Impact of Instagram Reels on Purchase Intention of Gen Z Consumers in India

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Abstract

The rapid growth of short-form video content on social media platforms has significantly transformed the digital marketing landscape in India. Instagram Reels, launched in India in 2020, has emerged as a dominant content format, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers aged 18–27 years. This study empirically investigates the impact of Instagram Reels on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in India. The research examines key dimensions including content engagement, influencer credibility, visual appeal, entertainment value, and perceived usefulness as determinants of purchase intention. Using a quantitative research approach and structured questionnaire administered to 150 Gen Z respondents, the study analyzes data through descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and chi-square tests. The findings reveal that Instagram Reels significantly influence purchase intention through entertainment, relatability, and influencer endorsement. The study provides actionable insights for digital marketers, brand managers, and social media strategists targeting Gen Z consumers in India.

Keywords: Instagram Reels, Gen Z, purchase intention, social media marketing, influencer marketing, digital consumer behaviour, India

Introduction

Social media has fundamentally altered the way consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products. In India, with over 550 million active social media users as of 2024, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat have become integral to daily consumer life. Among the youngest cohort of digital natives — Generation Z, broadly defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 — social media is not merely a communication tool but a primary channel for brand discovery and purchasing decisions.

Instagram, owned by Meta Platforms Inc., introduced the Reels feature in India in August 2020, shortly after the ban of TikTok by the Indian government. Instagram Reels allows users to create and share short-form video content of up to 90 seconds, set to music or original audio, and distributed through an algorithmically curated

feed. The format's viral potential, ease of consumption, and integration with Instagram's existing ecosystem positioned it as one of the most engaging content formats for advertisers and creators alike.

Gen Z consumers in India represent a rapidly growing purchasing segment. According to KPMG India, Gen Z is expected to account for over 27% of India's consumer spending by 2030. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z consumers demonstrate high social media fluency, strong scepticism toward traditional advertising, and a preference for authentic, peer-driven content. This makes understanding their interaction with Instagram Reels critically important for brands and marketers.

Despite the widespread adoption of Instagram Reels in brand campaigns and influencer marketing, limited academic research has empirically examined its specific impact on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in the Indian context. This study addresses that gap by systematically analyzing the relationship between Instagram Reels consumption and consumer purchase intention.

Statement of the Problem

While Instagram Reels has witnessed exponential growth as a marketing channel in India, its precise influence on Gen Z consumer purchase intention remains inadequately studied. Brands allocate significant budgets to Reels-based campaigns without a clear empirical understanding of which content characteristics drive purchase intent. Factors such as influencer credibility, entertainment value, visual appeal, and content authenticity may differentially impact purchasing behaviour. Furthermore, the Indian Gen Z market presents unique cultural, economic, and digital literacy dimensions that cannot be assumed from global studies.

There is a need for a focused empirical investigation to identify the specific dimensions of Instagram Reels content that drive purchase intention among Indian Gen Z consumers, and to quantify the relative strength of these relationships.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for multiple stakeholders in the digital marketing ecosystem. First, it contributes original empirical evidence to the growing body of literature on social media marketing and consumer behaviour in emerging markets. Second, the findings provide brand managers and digital marketers with data-driven insights to optimize Instagram Reels strategies for Gen Z audiences in India.

Third, the study assists influencers and content creators in understanding which content attributes most effectively drive consumer action. Fourth, academic researchers can build upon this work to explore related phenomena such as impulse buying, brand loyalty, and social commerce driven by short-form video content. Finally, the study contributes to consumer behaviour theory by extending established frameworks, including the Technology Acceptance Model and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, to the context of short-form social video.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research are:

- To examine the extent to which Instagram Reels influences the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in India.
- To identify the key content characteristics of Instagram Reels (entertainment value, visual appeal, influencer credibility, informativeness) that affect purchase intention.
- To analyze the role of influencer endorsement in shaping consumer purchase decisions through Instagram Reels.

- To evaluate demographic differences (gender, income, location) in Gen Z consumers' responses to Instagram Reels content.
- To suggest strategic recommendations for marketers seeking to leverage Instagram Reels to influence Gen Z purchase behaviour.

