Decoding Algorithmic Impact

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

(Research for Design)

Self-perception

Self-Perception is the view we have about ourselves, our characteristics, and the judgments we make about the traits we have. Self-perception includes our self-concept (the image we have in our heads of who we are) and our self-esteem (how we judge the characteristics we possess).

The Backstory

34%

Gen Z are **quitting social media**

64%

take a break from social media at least once in their early adulthood.

**Insecurity, jealousy and unrealistic expectations** set by consuming content online is draining Gen Z.

https://www.prweek.com/article/1459149/gen-z-quitting-social-media-droves-makes-unhappy-study-finds

The Backstory

Instagram, most popular social media among Gen Z, is presented as a platform **"of the people, by the people, for the people"** when it comes to content posted and shared.

But in reality, **Instagram's algorithm curates what people see** in their feeds. It depends more on engagement than user activity. Setting it's algorithm according to our wants is difficult.

The Backstory
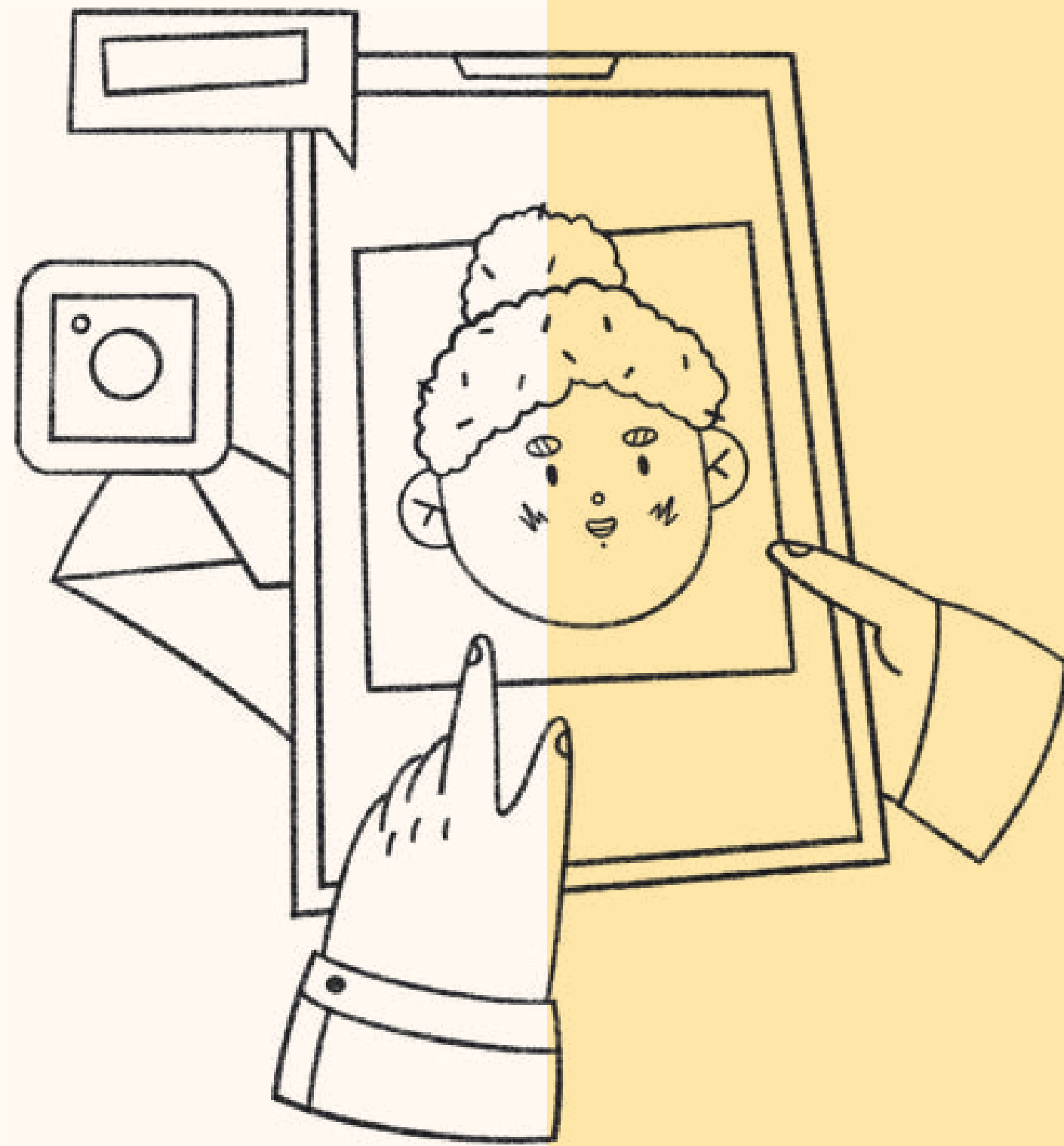
Does manipulating the algorithm really helps in creating Instagram a more positive space?

