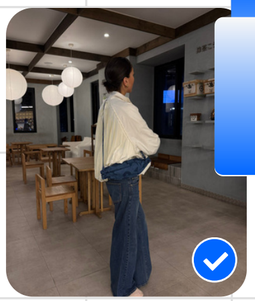
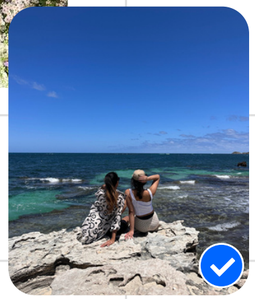
(01)





(02)



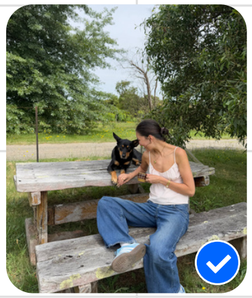
(03)

Meaningful & intentional

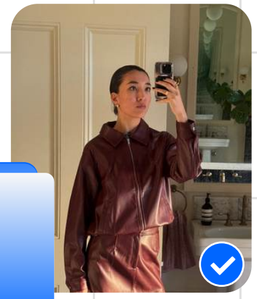
# SHORT-FROM CONTENT

## *NEEDFINDING REPORT*

(04)



(05)



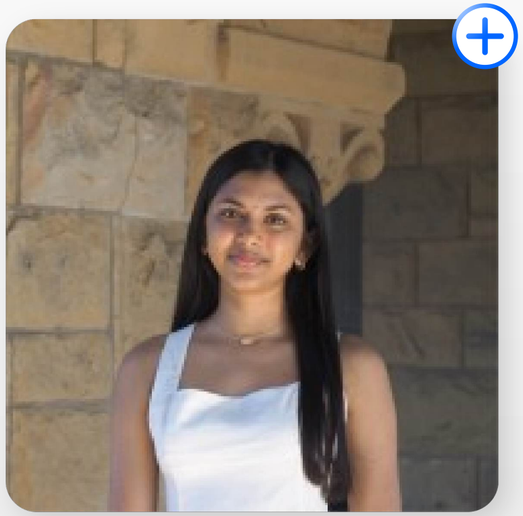
# MEET THE TEAM

View All



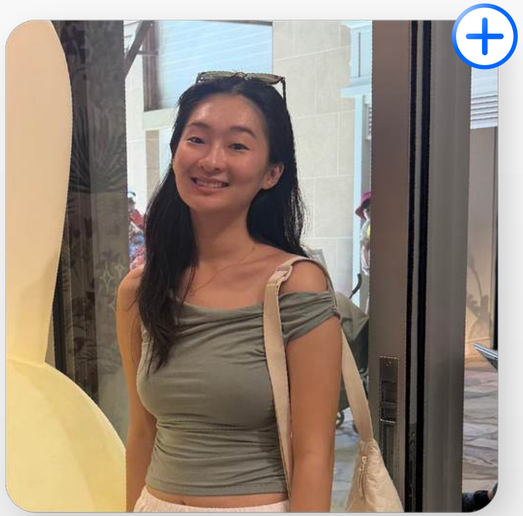
**Vinaya Sharma**

Class of ‘28
Computer Science
Toronto, Canada



**Preethika Pavirala**

Class of ‘28
CS + Product Design
Houston, TX and India



**Imogen Lee**

Class of ‘27
Symbolic Systems
Los Angeles, CA

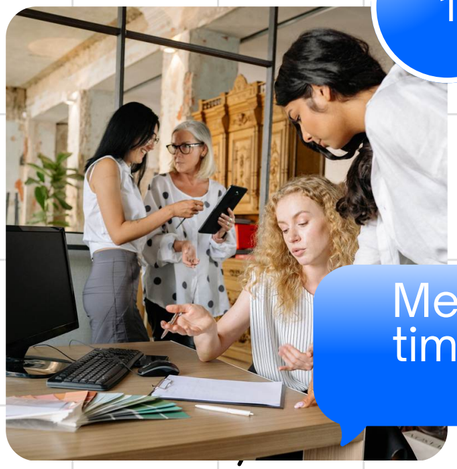


**Fiona Han**

Class of ‘27
Symbolic Systems
Shanghai, China

# DOMAIN SELECTION

1



Meaningful Work - what makes time and effort feel meaningful versus wasted?

