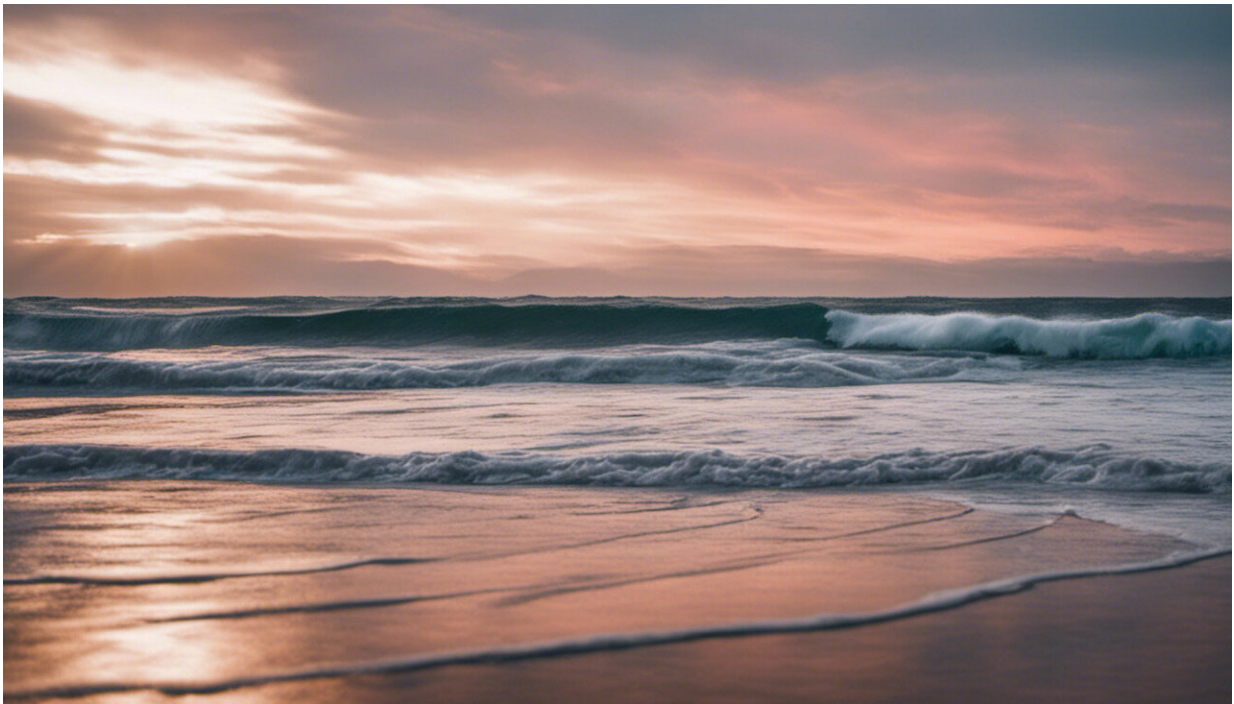


# Instagram is the home of pretty pictures. Why are people flocking to it for news?

August 19 2020, by Laura Glitsos

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

We know Instagram is the most influential app when it comes to [lifestyle](#) and [beauty](#) trends.

But recent research shows increasing numbers of people are also going to Instagram for their [news](#). A report by the [Reuters Institute](#) found the use

of Instagram for news has doubled across all age groups since 2018.

It is now [set to overtake Twitter](#) as a [news source](#) in the coming year, with [younger people](#) in particular embracing Instagram for their news.

## What is 'Insta'?

Instagram is a social media platform where users post photos with captions, with an estimated [one billion active users](#) around the world.

The Reuters report found Instagram reaches 11% of people of all ages for news, based on survey results for 12 countries, including Australia.

But the embrace of the platform for news is particularly pronounced for young people. For example, in April, 24% of 18-24 year olds in the United Kingdom used Instagram to find out about COVID-19. This compares with 26% in the United States.

Australians were not polled for this particular question, but a [2020 Australian study](#) of school students found 49% of teenagers surveyed got their news from Instagram.

Instagram is certainly viewed as a [younger person's platform](#), as opposed to Facebook, which is seen to be for [older people](#). Those between 18 and 34 make up [about 63 percent](#) of Instagram users worldwide.

Instagram users can receive news stories and updates by following another user and then seeing what they post by scrolling through their feed. Alternatively, users can search via a hashtag.

## Why are young people choosing Instagram for news?

Those under [about 35](#) have grown up with mobile and social media as the norm. So it follows they interact with news and current events in a radically different way from previous generations, or even news consumers a decade ago.

Recent [research suggests](#) young people think that rather than going to dedicated sources for their news—like a newspaper or TV bulletin—the news will come to them. So, important information "finds them" anyway, through their general media use, peers and social connections.

Another key difference with older news consumers is that younger people are "[prosumers](#)". Not only do they read the news, they can actually produce it and join in what's trending. Sometimes, this may be by simply sharing a post with extra commentary and opinion. At other times, users might take an image or video and edit it in order to make and share a meme that relates to the content.

## Order in a chaotic world

Amid global chaos and uncertainty, Instagram offers up the world as a stable, structured, and highly stylised.

Instagram is less chaotic than other social media platforms because of the actual interface design. That is, the focus is almost purely on esthetics—on the [beauty and impact](#) of the image using filters and tools. This type of media consumption soothes instead of provoking anxiety. In some senses, it simplifies and streamlines the chaos of the world.

Instagram's ability to simplify and "organize" the world resonates with another finding of the Reuters report—Instagram has become even more important with younger groups for accessing news about COVID-19.

## The power of influencers

Instagram is home to "[influencers](#)"—high-profile users who are considered to be style and opinion leaders. While they can influence the [products we buy](#), or the places we travel to, they can also influence [the information we consume](#).

This becomes even more important in times of crisis. It is comforting to seek out narratives or perspectives from people we know and trust.

In the case of news media, Instagram gives young people what feels like a direct and personal line to their role models. In this respect, so does Twitter, but again, the interface of Instagram is simpler. On Instagram, what might be complex and confusing issues are condensed down to images.

[Recent research](#) also suggests Instagram users prefer "lighter" and "less-demanding" types of interaction with online news.

## What does this mean for news consumption?

The implications of the move towards "Insta-news" are complex. One concern is the way people can curate their own reality, because they can shape their feed so they only see what they want. They can unfollow or block what they do not like.

In some senses, this can [sense](#) of control is positive. However, this also means people are essentially constructing what they want the world to look like. This leads to "[filter bubbles](#)", where people become "cut off" from other, perhaps more challenging, ideas.

Western culture is essentially "[ocularcentric](#)". In other words, we are

obsessed with images. And we are more likely to [believe things we can see](#). As a result, news consumers may be less inclined to challenge or critique what they see on Instagram. Even though they need to be doing this online more than ever.

The dangers of [fake followers](#), fake accounts and [fake news](#) are already well-known on social media. Last year, Institut Polytechnique de Paris researchers found [4,000 fake accounts](#) in a targeted sample on Instagram.

## Good-looking news in a hostile world

For [young people](#) seeking solace from the hostility and pressure of news events, Instagram provides a space filled with good-looking visual stimulation, often from people they like and trust.

And as the Reuters report noted—Instagram may not be everything. Social [media](#) are generally used "in combination" with other types of news information.

But as increasing numbers of people turn to Instagram for their news, the question remains: is this the news they need, or simply the news they want to see?

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