INSTAGRAM RESEARCH

Is Instagram being able to convey the true meaning of fitness and healthy living?

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Abstract

Instagram - launched on 6th October, it is an image-based social media platform that was built so that its users could communicate and share their lives with friends, families and the world. It has increased our (its users') connectivity but it also has negative effects on our perspective of ourselves. It is no longer a platform that is meant only to connect or share one's experiences with the world. Instead the motive of this platform has been metamorphosed to comparison of self with friends, relatives and celebrities. The negative impact of social media (Instagram in this case) can be explained with the help of the social comparison theory.

Social comparison theory was founded by social psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954 and suggests that people build their opinions of themselves and their abilities by comparing themselves to others. The theory particularly holds true for people aged between 10 - 24.

According to him there are 3 types of social comparisons we make,

Upward: We compare ourselves with others whom we think are doing better than us in some way.

Downward: We compare ourselves to others who we think we are doing better than them.

Lateral: We compare our self to someone we think as "equal" to us in various areas.

Introduction

Social comparison can, on one side inspire and motivate people but it also has a big downside to it. Social comparisons (upward or lateral) can be unfavorable to confidence, self-image, and comfort. This can create a judgmental, viable outlook. Also, social media increases the negative impact of social judgement for the youth. They compare themselves to -carefully curated images of their peers, celebrities or others who have achieved an unusual high level. Consequence is that teens don't

feel their accomplishments are enough, and they feel envy, regret, defensiveness and guilt.

In our research, we particularly focus on the impact that Instagram has on how its users define fitness and healthy living. Studies suggest that, in context to fitness, upward comparisons made after looking at idealized, filtered, and enhanced images lead to a negative body image or body dysmorphia (a mental health condition where a person spends a lot of time worrying about flaws in their appearance. The flaws that are often unnoticeable to others.)

Research Question

Google defines fitness as the condition of being physically fit and healthy or a state of being in good health, especially because of regular physical exercise. But is that what social media platforms convey? Our research is intended to find answers to the question – **Is Instagram being able to convey the true meaning of fitness and healthy living?**

Literature review

1) Increased craze in social media

   There has been an incredible increase in the craze for fitness and healthy living due to social media (particularly Instagram) in the last few years. We never had so much accessibility to the fitness world in the past.
   The reasons for fitness becoming a trend are,
   • Accessibility
   • Viral-ability
   However, there are downsides to both- Accessibility can influence young Instagrammers to indulge in unhealthy practices like excessive exercise and diets. Viral - ability on the other hand could lead to the spread of poor health and nutrition information

   A certified Ohio based counselor named Jonathan Bennett who is also a founder of Double Trust Dating articulates "I remember the days when learning new workouts or getting healthier recipes meant buying a health,

fitness, or lifestyle magazine". "Now, with Pinterest and other social media apps, you have countless options to craft the perfect health and fitness regimen, just for you."

2) Enhances the dissemination of unrealistic expectations

Men think they must have shaped abs, a hulking chest and tapered waistlines to look perfect and healthy. While women understand healthy bodies on social media that are quite underweight. This usually leads to disordered eating habits, body dysmorphia, depression and eating disorders.

A huge influx of poor health and nutrition information spreading quickly across the globe due to the ability of social media posts and videos go viral. It has also increased the broadcasting of unrealistic expectations. "Unsafe detoxes, bizarre diets, and even unsafe workouts, can quickly spread on social media. They can poorly influence those just looking to live a healthier lifestyle," Dr. Adams says. He has seen a drastic rise of unrealistic body image issues.

3) Blind belief of Instagrammers

There are many advices given in the Instagram pages of influencers and some of the users are blinding believing the advices or suggestions. "There is a lot more mis-information in fitness on social media and even in articles, than scientifically validated information. We are trying to present real research and couple that with common sense explanations and advice that can be applied directly to your workout and it's helping people achieve massive fitness transformations,", says Dr. John Jaquish, who runs a lot of educational content on his personal and company accounts. He is also the inventor of X3Bar.

