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The effect of reels on the communicative behavior of the Algerian university students

A study of a sample of reels' followers

Saliha chelouache

University of 20 august 1955 skikda (algeria)
s.chelouache@univ-skikda.dz

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Abstract:
This study aims at identifying the effect of reels on the communicative behavior of the Algerian university students. The study was applied on sample that covers 306 informants using an electronic questionnaire, which was divided into axes related to the use of reels by the students, and to their trends regarding the cognitive, psychological, and communicative effects of reels on them. Findings show that reels have a high effect on the students' cognitive aspect, an average effect on the psychological aspect, and a high effect on the communicative behavior.

Keywords: *Algerian University Students; Cognitive Effects; Communicative Behavior; Reels; Psychological Effects*

I. INTRODUCTION

Reels have witnessed a huge spread since 2020 thanks to their distinctive features that attract many followers, mainly the youths. In this regard, the number of reels' users on Instagram reached 02 billion, with a views rate of 17.6 million hour per day. Besides, statistics show that 140 billion reels are watched on Instagram and Facebook, with an increase of 40% compared to 2023 (GrabOn, 2024). The youths watch reels because they change the editorial style and sum up the idea in an innovative way in a brief time of 15 to 90 seconds using audiovisual filters that attract the followers. These reels treat different issues and fields and are a source of money and investment for their creators. Therefore, the big companies periodically update them to attract as many followers as possible. Meta Company introduced important updates for reels in 2023 to allow controlling the favorite types by introducing the option of "watch more" and "watch less", extended the duration of the reels to 90 seconds, and allowed editing reels using ready-made templates set by the platform (Facebook, 2023).

These updates had an effect on the number of followers; therefore, it is important to study this phenomenon. Despite it has many advantages, we still find negative aspects that affect the cognitive, psychological, and social aspects of the followers, and change the communicative and interaction behaviors. Such effects are not limited to the states where reels had first appeared; rather, they affect the whole world, including Algeria. The latter has witnessed a huge development of using social media, as the number of users increased to 25.6 million, i.e., 54.2% of the Algerian population and 70% of the Algerian internet users (DataReportal, 2025).

A study on some Algerian and Moroccan university students showed that reels have an effect on the communicative aspects of students, as they affect their verbal communication with the in-laws due to the interaction with the short digital content (Ben Chaaira, 2023). Due to the relation between the communicative behavior and the cognitive and psychological aspects, our study aims at revealing the main psychological and cognitive effects of reels on the communicative behavior of the Algerian university students by tackling the following problematic, "what are the effects of reels on the communicative behavior of the Algerian university students". In this regard, sub-questions arise as follows:

- What do the Algerian university students use the social media reels for?
- How do reels affect the cognitive aspect of the Algerian university students?
- How do reels affect the psychological aspect of the Algerian university students?
- How do reels affect the communicative behavior of the Algerian university students?.

1. The study concepts:

1.1. The concept of reels:

Reels platforms are a new form of social media for different purposes, including the escape of reality, the leisure, and the social achievement through a diverse and unharmful content like vlogs and tutorials (Kang, 2022). In addition, they are short videos produced on social media with a slight rhythm to create an entertaining and expressive content and communicate (Al Zoubi, 2022). Moreover, they are short videos on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and SnapChat, and are very common in the world of digital content. They last between 15 and 60 seconds, and are designed to attract attention in a fast rhythm using audiovisual filters that motivate watching; they are generally chosen by algorithms (Das & Mishra, 2024). Meta reports show that reels are among the most growing contents on Instagram; therefore, they are an important element for the study of the new behavioral patterns (Meta, 2023).

1.2 The cognitive effect:

The short-term memory: Reels affect the individual's ability to store information for a long time. Usually, the short-term memory needs a continuous repetition of

information to allow its retrieval. The information is stored for 20 to 30 seconds and, then, starts to disappear (Shama, 2023) due to the exposure to many videos. Each one lasts less than 01 minutes; therefore, the individual starts to forget rapidly.

