2.75, SD= 0.84),*** and the lowest users' score ***(M= 2.24, SD= 0.98)***. The ANOVA test obtained an F-value of ***20.506*** and a p-value of ***0.001***, revealing a significant difference among the groups. This resulted in the individual who spends more time consuming short-form videos being more likely to adopt slang and informal styles.

Abusive language showed the highest user score ***(M= 3.23, SD= 0.74***), a moderate user score ***(M= 3.01, SD= 0.71),*** and the lowest user score ***(M=2.79, SD= 0.69)***. The F-value is ***8.761,*** and the p-value is ***0.001***. A significant difference is also found in abusive language across the three groups. Greater exposure to reels may normalize harsh or aggressive expression, insulting, and vulgar expression or words, making such language more frequent in communication.

Unconventional language indicated the highest user score ***(M= 2.98, SD= 0.71***, moderate user score ***(M= 2.86, SD= 0.72),*** and lowest user score ***(M=2.39, SD= 0.86)***. A significant difference across groups ***(F = 15.118, p < 0.001).*** This pattern reveals that increased usage is associated with greater use of unconditional linguistic forms, such as abbreviations or non-standard expressions. Frequent usage of Reels platforms may encourage adaptive, creative, and non-traditional communication styles.

The analysis showed significant differences in communicative scores across participants with the lowest, moderate, and high Reels usage***(F=20.07, p < .001)***. Overall communicative language did show statistically significant differences across groups, indicating that Reel consumption does have a clear or direct impact on these forms of language. Studies such as Napitu and Suhardianto (2019) highlight that digital youth often use slang and coded expressions to build identity and connection, independent of screen time. *Nouriet al. (2025)* and *Bade et al. (2025*) also report that social media use increases the prevalence of abusive, slang, and unconventional language, which directly supports the present study's findings. Higher screen time was found to increase the use of slang and unconventional language in the present study, a pattern also observed in recent research on digital language trends *(Malik, Iftikhar, & Gurmani, 2025).* However, this usage is not always directly proportional to screen time; instead, it depends more on social circles and individual styles of self-expression.

This pattern could be due to social desirability bias or differences in self-perception, where high users may have downplayed their language use, or low users might have been more open in admitting their use of casual or informal language. *Montag et al. (2019)* showed that features such as infinite scrolling, constant notifications, and quick feedback on social media platforms strongly contribute to sustaining user engagement and attention and shape patterns of online activity. Such design features can indirectly affect how young adults portray themselves and react within digital spaces. Although the study did not directly address self-presentation, the findings align with the view that online behaviour often becomes performative. This is relevant, as it may impact how individuals respond to personal questions about their language patterns and impulsive behaviour, especially in self-report questionnaires.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that young adults who frequently consume reels display higher levels of impulsivity, including acting without careful thought and facing challenges in concentration. These outcomes support previous research connecting extensive social media usage to reduced self-control. Additionally, frequent Reel viewers adopt more slang, abusive terms, and unconventional language styles, which may diminish the effectiveness of their interactions. In summary, the study concludes that increased exposure to short-form videos corresponds with heightened impulsivity and a decline toward more casual and internet trend- driven language. This study underscores the importance of promoting balanced media programs and the need for awareness programs and implementing interventions to encourage mindful usage and responsible digital behaviour among youth.

Limitations of the study

This research has several limitations that should be clearly addressed and discussed. The sample size was modest, and participants were selected through convenience sampling, so the findings cannot be assumed to represent all young adults. A larger and more diverse sample could have provided a stronger picture. The communicative language scale used in this research was prepared with the help of earlier studies, but it has not yet been fully standardised. Its reliability and validity were not statistically established,

so the results related to language patterns should be viewed as tentative rather than definitive. It cannot confirm that short-form videos directly cause changes in impulsivity or communication. In addition, all data were collected through self-report questionnaires, and such responses may be affected by memory errors or the tendency to present oneself positively. Finally, the research focused only on short-form videos such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. Other forms of digital engagement, including long videos or text-based interactions, were not included, though they may influence behaviour and communication in different ways.

Future Implications

This study points to severaldirections for future work as well as practical use. An essential future direction would be the development and validation of more stronger assessment tools to measure accurately how young individuals communicate in digital spaces. Further studies could also follow longitudinal or experimental designs to observe shifts in impulsivity and communication patterns that evolve with prolonged exposure to short-form videos. Examining various platforms, including Snapchat, Facebook short videos, and Moj, could further reveal and provide insight into how distinct app features impact the behavioural outcomes of users. Studies carried out in various cultural and regional settings would further help in understanding how language habits and impulsive tendencies differ from place to place. Finally, these findings can be useful for teachers, policymakers, and digital-wellness workers to design programs that encourage balanced online habits and healthier ways of communicating among young people.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical rules. Participants consented before starting, and their personal information was not collected. They could leave the study at any time. All responses were kept private and were used only for academic purposes.

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