Unfortunately, the advice on social media is tricky. Nutritionists are concerned about the dietary advice shared on social media; they are

conflicting. This can lead people to adopt dietary plans that are unhealthy or overly restrictive.

4) Ignoring facts

We found that there are a lot of diets which are suggested by many fitness trainers or institutions however, there is no doctor-recommended diet that will allow someone to lose weight in 7 days, nor do they actually work. And people get influenced with pictures that are posted on Instagram. They are almost always edited/photoshopped and that the influencers have experienced trainers, constant supervision and excellent quality equipment at hand which is why they achieve mind blowing results. Yet the users only focus on the 'ideal'/'perfect' bodies portrayed in the pictures and engage in unhealthy practices only to change the way they look.

"Instagram easily makes girls and women feel as if their bodies aren't good enough as people add filters and edit their pictures for them to look 'perfect'.

Methodology

Our research is focused on Indian fitness influencers only and hence we have extracted data (images) from the accounts of the top 5 Indian fitness influencers (by the number of followers) on Instagram. The influencers are,
- **Shilpa Shetty**
    - An actress turned fitness enthusiast and wellness influencer. Endorse the idea of eating healthy food and maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- **Sahil Khan**
    - Fitness coach who was felicitated with Rajiv Gandhi award for India's Fitness Icon, Title of India's Youth Icon. He is the owner of many Gyms in India. Famous one is Muscle n Beach Gym in Goa. Endorse Hunk Water
- **Mandira Bedi**
    - TV presenter, actress, model, fitness and fashion enthusiast. Inspire people with high end fitness routines
- **Ranveer Allahbadia**

- Youtuber and fitness enthusiast. Instagram with Beer biceps and also cofounder of monkentertainment
- **Sonali Swami**
  - Fitness trainer and Coach. She is s fitness inspiration for many mothers in India. Endorse many fitness product and fashion brands

We used python to extract the required data. Once we had access to all the images from the above mentioned profiles we sampled 300 images by performing a simple random sampling on each profile.

The reason for choosing simple random sampling was so that so that we get a feel of an influencer's entire account. We did not want to report any insights on the basis of very recent or very old or the images of a certain fixed time period. Say for example an influencer 'A' posts images and videos for a particular challenge (like the 365 days fitness challenge).If we picked the most recent posts from influencer 'A' 's account and not others(before and after the challenge) we could infer completely different insights when compared to what we can infer by randomly picking up posts from his/her entire account.

Also, instead of doing the random sampling ourselves(manually) we associated each image with a serial number and used a random number generator on R and then chose the images for coding because that way the chosen images are completely free from any kind of bias.

We have chosen only those images that had a fitness related hashtag associated to it.Some examples being,

#fitness #fitnessICON #healthylifestyle #fitindiamovement #befitandhealthy etc

To analyze the obtained images we used the method of content analysis.Content analysis is a research method that is often used to study qualitative data (text,images,audio,videos etc).It is used to quantify patterns observed in qualitative data(images in our case).

Analyzing images using content analysis

We used the method of coding for analyzing the images.A code is a word or short phrase that signifies a concept or idea.Coding (for images) is the process of observing images and assigning codes to them based on different elements in the images.In simple words,coding is when the researcher places qualitative data into categories. The codes are assigned with respect to the research question which means that the assigned codes should help in capturing a pattern for answering the research question.Once the codes are assigned a count of the number of occurrences for each code is taken.Then the codes are organized and reorganized into major categories and subcategories and inferences are drawn.The codes are logged in a codebook.Codebooks are critical in setting coding standards especially when multiple team members work together on the same data.