The vital neural effects: The vital neural studies show that when the youths use reels, dopamine increases and strongly affects their behaviors. A clinical study showed that the brain schema that treats the rewards showed more activity for the youths who watch reels. This increasing activity leads to the acquisition of watching habits, negatively affects the concentration abilities in the long term, and fosters the cycle of looking for immediate satisfaction (Das & Mishra, 2024).

1.3 The psychological and social effects of reels:

The main social and psychological effects of reels include the following:

The social media may have negative effects on the social health, as many studies linked the use of social media with different negative effects, including insomnia, emotional troubles, low academic achievement, and depression (Sharma, 2023). The excessive views of reels leads to insomnia due to the excessive stimulation of the brain that makes it active and exhausted and unable to rest (Mishra, 2024).

Reels reshape the social taste by promoting for specific outfits, behaviors, and cultural orientations (Nesi, 2020), mainly that the producers of these videos deliberately rely on shocks and weirdness to attract the followers. Thus, the more the reel is weird, the more views it gets.

Instagram reels may cause an addiction for the users because the likes and shares the videos receive create a positive feeling that encourages the users to go on using the application to keep feeling fun. Therefore, watching reels takes long time of their lives due to the addiction, making them neglect the most productive and important activities (Sharma, 2023). The reels are easy to produce and require no costs; therefore youths follow them and get addicted (Molem, 2024).

1.4 The effect on the communicative behavior:

Literature on reels shows many effects on the communicative behavior, including the following:

The big number of reels affects the traditional communication patterns, as the youths become addicted to the short videos and lose focus and interaction with their social environment (Alter, 2017).

The new interaction patterns, including likes and shares, changed the youths' ability to express and use the deep linguistic skills; thus, the youths use abbreviations and symbols for communication (Tagg, 2015).

The duality between the real identity and the virtual one makes the youth use reels to express themselves in a way that is far from their real personalities to achieve more views and satisfy the audience (Papacharissi, 2010).

II. Methods and Materials:

This study is part of the quantitative descriptive studies. Creswell defines them as the studies that aim at studying the relation between the variables using statistical tools. The descriptive method aims at collecting the necessary data on the phenomenon, and organizing, describing, and analyzing them to deduce results and generalize them in the future (Creswell, 2014). We chose this method because it allows describing the study variables in an exact way to diagnose the status-quo, and collecting sufficient data on the effect of social media reels on the cognitive, social, and psychological aspects of the Algerian university students.

The study sample:

We administered the e-questionnaire on 350 Algerian university students and collected back 306 because we excluded 40, which did not meet the conditions. Table 01 shows the informants' properties.

Table 01: The informants' properties:

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Male	114	37.3
Female	192	62.7
Total	306	100

The source: This study

The data collection tools:

They are the tools used for collecting the materials to be used in the study. These tools express a given phenomenon that helps conduct the study and achieve its goals. In our study, we used the electronic questionnaire, which we administered to different Algerian students on Facebook. The questionnaire was divided into the following axes:

- **Axis one:** The use of social media reels by the Algerian university students.
- **Axis two**: The effect of reels on the cognitive aspect of the Algerian university students.
- **Axis three**: The effect of reels on the psychological and social aspects of the Algerian university students.
- **Axis four**: The effect of reels on the communicative behavior of the Algerian university students.

We used Lickert's five points scale to measure the students' trends (agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). Besides, we used different statistical tools, as follows:

- The percentages.
- The arithmetic mean.
- The standard deviation.

III. Results and discussion :

The use of social media reels by the Algerian university students

Table 02: The Algerian university students' exposure to reels:

Categories	Frequency	Percentage%
Less than 01 hour	128	%41,8
01 to 03 hours	152	%49,7
04 to 06 hours	20	%6,5
More than 06 hours	6	%2,0
total	306	%100,0

The source: This study

Table 02 shows that 152 informants (49.7%) are exposed to reels for 01 to 03 hours, 128 (41.8%) for less than 01 hour, 20 (6.5%) for 04 to 06 hours, and 06 (02%) for more than 06 hours. Thus, we find out that the informants spend more than 01 hour watching reels because of their characteristics, especially the immediate satisfaction to achieve happiness.

