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SRK'S LOCKABLE REEL SHOWS WHY EXCLUSIVITY IS THE NEW ENGAGEMENT HACK

SRK's password-protected Reel turned casual scrollers into code-cracking fans, blurring the line between entertainment and engagement. Are we entering the era of 'earned access' content?

BY **ANTORA CHAKRABORTY**
Published: Oct 22, 2025 3:45 PM

When Shah Rukh Khan dropped India's first 'Lockable Reel' on Instagram, a password-protected behind-the-scenes clip from *The Ba**ds of Bollywood* that fans could access only after decoding a hidden clue, it felt like more than a stunt. It was a signal- a sign that social media's next frontier may not be about visibility, but exclusivity.

Instagram's 'Lockable Reels' feature allows creators to post content accessible only through a secret code, turning passive viewing into an act of discovery. For brands and creators navigating an overcrowded attention economy, this could become a powerful way to command engagement, foster loyalty, and even build new revenue streams. For the first time, Instagram wasn't asking users to simply watch; it was asking them to work for access. That shift, from scrolling to seeking, could redefine the way audiences engage with brands online.

Mrityunjay Kumar, Co-founder, Mashrise, calls this shift a move toward "making social content experiential." When users go beyond passive consumption to decode, unlock, and participate, they begin to feel a part of it. He adds, "It's not just about views anymore, it's about involvement. When audiences decode a passcode or unlock exclusive footage, they feel part of something bigger than the content itself. That feeling of discovery and belonging drives far deeper engagement than a standard reel ever could."

For years, social media platforms have battled user fatigue, an endless stream of content that blends into sameness. 'Lockable Reels' have the potential to introduce a moment of friction, and paradoxically, that's what makes them more engaging. **Chandan Bagwe, Founder & Director, C Com Digital** explains, the format "makes scrolling more interesting by turning it into a 'Velvet Rope' activity." He elaborates, "Lockable Reels fit right in with modern brand strategies that focus on keeping customers and getting them to buy more by allowing targeted, high-value distribution. It makes people want to interact with the content on purpose by making them work to find the code, which makes the content seem more valuable."

The format has the potential to transform discovery into a game, and games, as marketing history shows, are powerful behavior drivers. But how can this layered Instagram feature become a part of brand strategy?

Yash Chandiramani, Founder & Chief Strategist at Admatazz, explains this feature as "an elegant blend of psychology and platform design." He believes Lockable Reels tap into the fundamentals of human curiosity. He also emphasizes that the feature is most effective when "the effort-to-reward ratio is balanced. Lockable Reels can be used for gamified launches, tiered access content or exclusive collaborations. It should not be a part of a tactic to gain attention. Brands should not revolve their 'strategy' around it."

Somewhere for brands, this feature can open new strategic pathways. Imagine fans hunting for hidden codes in brand posts, unlocking new content, or getting access to limited offers. **Tanisha Jatia, Founder & Brand Lead, Urban Jungle,** puts her, "Lockable Reels can seamlessly integrate into existing brand strategies by adding a layer of intimacy and interactivity to digital storytelling. They turn campaigns into experiences that feel both personal and participatory, shifting engagement from passive viewing to active discovery. For brands like ours, it means we can reward loyal audiences with early-access drops, hidden codes, or gated content moments that build emotional connection." From a business perspective, she sees this as more than a creative tool, "Lockable Reels open up exciting avenues, from conversion-linked unlocks and premium access models to spend-based rewards or membership-driven perks. Beyond engagement, they bridge social entertainment with loyalty marketing, transforming curiosity into tangible action."

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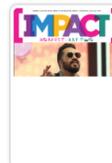
Mrityunjay adds that Lockable Reels offer brands a range of possibilities, from providing early product access and hidden campaign teasers to sharing insider tutorials. "They allow brands to create layered storytelling, distinguishing between what's publicly available and what's earned," he explains. "From a monetization perspective, the opportunities are significant: gated premium content, collaborative unlocks with influencers, or interactive scavenger-style campaigns. It gives brands a way to transform attention into meaningful action, truly marketing gold."

Shradha Agarwal, CEO, Grapes Worldwide, likens Lockable Reels to a "speakeasy bar," hidden behind an invitation, known only to those who care enough to find it. "We all love what happens behind the scenes. That feeling of being part of something special, something you've earned, that's powerful. If brands can give that sense of access, it becomes something people talk about." She sees a three-layered opportunity: community-specific access for loyal fan tribes, experiential behind-the-scenes content for event attendees or active followers, and transactional hidden offers or perks. "Brands can now creatively monetize this exclusivity," she adds. "From gated premium experiences to reward-linked unlocks, it's about turning curiosity into tangible ROI while maintaining engagement." Each layer strengthens emotional connection, turning followers into insiders.

To discuss monetization potential, every click and unlock can be traced to tangible outcomes. Brands have the oppurtunity to not just measure impressions, but participation. Subscription-only unlocks, gated lead-generation content, or time-limited discount reveals can link attention to revenue, converting curiosity into conversion.

Sudharshan Anandkumar, founder of TING, adds even more insight on brand potential. "Advertising, at its core, has always been about earning attention. In today's noisy social landscape, even platforms need to help creators and brands innovate to spark curiosity. Lockable Reels does exactly that. It builds a sense of discovery and FOMO, something most brands are constantly chasing." He further emphasizes, "Brands can use it for product launches, exclusive content drops, or as curiosity triggers. But like any creative tool, it works best in moderation. The magic lies in how it's used, not how often it's used. Overuse will only dilute its novelty. It should be like the twist in a good story, unexpected, smart, and timed right."

"The best campaigns won't chase mass reach; they'll design moments worth unlocking," **Anandkumar** notes. "The infinite scroll is losing its charm. Audiences now want to find, not just follow. This is the psychology brands need to tap into, selective discovery, anticipation, and the joy of earning access."

Even Instagram itself is approaching Lockable Reels with cautious experimentation. "This is one of several new Reels features that Instagram is testing to improve the Reels experience," **a Meta spokesperson said**. Yet the implications go far beyond a simple feature test. Meta appears to be nudging Instagram toward a model where interaction, intimacy, and exclusivity converge, signaling a shift in social media from mere exposure to meaningful experience.

Lockable Reels are not just a technical experiment; they represent a potential paradigm shift in how brands approach digital storytelling and monetization. The future of Instagram may not hinge on raw view counts, but on how deeply audiences feel embedded in a narrative. In this emerging landscape, the most powerful stories won't simply be watched, they'll be unlocked, experienced, and strategically monetized, offering marketers new ways to convert engagement into loyalty, community, and revenue.

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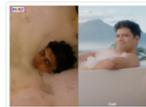
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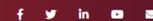**IS THAROOR INDIA'S NEXT MEDIA MUSE?**

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