The codes that we came up with for our research question are,

Sl no	Variable (code)	Variable (code) description
1.	Type of post (Still image - 0,video -1)	Records whether a post is an image or video.
2.	Image/Video content (Workout-0,Food-1,Other-2)	Records whether the image/Video content is about some kind of a workout or about food or something else.
3.	Workout form being promoted (yoga - 0,weights -1,none-2)	Records the kind of workout form being promoted as yoga, weights (or any kind of gym equipment), and none.
4.	Gender (0-Male,1-Female,Group - 2,none-3)	Records the gender of the person (if any) in the image/video as male, female, group(if it is a group picture/video) and none if there is no person in the image/video.
5.	Gym equipment (Present -1,Absent - 0)	Records whether the image/video has gym equipment or not.
6.	Image/Video purpose (Fitness related -0,Personal -1,product promotion post -2)	Records the purpose of the post as fitness related, Personal or product promotion post

7.	First impression from the image (Motivation towards fitness -0,Motivation to purchase a product/service or follow an account - 1,other -2)	Records the first impression that a layman would have after looking at the post as Motivation towards fitness, Motivation to purchase a product/service or follow an account and other
8.	Presence of workout instructions/fitness Tips in the image or comments (Yes-1,No -0)	Records whether a post has some tips and instructions to follow before or during a workout/diet or not.
9.	Place where the image has been taken (gym-0,elsewhere - 1)	Records the place where the post has been captured.
10.	Comment (Fitness motivation comment - 0,other -1)	Records the kind of comment associated with a post as fitness related or not.
11.	Product promotions Present -1,Absent -0)	Records whether a post has product promotions or not.
12.	Specification of age limit to follow a diet/workout (Yes-1, No-0)	Records whether an influencer has specified an age limit to follow a given diet/workout or not.

Below is a snippet of the data that we coded using Microsoft Excel.

Account holder	Post no.	Type of post (Still image - 0,video -1)	Image/Video content (Workout-0,Food-1,product promotion-2,other-3)	Workout form being promoted (yoga - 0,other -1,none-2)	Gender (0-Male,1-Female,Group -2,none-3)	Gym equipment (Present - 1,Absent - 0)	Image/Video purpose (Fitness related - 0,Personal - 1,product promotion post - 2)	First impression from the image (Motivation towards fitness/healthy eating - 0,Motivation to purchase a product/service or follow an account - 1,other - 2)	Presence of workout instructions/fitness Tips/recepie in the post or comments (Yes-1,No -0)	Place where the image has been taken (gym-0,elsewher e - 1)	Comment (Fitness motivation comment - 0,other -1)	Product promotions Present - 1,Absent -0)	Specification of age limit to follow a diet/workou /purchase a product (Yes-1, No-0)
theshilpashetty	Post 1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
theshilpashetty	Post 2	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
theshilpashetty	Post 3	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
theshilpashetty	Post 4	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
theshilpashetty	Post 5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
theshilpashetty	Post 6	1	1	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	1	1	0
theshilpashetty	Post 7	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
theshilpashetty	Post 8	1	2	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	1	1	0
theshilpashetty	Post 9	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
theshilpashetty	Post 10	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0

After coding the 300 images we decided to to visualize the data and draw inferences out of the charts. We used Microsoft Power BI to construct charts.