Table 03: The number of reels watched daily by the informants:

Categories	Frequency	Percentage%
Less than 10	25	8,2%
10 to 30	44	14,4%
30 to 50	60	19,6%
More than 50	177	57,8%
total	306	100,0

The source: This study

Table 03 shows that 177 informants (57.8%) watch 50 reels per day, which is the highest percentage. Besides, 60 informants (19.6%) watch 30 to 50 reels per day, 44 watch 10 to 30 reels per day, and 25 watch less than 10 reels. These results are logical because the highest percentage, which exceeds half of the informants, is exposed to more than 50 reels because of their characteristics, especially the short duration that does not exceed 01 minutes.

Table 04: The informants' choice of reels:

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Your choice	38	12,4%
By random	268	87,6%
Total	306	100,0%

The source: This study

The table shows that 268 informants (87.6%) watch reels by random while 38 (12.4%) make their choices. In this regard, most watch reels by random because the algorithms present reels that are part of their interests; therefore, they do not have to choose specific reels. In addition, curiosity makes them watch all what is shared to discover the reels' content, which usually do not take long time. Thus, they unconsciously and indeliberately watch a new reel each time they scroll down.

Table 05: The platform used by the informants to watch reels:

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	166	30,4%
TikTok	183	33,5%
Facebook	172	31,5%
YouTube	25	4,6%
Total	546	100,0%

The source: This study

Table 05 shows that 183 of the informants (33.5%) watch reels on TikTok, 172 (31.5%) on Facebook, 166 (30.4%) on Instagram, and 25 (4.6%) on YouTube. The percentages are convergent because these platforms are connected and are the most used in Algeria, and

because TikTok and Instagram have relied on reels since their creation. In this context, TikTok ranked first since it is known for its entertaining informal reels that are widespread among the youths.

Table 06: The reels' content followed by the informants:

Categories	Frequency	percentage
Entertaining	204	36,0%
Educational	176	31,0%
Political	25	4,4%
Social	82	14,5%
Artistic and musical	80	14,1%
Total	567	100,0%

The source: This study

The table shows that 204 informants (36%) watch the entertaining reels, 176 (31%) watch educational reels, 82 (14.5%) watch social reels, 80 (14.1%) watch artistic reels, while 25 (4.4%) watch the political ones. These results show that the informants watch more the entertaining reels because they are young and generally love fun and entertainment. In addition, they use TikTok, which is known for its delightful content in Algeria before including the marketing and educational reels. In addition, the educational reels ranked second and reflect the informants' interests, because they are still learning and need new information.

Table 07: The informants' interaction with reels:

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Just watch	306	53,1%
Like	102	17,7%
Share	168	29,2%
Total	576	100,0%

The source: This study

The table shows that 306 out of 576 frequencies (53.1%) just watch reels, 168 (29.2%) share the reels with friends, while 102 (17.7%) like the reels. In this context, most of the informants just watch reels without interaction because it just needs scrolling down to watch the next. Thus, when the first reel ends, the user moves to the next video and shares it with friends when he likes it. This option ranked 02nd, mainly that the most watched type of reels is the digital one, as table 06 shows, what makes the video sharing rank 02nd.