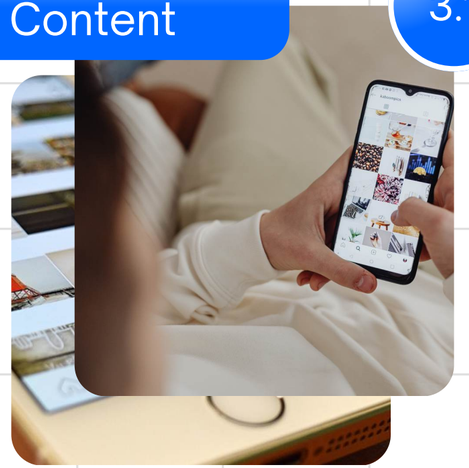
Attention + How it Slips Away



2

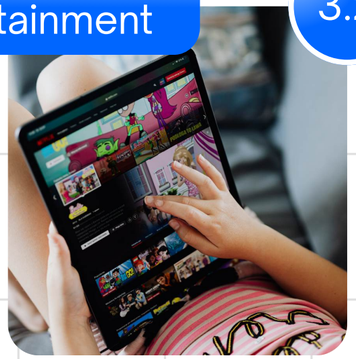
Short Form Content

3.1



Passive Entertainment

3.2



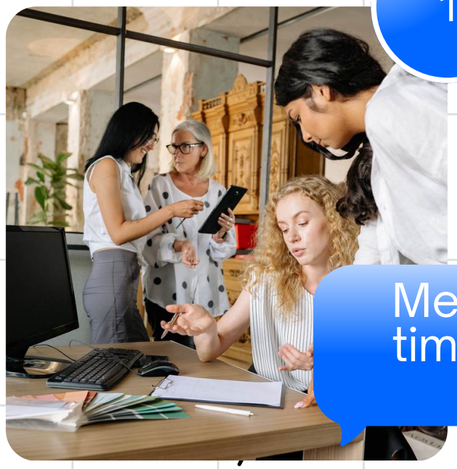
Gaming

3.3



# GENZ AND STUDENTS THAT WATCH SHORT FORM CONTENT

1



Meaningful Work - what makes time and effort feel meaningful versus wasted?

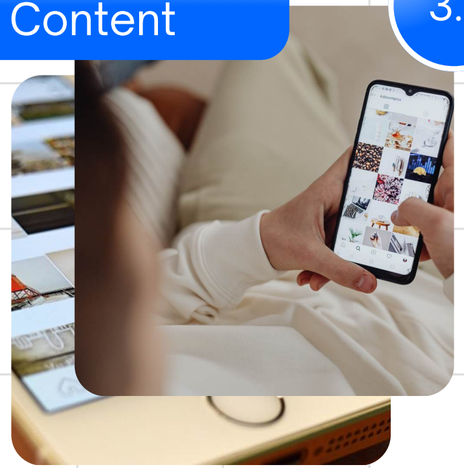
Attention + How it Slips Away



2

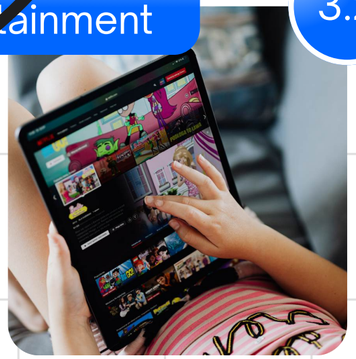
Short Form Content

3.1



Passive Entertainment

3.2



Gaming

3.3



# FINDING PARTICIPANTS

Notes Done

## 01. GENZ

Focused primarily on Gen Z participants . They are among the heaviest and most habitual users of short-form video platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts.

Notes Done

## 02. DIVERSITY

Diversity in age, gender, location and more made sure we got a broad understanding of peoples experience with short form content.

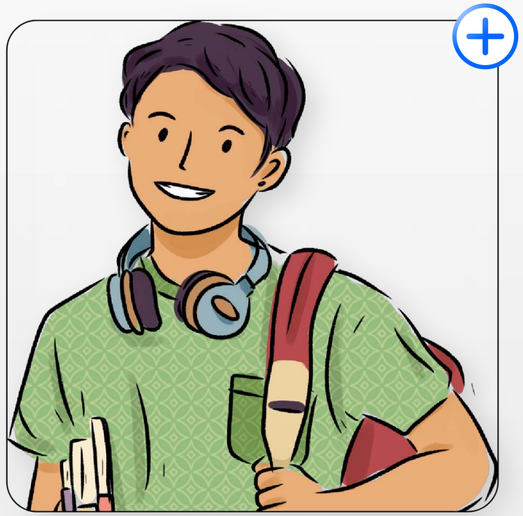
Notes Done

## 03. PARENTS - LIFE-STAGE AXIS

We included them specifically to see whether the tensions around intentional versus automatic consumption were unique to younger users or appeared across generations.

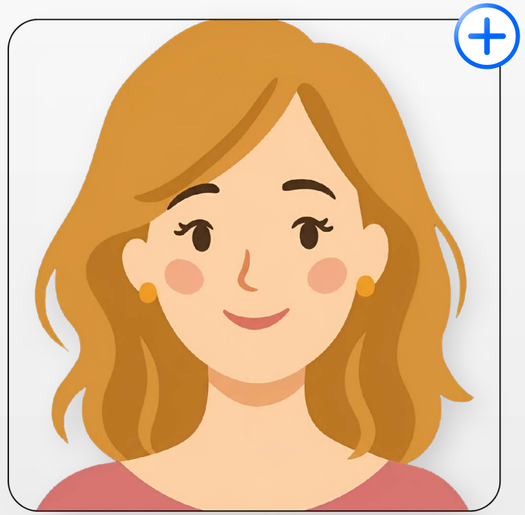
# WE SPOKE TO...