Charts and Inferences

Post content
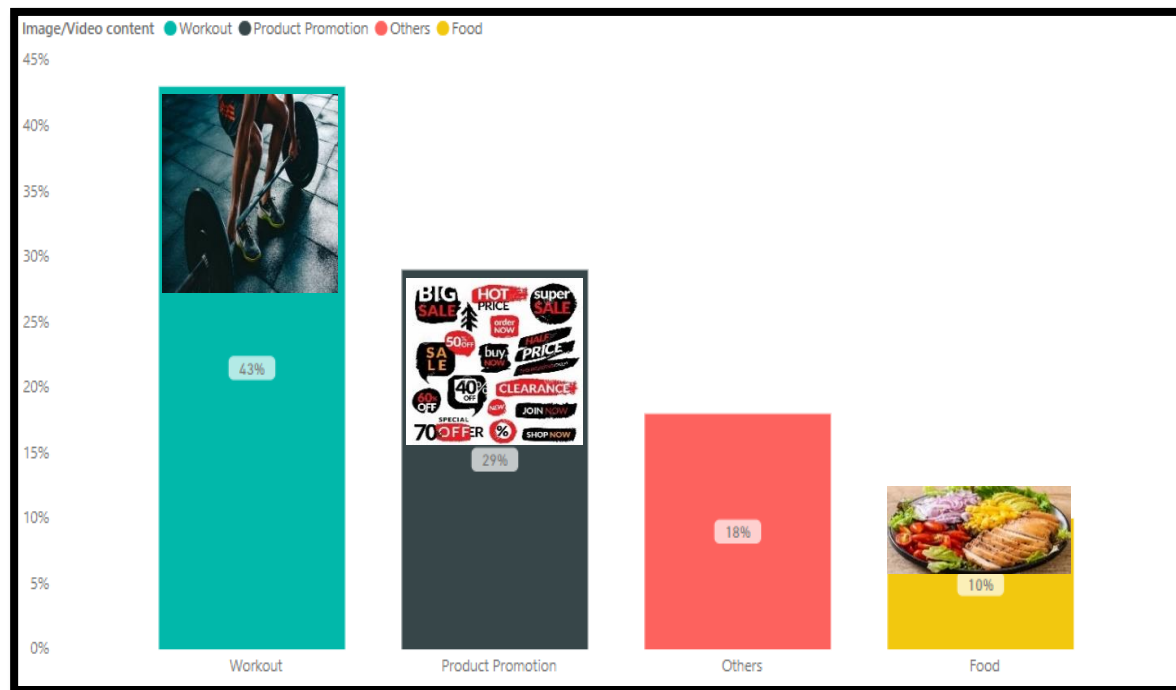
43% of the total number of posts are about some or the other form of workout whereas only 10% of them are about food. This shows that the focus is purely on physical exercise but the fact that a healthy diet is equally important is, to a large extent being neglected.
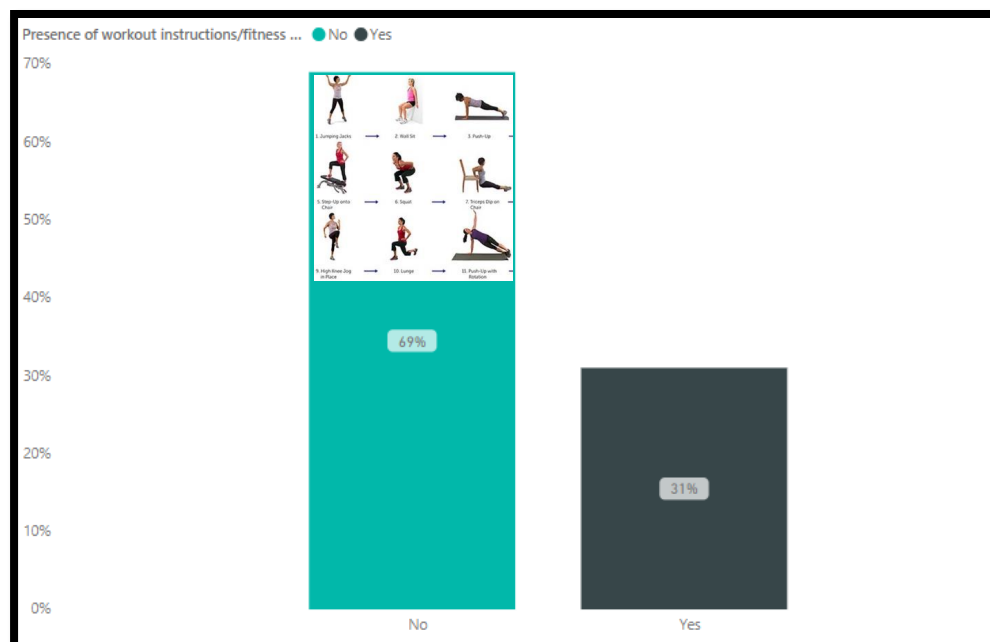
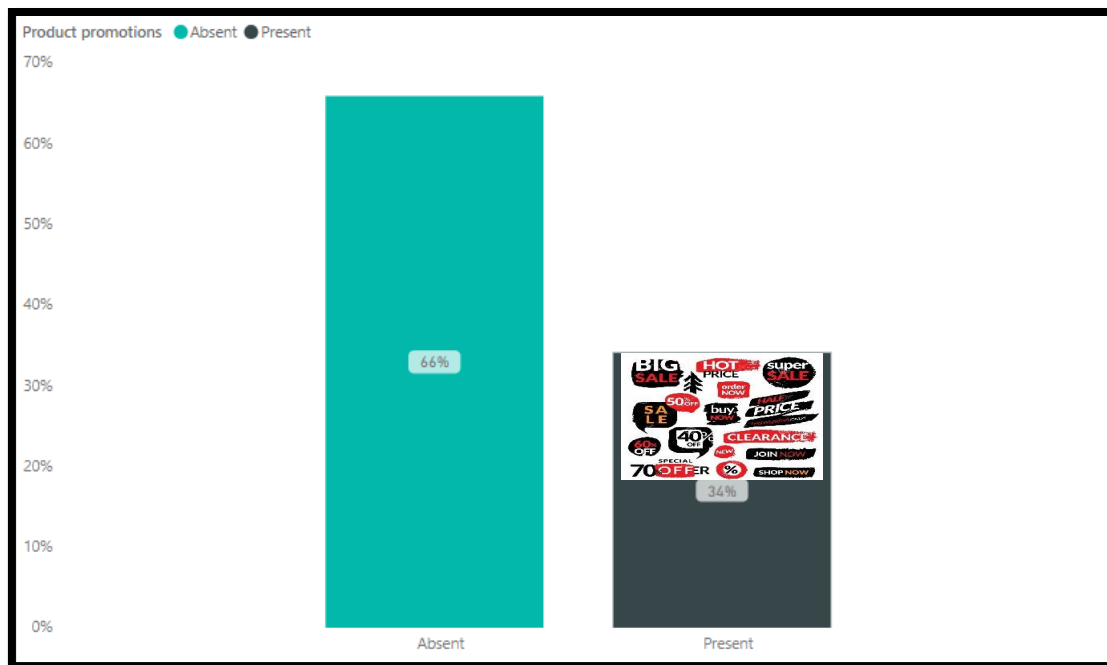**Also, the second highest type of posts are of product promotions.**