Table 08: The effect of reels on the cognitive aspect of students:

The reels and the cognitive effect		Tests					Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Order	Total degree
Reels help me discover new things	O	7	255	44	00	00	4,12	,3910	1	High
	%	2,3	83,3	14,4	00	00				
Reels are	O	49	136	115	6	00	3,25	,7420	6	average

my favorite source to get information	%	16,0	44,4	37,6	2,0	00				
Reels influence my views	O	116	116	68	6	00	2,88	,8170	7	average
	%	37,9	37,9	22,2	2,0	00				
I prefer reels because they summarize information in an exciting way	O	43	213	50	00	00	4,02	,5520	2	High
	%	14,1	69,6	16,3	00	00				
Reels make me lazy in my study	O	12	68	25	163	38	3,48	1,087	5	average
	%	3,9	22,2	8,2	53,3	12,4				
Reels distract my thinking and make me shift from one topic to another	O	6	43	87	78	92	3,68	1,106	3	High
	%	2,0	14,1	28,4	25,5	30,1				
Reels make me less attentive	O	109	7	98	92	00	3,57	1,251	4	High
	%	35,6	2,3	32,0	30,1	00				
Reels and the cognitive effect							3.571	0.530	/	High

The source: This study

The table shows the effect of reels on the cognitive aspect of students. In this regard, the item “Reels help me discover new things” ranked first with an arithmetic mean of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.391, showing a high agreement on this item. It is followed by item 03 “I prefer reels because they summarize information in an exciting way”, with an arithmetic mean of 4.02, a standard deviation of 0.552, and a high agreement. Then, we find the item “Reels distract my thinking and make me shift from one topic to another”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.68, a standard deviation of 1.106, and a high agreement. After that, the item “Reels make me less attentive” ranked fourth and got an arithmetic mean of 3.57, a standard deviation of 1.251, and a high agreement. In fifth rank, we find the item “reels make me lazy in my study”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.48, a standard deviation of 1.087, and an average agreement. Regarding the item “Reels are my favorite source to get information”, it ranked

sixth with an arithmetic mean of 3.25, a standard deviation of 0.742, and an average agreement. Finally, the item “Reels influence my views” ranked last, with an arithmetic mean of 2.88, a standard deviation of 0.817, and an average agreement.

The table shows that the overall arithmetic mean for all the items is 3.571 and the standard deviation is 0.530, showing a high agreement for the informants on the effect of reels on their cognitive aspect. The items order based on the informants’ views is as follows: Reels help me discover new things.

- I prefer reels because they summarize information in an exciting way.
- Reels distract my thinking and make me shift from one topic to another.
- Reels make me less attentive.
- Reels make me lazy in my study.
- Reels are my favorite source to get information.
- Reels influence my views.

This order shows that the informants focus on the positive side of reels, especially the fact that reels make them discover new things and sum up information in an exciting way. This is because the informants are young and belong to the Z generation, which grew up with technology and is attracted to it. In addition, the informants chose the positive side, which is in itself one of the reels characteristics that attract the users. Then, they discussed the negative side, confirming that reels make them distracted because of their high number, what pushes them to zap videos and move from topic to another. Therefore, they feel less attentive and get distracted. The last item confirms what was said, as the fast zapping makes the videos unable to influence the views since the informants deal with the topics as transient ones for fun. In general, findings show that students see that reels highly affect their cognitive aspect; therefore, they became an integral part of their lives and affect their concentration and attention.

Table 09: The effect of reels the psychological aspect of student:

The reels and the psychological effect		Tests					Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Order	Total degree
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagreed				
I feel bored when I do not watch reels	O	12	103	69	110	12	3,02	1,006	7	Average
	%	3,9	33,7	22,5	35,9	3,9				
I waste much time watching reels on the detriment	O	12	24	73	87	110	3,85	1,116	1	Low
	%	3,9	7,8	23,9	28,4	35,9				