View All



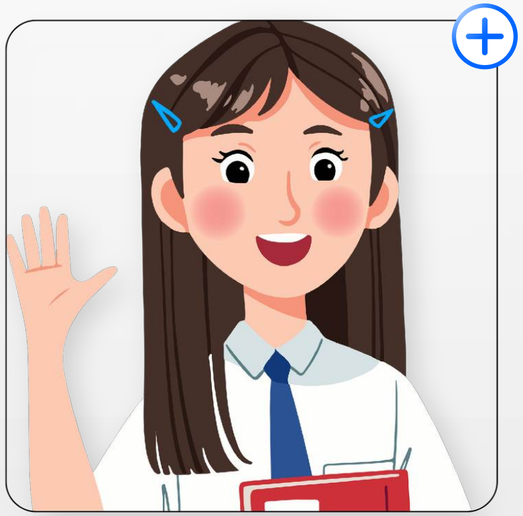
**Keith**

14 year old high school student (Palo Alto, boy)



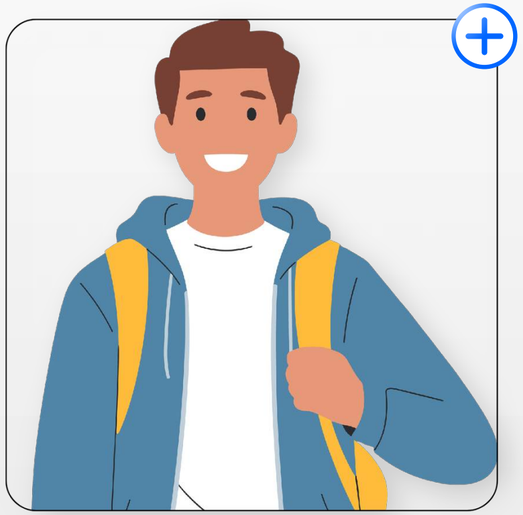
**Lena**

GSE researcher and Mom



**Nishi**

18 year old high school student (India, girl)



**Harsh**

15 year old high school student (Mountain View, boy)

# QUESTIONS WE ASKED

**Triggers & context**

1. When / where / why do you scroll?
2. What makes you start?

**Experience**

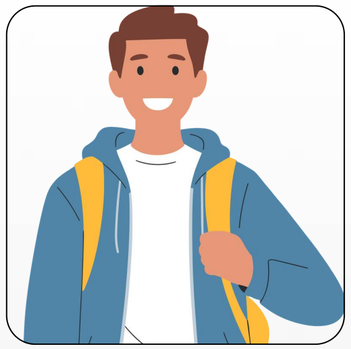
- What does scrolling feel like?
- How does it feel afterward?
- When does it feel worthwhile?

**Meaning & value**

- What content sticks with you?
- What makes content worth sharing?
- Do you get lasting value from it?

**Control & agency**

- Intentional vs. automatic scrolling?
- How do you decide when to stop?
- Have you tried cutting back?
- What would you change?