Promotions
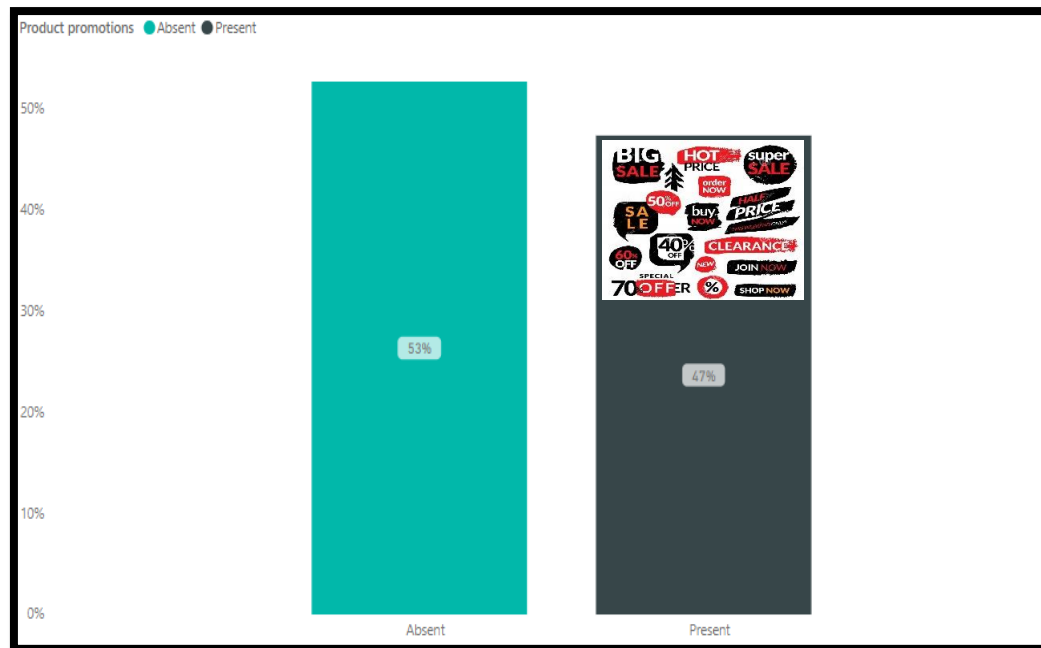
47% of the total number of posts have product promotions associated to them