Our Case

Taking an edge case for this general scenario,

Comparison conscious young females (18-24 yo) that scroll through reels about 2-3 hours per day.

They are prone to comparing themselves to these influencers and celebrities that have an apparently perfect body type.

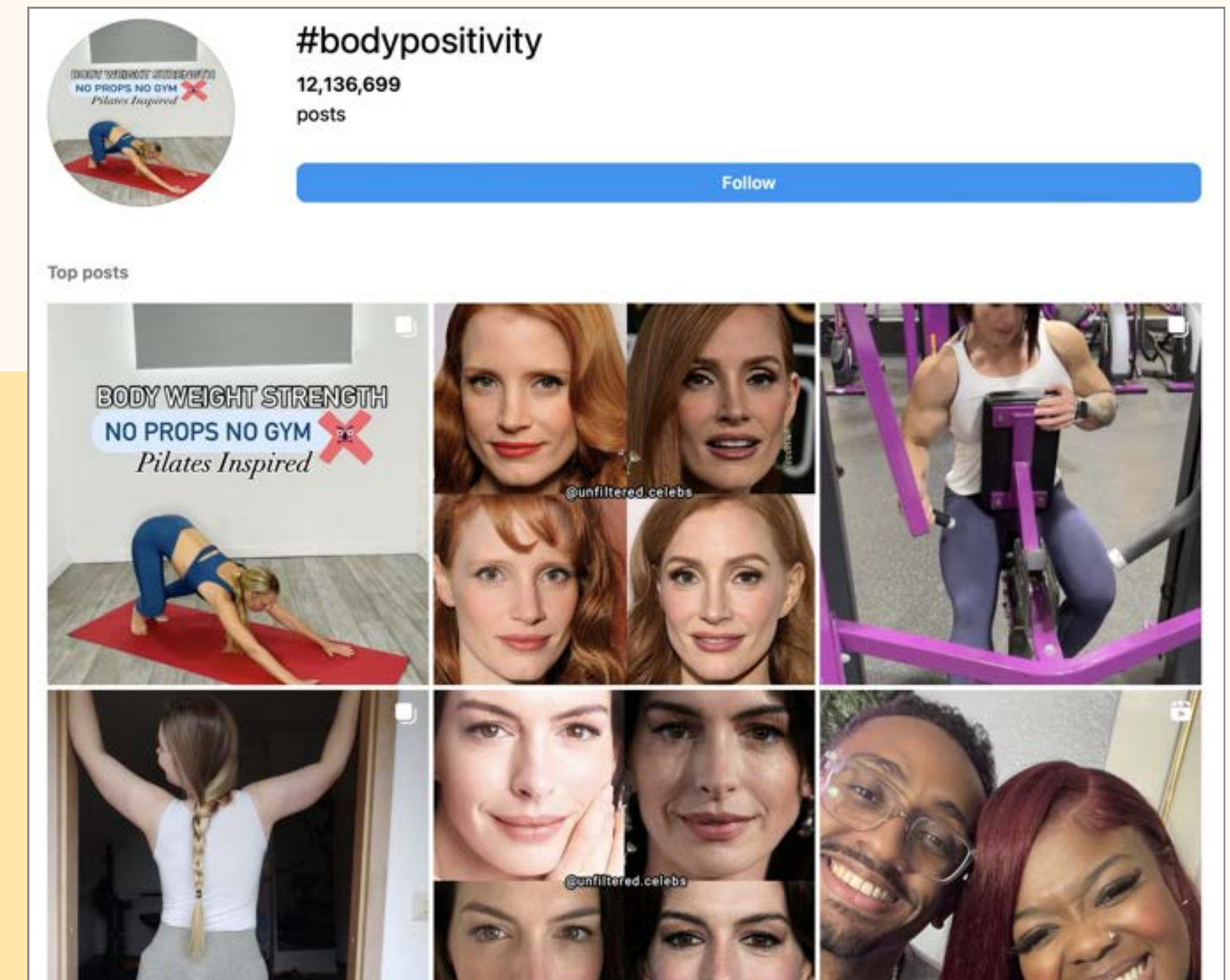Even when they search for #bodyposititvity, they see similar reels.