# HARSH

*Cupertino, CA*

15 years old | High School Boy | Ambitious

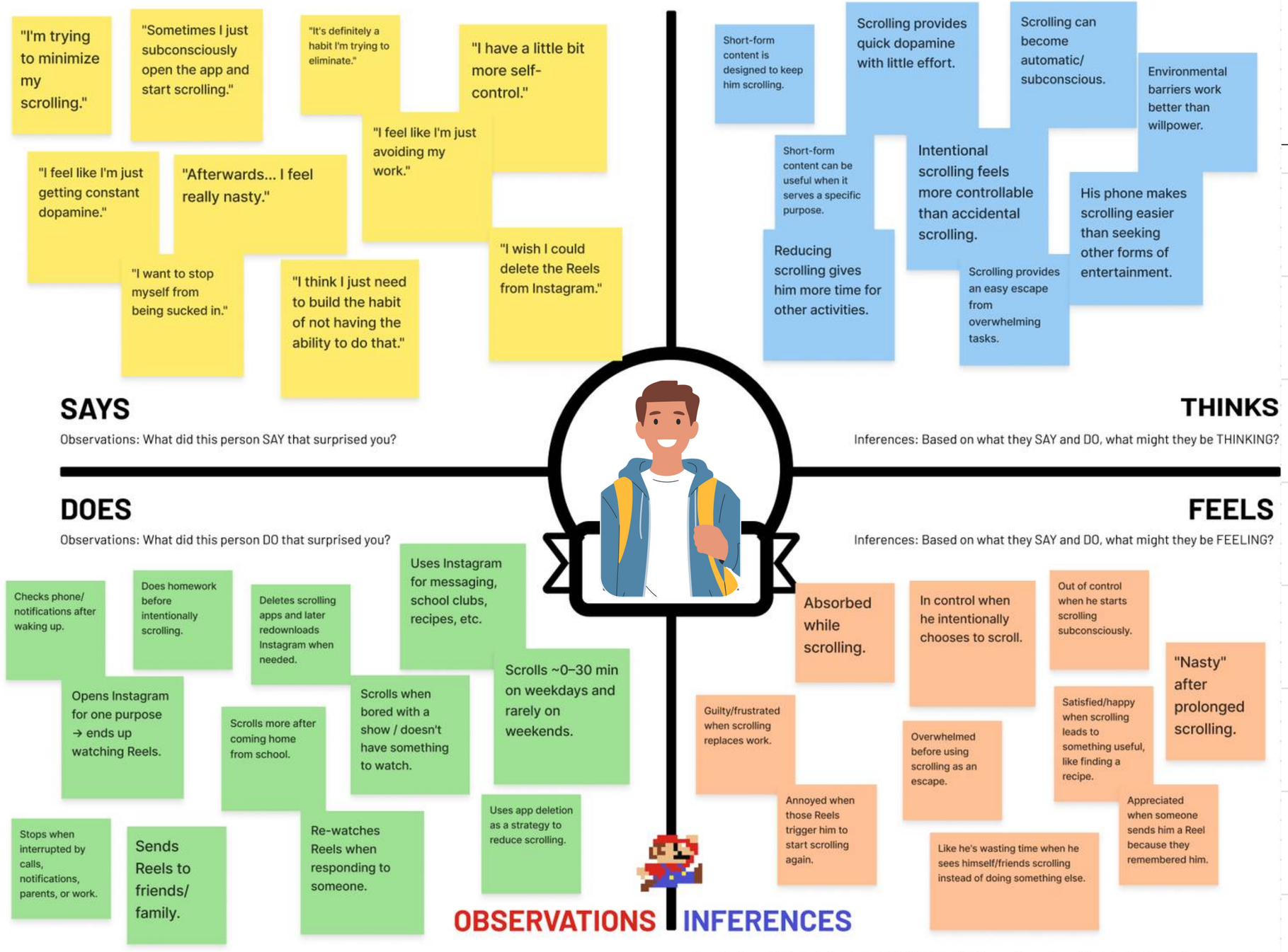
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***Key direct quotes and surprises***

"Sometimes I just subconsciously open the app and start scrolling."

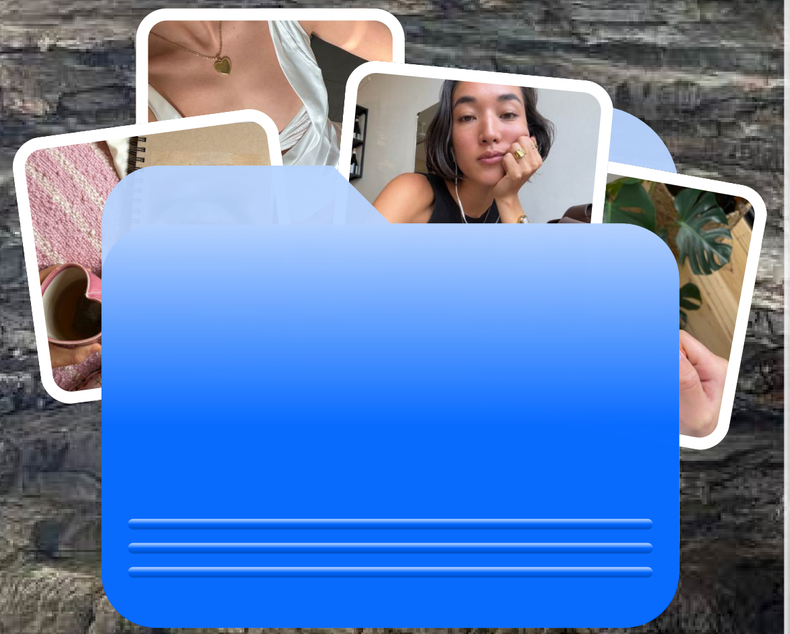
Sends Reels to friends/family.

Scrolling provides an easy escape from overwhelming tasks.




Empathy Map originally created by a team at XPLANE: https://medium.com/the-xplane-collection/updated-empathy-map-canvas-46df22

# INTERVIEW INSIGHTS



## INSIGHTS

#1: Uses short-form content as an escape when feeling overwhelmed, bored, or tired, but often ends up procrastinating and feeling worse afterward.

#2: Wants to use Instagram for messaging, school, and information, but the presence of Reels turns necessary app use into unintended scrolling.