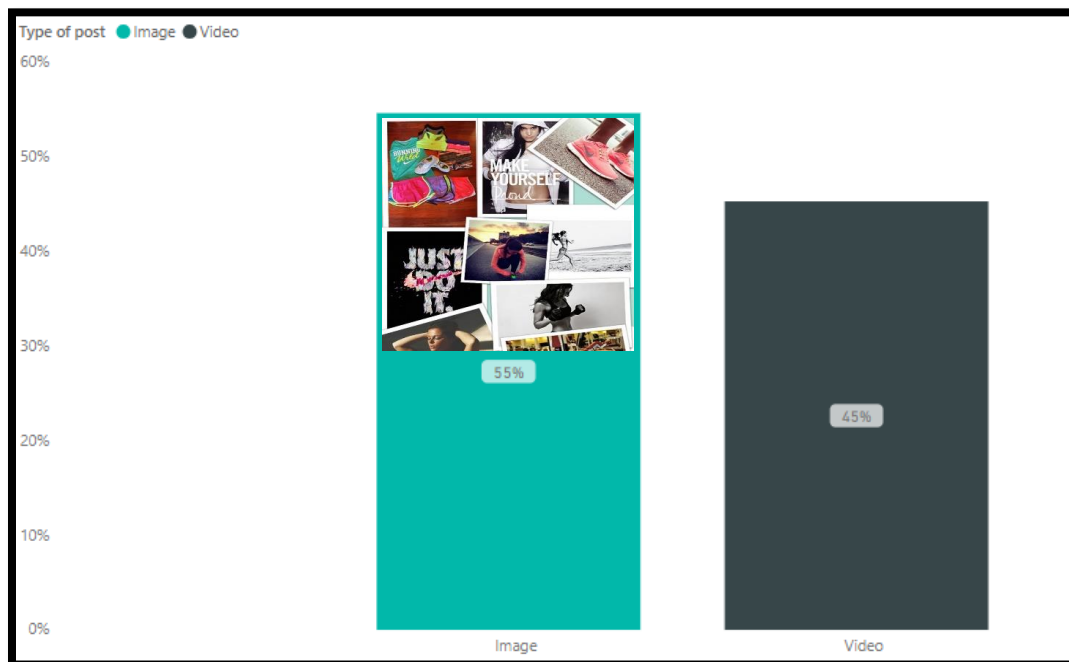# Presence Of Instructions In Workout Posts

69% of the posts related to workout had no instructions mentioned

Product Promotions in Workout Posts

34% of the posts related to workout have product promotions associated to them

Type Of Post

55% of the total posts are images whereas images cannot serve the purpose of influencing and motivating people to work towards fitness as much as videos can.

Post Purpose

Only 50% of the Image/Video had the purpose of Fitness

Specification of age limit to follow a diet/workout/purchase a product

Only 1 post had the age limitation specified to follow a diet or workout

<u>Conclusion</u>

- The meaning of fitness that one infers from instagram is to focus on physical fitness, whereas the true meaning of fitness is to be able to strike a balance between physical exercise and healthy eating, which to a large extent is being ignored on instagram.
- Almost half (47%) of the posts related to fitness have product promotions associated to them. Hence we can conclude that instagram is not only being used to spread awareness about fitness but it is also being used as a marketing platform.
- Influencers (or anybody posting fitness related content),to some extent, are posting content irresponsibly without realizing the kind effect they could have on their audience (Lack of workout instructions, No specification of age limit in posts, Using more images and less videos)
- Fitness related hashtags are being used very casually. Posts that have no fitness content also have fitness related hashtags used with them.

<u>Answer to the Research Question</u>

With respect to our sample data (300 posts) we conclude that,

No, Instagram is unable to convey the true meaning of fitness and healthy living.

References

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