Initiative by Instagram

1. Instagram is introducing new resources to support users affected by negative body image.

2. They're collaborating with experts to ensure these resources are helpful and effective.

3. When users search for or share content related to negative body image, Instagram will prioritize these resources, making it easier for users to find support and assistance.y perfect body type.
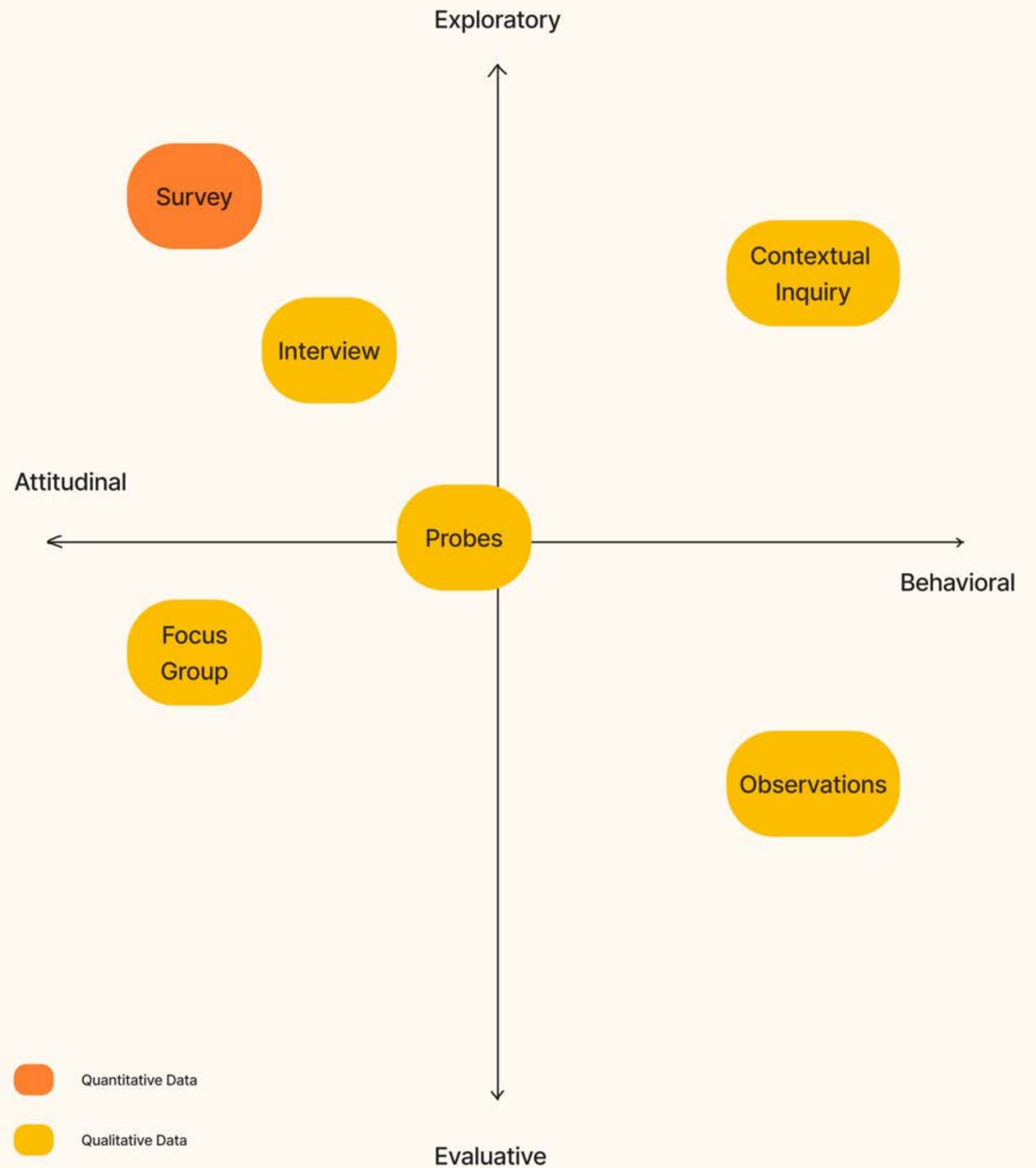
Public Initiatives

#bodypositivity movement was a public initiative to negate the ill-effects of irrational societal beauty standards on the mental health of women.

Unfortunately, the #bodypositive hashtag on Instagram is dominated by slimmer, white users who are straight sized, many of whom would have no issue getting a job, being discriminated against, or buying clothes to fit their body. Study shows that this movement failed over time losing it's initial intentions.

Gelsinger, A. S. (2021). A critical analysis of the body positive movement on Instagram: How does it really impact body image?. Spectra Undergraduate Research Journal, 1(1), 47-55. https://doi.org/10.9741/2766-7227.1003

Mood Tracking

Participants were given these abstract art posters to fill with colors corresponding to their feelings after each Instagram reels scroll session.

Snapshot

Participants were given a set of prompts that they could use to reflect upon how they feel about themselves, looking at the snapshot of that specific day.

When do you feel most yourself while being online on instagram?

Describe the reel that you shared with your female friends today.

Describe the environment where you are scrolling reels.

Describe the reel that you saved today and tell us why?

Limitations

Reliance on self-reported data, may be biased or inaccurate.

Focus on specific demographic, may limit generalizability.

External factors like beliefs and content from other platforms could confuse results.

Unmoderated environments throughout the study with limited number of participants.