#3: External friction works better than willpower: deleting apps and making them harder to access significantly reduced subconscious scrolling.

## NEEDS

#1: Needs to **relax** when overwhelmed without falling into an unintentional scrolling cycle.

#2: Need to stay **socially connected**. Sending Reels and messaging friends is actually an important social behavior.

#3: Need to stay **informed** quickly, because short-form content had become a convenient source of news and information.



# KEITH

*Palo Alto, CA*

Age: 14

young user

9th grade student

---

***Key direct quotes and surprises***

"If I really needed to move away from the habit, I feel like I could do it without too much difficulty"

"I'm not proud that I remember this" (an AI mukbang video)

"It's kind of a way of starting a conversation, when there's no other easy way to talk to them"

"If I'm scrolling, it's usually after school when I get home."

"I feel like it's kind of a conscious choice"

"It's not like you're retaining all the information; it kind of goes away."

"I'm not proud that I remember this (about AI-generated content)"

"As long as I use my time well and get what I need to do done, my parents are fine with it"

"Short-form content can give you the same things as long-form, just much quicker."

"It can be really distracting."

"I sit there for like half an hour"

"It changes how I see it sometimes (re: news like Israel-Palestine through reels)"

"I think it declines because there's a lot of repetition"

"I use it for messaging people a lot, for the connections"

"TikTok is "all the same" as Instagram Reels, and has a worse reputation."

## SAYS

Observations: What did this person SAY that surprised you?

Believes they could stop the habit easily if they tried

Believes short-form content delivers information faster/more efficiently than long-form

Scrolling is only worthwhile when he gets something out of it, like photography tips.

TikTok is the "purest form" of short-form content, but has the "worst reputation" vs Instagram/YouTube

Much of what he watches is forgettable and low-quality, especially AI-generated content.

Attributes what they see (and don't see) to the algorithm, not fully to their own choices

His parents' standard works for him: fine as long as his work gets done.

Short-form video shapes his views, like on Israel/Palestine, since he doesn't watch the news.

Connected, since DMs let him start conversations with friends he can't otherwise reach.

Believes the habit is a real distraction from productive work

Frames the habit as something that "replaced" an earlier habit, implying habits are interchangeable

Believes reels substitute for social contact with friends who are otherwise hard to reach

## THINKS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be THINKING?



## DOES

Observations: What did this person DO that surprised you?

Scrolls after school and in bed, up to about 30 minutes per session.

Mostly uses YouTube and Instagram. He deleted TikTok.

Watches badminton, photography, and random content, and sometimes searches for specific topics.

Uses Instagram DMs and WhatsApp to stay in touch, including with friends at Gunn.

Stops when content gets repetitive.

Gets news from Reels instead of traditional news.

Wanted to buy a computer and noticed ads on Reels for attractive ones.

Replaced bedtime reading with scrolling.

Often relies on the search feature in Instagram Reels to find specific information instead of using Google

Conducts deep dives when the content interests him

## FEELS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be FEELING?

Tired and too lazy to do anything else when he starts scrolling.

A dopamine-driven good feeling at first, which declines as content repeats.

Mild regret, like he's "wasted a lot of time"

Hooked since he got the apps in middle school.

Mildly embarrassed or self-conscious (about remembering the AI mukbang content)

Relaxed/low-effort comfort, especially when tired after school

Frustrated when the habit pulls them away from work ("kind of annoying")

Connected to friends through the act of sending/receiving reels

Ambivalent, holding both "this is beneficial" and "this is a waste" at once

Diminishing satisfaction as a session goes on, tipping into boredom

A little defensive/image-conscious about which platform they use (avoiding TikTok's reputation)

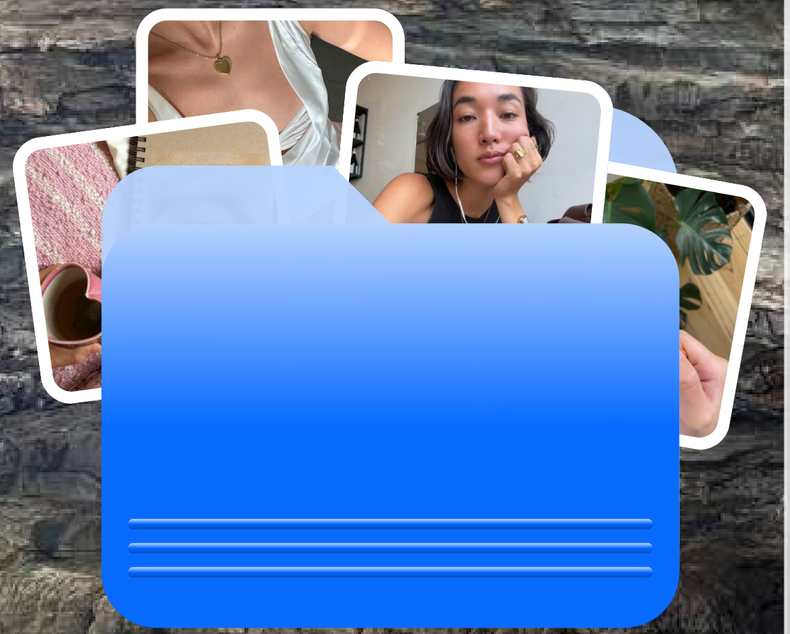
Confident about being "in control," despite describing behavior that suggests otherwise