of my daily activities										
The continuous use of reels makes me feel happy	O	13	48	169	70	6	3,03	0 ,797	6	Average
	%	4,2	15,7	55,2	22,9	2,0				
Reels are part of my daily routine	O	6	43	60	184	13	3,51	0 ,858	2	Low
	%	2,0	14,1	19,6	60,1	4,2				
I feel frustrated when I cannot watch reels	O	25	153	55	60	13	2,62	1,025	9	Average
	%	8,2	50,0	18,0	19,6	4,2				
I feel sorrow when I am done watching reels	O	18	165	38	24	61	2,82	1,274	8	Average
	%	5,9	53,9	12,4	7,8	19,9				
My addiction to reels makes me neglect my daily tasks	O	12	63	115	43	73	3,33	1,162	4	Average
	%	3,9	20,6	37,6	14,1	23,9				
Reels make me compare myself to others	O	98	140	50	12	6	1,98	0 ,905	10	Low
		32,0	45,8	16,3	3,9	2,0				
Reels make me feel pleasure and relax	O	12	78	97	113	6	3,08	0 ,926	5	Average
		3,9	25,5	31,7	36,9	2,0				
Reels distract my emotions and move me from one mood to another	O	6	32	92	146	30	3,50	0 ,928	3	Low
		2,0	10,5	30,1	47,7	9,8				
Reels and the psychological effect							3.571	0.530	/	Average

The source: This study

The table shows the effect of reels on the psychological aspect of students. In this regard, the item “I waste much time watching reels on the detriment of my daily activities” ranked first with an arithmetic mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 1.116, showing a high agreement and a positive trend towards this item. It is followed the item “Reels are part of my daily routine”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 0.858, showing that the informants agree on the item and have a positive trend. Then, we find the item “Reels distract my emotions and move me from one mood to another”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.50 and a standard deviation of 0.928. After that, the item “My addiction to reels makes me neglect my daily tasks” ranked fourth and got an arithmetic mean of 3.33, a standard deviation of 1.162, and an average agreement. In fifth rank, we find the item “Reels make me feel pleasure and relax”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.08, a standard deviation of 0.926, and an average agreement. Regarding the item “The continuous use of reels makes me feel happy”, it ranked sixth with an arithmetic mean of 3.03, a standard deviation of 0.797, and an average agreement. Then, the item “I feel bored when I do not watch reels” ranked seventh, with an arithmetic mean of 3.02, a standard deviation of 1.006, and an average agreement. In the eighth rank, we find the item “I feel sorrow when I am done watching reels” with an arithmetic mean of 2.82, a standard deviation of 1.274, and an average agreement. In the ninth rank, we find the item “I feel frustrated when I cannot watch reels” with an arithmetic mean of 2.62, a standard deviation of 1.025, and an average agreement. In the last rank, we find the item “Reels make me compare myself to others” with an arithmetic mean of 1.98, a standard deviation of 0.905, and an low agreement

The table shows that the overall arithmetic mean for all the items is 3.0.57 and the standard deviation is 0.552, showing an average agreement for the informants on the effect of reels on their psychological aspect. The items order based on the informants’ views is as follows:

- I waste much time watching reels on the detriment of my daily activities
- Reels are part of my daily routine.
- Reels distract my emotions and move me from one mood to another.
- My addiction to reels makes me neglect my daily tasks.
- Reels make me feel pleasure and relax.
- The continuous use of reels makes me feel happy.
- I feel bored when I do not watch reels.
- I feel frustrated when I cannot watch reels.
- Reels make me compare myself to others.

This order shows that the informants focused on the negative psychological aspect of reels, especially the fact that reels cause them to neglect their assignments because they turned into a routine in their lives that affects their commitments and tasks. Besides, they focused on the mood changes when moving from one video to another, mainly that reels are short and may show happiness and, then, move to sadness or spiritual videos. Thus, there is no

fixed feeling. As for the items about the informants' addiction to reels, they have average degrees because the informants are aware about the negatives of reels and, therefore, did not reach addiction.