OBSERVATIONS | INFERENCES

Empathy Map originally created by a team at XPLANE: https://medium.com/the-xplane-collection/updated-empathy-map-canvas-46df22

# INTERVIEW INSIGHTS



## INSIGHTS

#1: Says the habit is easy to quit, but describes escalating use

#2: The stopping point is boredom or repetition, not by any sense of completion or satisfaction

#3: Describes the content as fleeting and shallow, yet credits it with shifting real opinions and teaching real skills

## NEEDS

#1: Needs a low-effort way to decompress after a draining day

#2: Needs fast, low-friction access to specific information

#3: Needs a way to stay connected to friends who are hard to reach otherwise



# LENA

GSE

Age: 30s

Mom of a toddler

Senior Researcher

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***Key direct quotes and surprises***

“I get really overwhelmed and overstimulated... It's like constantly feeding me stuff and it's not in my control.”

“It can be hard to condense kind of complex things into a 10 second video.”

“Usually I'm not on it for very long. I'm usually like, oh, this is dumb and then I'll close it.”



## SAYS

Observations: What did this person SAY that surprised you?

"Some of those things I have a hard time learning about outside of social media."

"If that kind of becomes your baseline, then, like, reality might start to seem a little boring."

"It's like constantly feeding me stuff and it's like not in my control."

"It can be hard to condense kind of complex things into just like... a 10 second video."

"I just like need a mental break or like not to be thinking about something else."

"It's a little concerning that like people can't really like read an article anymore."

"It's not like, um, good or intentional time."

"I get really overwhelmed and overstimulated by the kind of constant play."

"I can't just be like, I'm not gonna look at my phone for the next hour"

"Usually I'm not on it for very long. I'm usually like, oh, this is like dumb and then I'll close it."

## THINKS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be THINKING?

Most social media content doesn't add anything meaningful to her day.

Social media is a hard habit to quit because some of it is genuinely useful.

Feeds where she controls the pace are acceptable (e.g., the Instagram posts).

Autoplay on Reels takes control away from her.

Short-form content trains short attention spans and passive consumption.

If constant stimulation becomes the baseline, real life may start to feel boring.

But social media can surface parenting topics she wouldn't have known to think about.

Parenting advice online is often oversimplified into rigid "right vs. wrong" rules.

Informational short videos (like NYT's) are less harmful than flashy ones, but their existence is a bad sign.

Watching on a phone is a worse experience than watching on a TV.

Long-form content lets her learn or get invested in a way short content doesn't.

## DOES

Observations: What did this person DO that surprised you?

Opens Facebook and Instagram several times a day in short sessions.

Passively watches whatever Instagram stories appear first rather than seeking out specific people.

Checks texts immediately even when she can't respond, then rereads them later.

When landing in reels, doesn't spend too much time on it.

Follows local neighborhood accounts and adds events (night markets, open houses) to the family calendar.

Opens social media to fill one-minute gaps, like right before leaving the house.

Uses Facebook to check mutual connections when meeting someone new.

Minimizes phone use in front of her daughter but still uses it for necessary tasks like answering her husband.

Watches long-form shows (YouTube, Netflix, HBO, Apple TV) on the TV with her husband for about 30 minutes after dinner.

Listens to news podcasts of varying lengths (The Headlines, The Daily, hour-long discussions) while driving or walking.

## FEELS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be FEELING?

Guilty or dissatisfied that her social media time isn't intentional.

In need of mental breaks and brief distraction during the day.

Overwhelmed and overstimulated by reels and autoplay.

More in control and at ease when scrolling static posts.

Amused and validated by comedy parenting content that mirrors her experiences.

Uneasy that her daughter is fascinated by her phone as a "forbidden thing."

Pressured by the need to stay reachable even while trying to model low phone use.

Conflicted about deleting Instagram because she'd lose valuable local information.

Worried about broader societal effects of short-form media on attention.

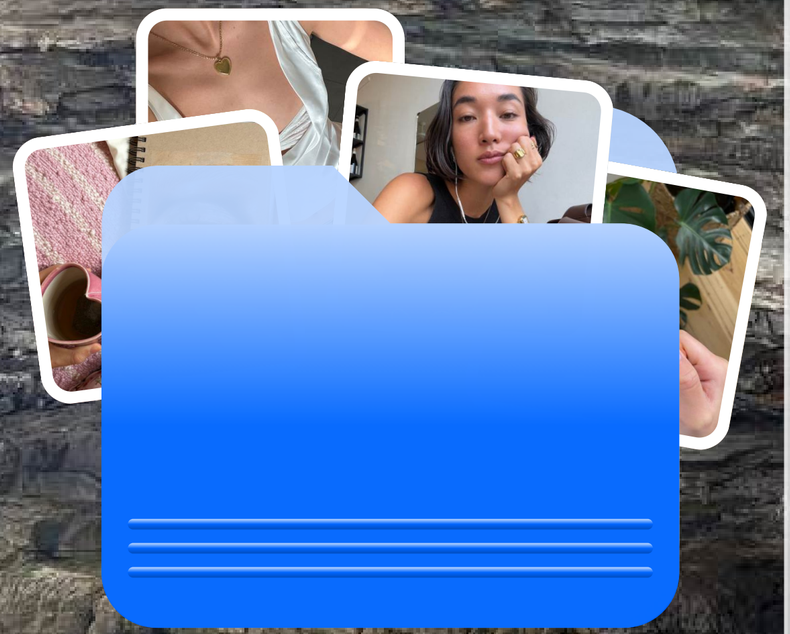
Relaxed and connected when watching shows together with her husband.



OBSERVATIONS | INFERENCES

Empathy Map originally created by a team at XPLANE: https://medium.com/the-xplane-collection/updated-empathy-map-canvas-46df22df3c8a

# INTERVIEW INSIGHTS



## INSIGHTS

#1: The useful local content (events, new businesses) are one of the only things keeping her on Instagram.

#2: Whether media feels okay depends on who controls what you watch. She's fine with short posts but feels overwhelmed by what comes next.

#3: She opens social media because a one-minute gap feels like it needs filling, and she usually ends up thinking "this is dumb".

## NEEDS

#1: A way to get neighborhood and local updates and feel connected.

#2: A way to consume content at her own pace, choosing what is next.

#3: A way to fill tiny moments of downtime with something that actually feels meaningful.



# NISHI

*Hyderabad, India*

Age: 18 | High School Girl | Driven student

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## *Key direct quotes and surprises*

“One account is tuned for just brain rot and art content... And then I have my main account that is usually to the educational side” - curated through specific interaction choices

“I’m a person that gets influenced very easily… if I see around 4 to 6 reels constantly of some sort of political content…” “That influence makes it so much more real when they just state arbitrary facts that you’re not checking yourself”

"If I see a reel that goes below 30 seconds, I usually skip it." Yet on the 2x feature: "I think that is also another horrible factor, even though I do use it a lot." - she seeks out longer content, then speeds it up

# NISHI: EMPATHY MAP

## SAYS

Observations: What did this person SAY that surprised you?

- "I just tune my algorithm so it doesn't give me just brain rot content."
- "89% of the time, [I use] [short form content] for escape."
- "Are you really ever happy watching content on Insta? ... There's no satisfaction point."
- "I'm a person that gets influenced very easily."
- Serious news getting cut off by influencer reels: "It's out of sight, out of mind" mindset forms
- Asked if she's ever tried to cut back: "I don't think I have."
- Platforms should ask qualitative questions. learn where users "exactly stop" and why they start.
- "I'm pretty sure it was 47 times that I got a Grok ad" in ~5 minutes of scrolling.

## THINKS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be THINKING?

- If she curates what she watches, the time isn't wasted. "Intentional" = what she watches, not how long.
- She's in control and using it the right way, even while admitting it hurts her attention span.
- Breaks have no natural end. Only a goal (like finding inspo) gives a session a finish line or a satisfying end,
- Repeated reels can quietly change what she believes, looking back on being swayed by political content.
- Platforms are profit-driven; they'll never really change. Resigned about systemic fixes.
- The feed flattens tragedy and trivia into one scroll, so serious issues lose their weight.
- People should be made to stop and reflect on why they're using the app at all.
- Influencer lifestyles are an elitist, unrealistic benchmark that ignores your own life's variables.



## OUR USER

High-school student in India prepping for the SAT & college apps. Heavy Instagram user (3–4 hrs weekdays, ~7 hrs weekends) who sees herself as a deliberate, "algorithm-tuning," and easily influenced viewer.

## DOES

Observations: What did this person DO that surprised you?