Table 10: The effect of reels on the communicative behavior of the students:

The reels and the communicative behavior		Tests					Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Order	Overall degree
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagreed				
Watching reels decreased my communications with the others	O	59	192	33	20	2	3,93	,7870	1	High
	%	19,3	62,7	10,8	6,5	,70				
I do not like it when someone interrupts me when I watch reels	O	55	151	58	33	9	3,69	,9850	6	High
	%	18,0	49,3	19,0	10,8	2,9				
I cannot watch long videos	O	70	170	31	30	5	3,88	,9260	3	High
	%	22,9	55,6	10,1	9,8	1,6				
I acquired new expressions because of extensive use of reels	O	63	148	45	45	5	3,72	1,005	4	High
	%	20,6	48,4	14,7	14,7	1,6				
I use symbols and short expressions in my discussions	O	61	148	46	20	31	3,61	1,174	7	High
	%	19,9	48,4	15,0	6,5	10,1				
I am less patient when listening to the others	O	67	155	30	33	21	3,70	1,131	5	High
	%	21,9	50,7	9,8	10,8	6,9				
Watching reels makes me want to watch more	O	65	177	43	19	2	3,93	,8110	2	High
	%	21,2	57,8	14,1	6,2	,70				
Reels and the communicative behavior							3.571	0.530	/	High

The source: This study

The table shows the effect of reels on the communicative behavior of students. In this regard, the item "Watching reels decreased my communications with the others" ranked first with an arithmetic mean of 3.93 and a standards deviation of 0.787, showing a high agreement

on this item. It is followed by “Watching reels makes me want to watch more”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.93, a standard deviation of 0.811, and a high agreement. Then, we find the item “I cannot watch long videos”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.88, a standard deviation of 0.926, and a high agreement. After that, the item “I acquired new expressions because of extensive use of reels” ranked fourth and got an arithmetic mean of 3.72, a standard deviation of 1.005, and a high agreement. In fifth rank, we find the item “I am less patient when listening to the others”, with an arithmetic mean of 3.70, a standard deviation of 1.131, and a high agreement. Regarding the item “I do not like it when someone interrupts me when I watch reels”, it ranked sixth with an arithmetic mean of 3.69, a standard deviation of 0.985, and a high agreement. Finally, the item “I use symbols and short expressions in my discussions” ranked last, with an arithmetic mean of 3.61, a standard deviation of 1.174, and a high agreement.

The table shows that the overall arithmetic mean for all the items is 3.7801 and the standard deviation is 0.76674, showing a high agreement for the informants on the effect of reels on their communicative behavior. The items’ order based on the informants’ views is as follows:

- Watching reels decreased my communications with the others.
- Watching reels makes me want to watch more.
- I cannot watch long videos.
- I acquired new expressions because of extensive use of reels.
- I am less patient when listening to the others.
- I do not like it when someone interrupts me when I watch reels.
- I use symbols and short expressions in my discussions.

This order shows that reels have a high effect on the informants’ communicative behavior because the extensive watching of reels makes them preoccupied and less communicative, mainly that reels are short, attract attention, and do not cause boredom because of the possibility of moving from one topic to another based on the algorithms’ suggestions. Thus, the informants find no need for communicating with the others, and acquire a new communicative feature, that is the excessive watching of reels. In addition, the reels’ focus on attracting attention and gaining more followers pushes their creators to invent a new smooth and funny language that can be easily learned and used to push the youths to embrace it and integrate it in their daily expressions. Moreover, reels affect the youths’ patience when listening to others or watching long videos because they are used to short ones that transfer the message easily.

IV. Conclusion:

Findings show a high effect for reels on the cognitive aspect of the informants, as they help them discover new things and summarize information. However, they have a negative effect because they reduce concentration and distract attention, as confirmed by different studies. Regarding the psychological aspect, the degree of reels’ effect is average. Although the

informants agree on the negative effects of reels, like moving from one mood to another and the fact that they became a routine in their lives, they did not cause an addiction. In return, they negatively affect the communicative behaviors of the informants at a high degree, as they change their expressions and made them acquire new language and communicative habits marked with low patience in listening and interacting with the others, and in watching long videos. In the end, we conclude that reels are a new form of the digital content with distinctive features that impose a different communicative behavior and show hastiness and less face-to-face interaction.

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