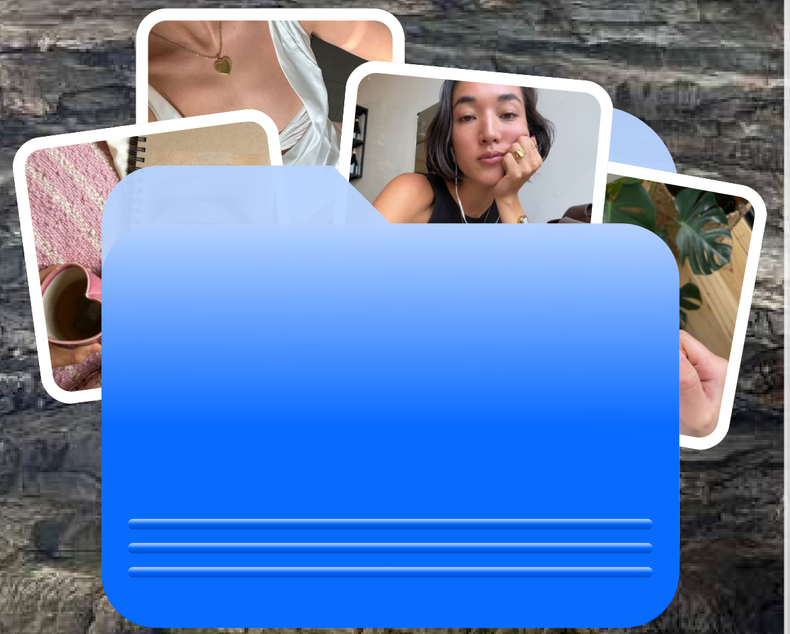
- Runs two Instagram accounts: a "main" one tuned for educational content, another for brain rot
- Likes, comments & shares educational posts to train her feed + watches brain rot but deliberately withholds likes.
- Scrolls in planned breaks between study blocks (~30 min study → 5 min reels), timing it by glancing
- Lets go of her self-timer at night: scrolls 30 min to 2.5 hrs in bed, sometimes until 2–3 AM.
- Picks up her phone without meaning to right after putting her laptop away for bed.
- Skips reels under 30 seconds and seeks longer ones, but watches most of them at 2x speed (which can then become under 30 seconds)
- Shares memes with her grade far more often than educational content.
- Sometimes goes in with a goal: searches Halloween party inspo, revisits Saved for dance & college tips.
- Opens DMs first to text friends then moves into reels.
- Reports ~3–4 hrs/day on weekdays and ~7 hrs on weekends on social media.

## FEELS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be FEELING?

- Relief and release when she opens a short form video app when her mind wanders mid-study (especially SAT English).
- Proud and savvy about "hacking" her algorithm.
- Unsettled by the quick switch from tragic news to influencer fluff and uneasy at how fast she forgets.
- Numb in long sessions, especially during her night-time scrolls where scrolling becomes background "white noise" and goes on for hours
- Powerless at night ("you don't have control over that"), yet accepting of it.
- Irritated by ad overload and a UI designed to keep her hooked.
- Wary about privacy, worried features like Instants make stalking easier.
- Connected to her grade through shared memes and inside references.

# INTERVIEW INSIGHTS



## INSIGHTS

#1: Sees curating her feed as being intentional and "good" content means longer time spent scrolling isn't a problem.

#2: Even with a carefully curated feed, repetition changed her mind. 4-6 political reels in a row made claims she never checked feel true.

#3: Educational reels fade, but memes spread. Without a way to bring learning into conversation, the "good" content stays forgettable.

## NEEDS

#1: A way to judge her time on the app by what she watched and how it leaves her, not just by what she watched

#2: A way to notice when her feed is shaping her opinions, before repetition turns into belief

#3: A way to turn what she learns into something she can talk about with friends.

# INTERVIEW RESULTS

1. **People think they're choosing when to stop, but sometimes something else is actually making the decision for them.**
   - One participant said scrolling was a conscious choice and that they could stop easily.
   - But when we dug deeper, they realized that they usually stopped when the videos became repetitive or boring.
   - So the stopping point wasn't necessarily an intentional decision. It was the content becoming less stimulating.

2. **People often use the value of the content to justify the time spent.**
   - For example, someone might say they're learning photography tips or getting news.
   - But then they'll admit that the information "kind of goes away."
   - So there's a tension between feeling like you're gaining something and actually retaining something meaningful.

3. **Deleting one platform doesn't necessarily solve the underlying behavior.**
   - One participant deleted TikTok because they felt better without it, but continued the same scrolling behavior through Instagram and YouTube.
   - That suggested to us that the deeper issue isn't necessarily a specific platform.
   - It's the relationship between the person, the content, and the habit.

# PUTTING IT TOGETHER

4 Interviews Later!

**Agency & control**
- Want control over when/why they scroll
- Accidental / automatic scrolling feels out of control
- Environmental barriers > willpower

**Emotional escape**
- Quick dopamine
- Escape from boredom, stress, overwhelm
- Easy, low-effort distraction
- Often leads to procrastination / regret
- Information seeking
- Guilt / regret
- Desire for intentional use

**Social & informational value**
- Messaging + staying connected
- Finding recipes, news, school info
- Sharing content with friends/family
- Hard to delete platforms because of useful features

**Supporting themes**
- Habit / autopilot
- Boredom
- Procrastination
- Social connection