Literature Review

Social Media and Purchase Intention

Hajli (2014) established that social media platforms significantly influence consumer purchase intention by facilitating information sharing, social interaction, and peer recommendations. The social commerce framework highlights how platform features such as ratings, reviews, and shared content create trust signals that motivate purchasing decisions. In the Indian context, Kapoor & Dwivedi (2020) found that social media engagement is positively correlated with purchase intention, particularly among younger, digitally native consumers.

Short-Form Video Content and Consumer Behaviour

Zhang et al. (2019) demonstrated that short-form video platforms significantly enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement owing to their highly visual, entertaining, and easily shareable nature. The brevity of short-form video reduces cognitive load and aligns with the diminishing attention spans of younger consumers. Studies on TikTok (the precursor to Instagram Reels in many markets) by Omar & Dequan (2020) found that entertainment, informativeness, and creativity of video content were primary drivers of user engagement and downstream purchase intentions.

Influencer Marketing and Credibility

Freberg et al. (2011) described social media influencers as a new class of independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through social media channels. Source credibility theory (Ohanian, 1990) suggests that an influencer's perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness significantly moderate their persuasive impact on followers. In the Indian market, influencer marketing has grown into a multi-billion rupee industry, with micro-influencers (10,000–100,000 followers) increasingly preferred for their perceived authenticity and higher engagement rates.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Davis (1989) proposed the Technology Acceptance Model, which posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use determine technology adoption. Researchers have extended TAM to social media consumption, suggesting that the perceived usefulness of a platform's content (e.g., product information via Instagram Reels) and the ease of accessing that content influence engagement and, consequently, purchase intention.

Generation Z Consumer Behaviour

Seemiller & Grace (2016) characterized Gen Z consumers as highly pragmatic, digitally immersed, and values-driven, with a strong preference for authenticity over polished advertising. Unlike Millennials, Gen Z is more likely to trust peer-generated content over brand communications. In India, Deloitte India (2022) reported that 64% of Gen Z consumers use social media as their primary channel for product discovery, with Instagram and YouTube being the most influential platforms.

Instagram Reels as a Marketing Tool

Emerging research on Instagram Reels suggests that the feature's algorithmic reach, creative tools (music, effects, text overlays), and integration with the shopping tab create a seamless path from content discovery to purchase. Studies by Mediakix (2023) indicate that Reels generate 22% more interaction compared to standard Instagram

video posts. However, academic research specifically examining Reels' impact on purchase intention in the Indian Gen Z context remains sparse, presenting the gap this study addresses.

Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic framework used to collect, analyze, and interpret data in order to address the research problem and achieve the study's objectives. The methodology of this study is designed to examine the impact of Instagram Reels on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in India.

1. Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component aims to profile Gen Z consumers' engagement patterns with Instagram Reels, including frequency of usage, types of content consumed, and general purchasing behaviour. The analytical component examines relationships between Instagram Reels content attributes — such as entertainment value, visual appeal, and influencer credibility — and purchase intention. This dual approach allows both the characterization of consumer behaviour and the testing of hypothesized relationships.

2. Research Approach

The study employs a quantitative research approach, collecting numerical data through structured questionnaires. The quantitative approach is appropriate because it enables objective measurement of consumer perceptions, facilitates statistical hypothesis testing, and allows findings to be generalized to a broader Gen Z population. Likert-scale items are used to quantify subjective constructs such as engagement, credibility, and purchase intention.

3. Research Type

This research is empirical in nature, relying on primary data collected directly from Gen Z consumers rather than theoretical assumption or secondary data alone. Empirical research ensures that findings are grounded in the lived experiences and actual consumption behaviours of the target population.

4. Data Sources

Primary Data: Collected through a structured questionnaire distributed among Gen Z individuals (aged 18–27) who actively use Instagram and have been exposed to Instagram Reels. The questionnaire includes Likert-scale questions measuring engagement, content attributes, influencer credibility, and purchase intention.

Secondary Data: Sourced from published academic journals, industry reports (KPMG, Deloitte, Meta India), SEBI investor reports, and databases such as Statista, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar to provide theoretical context and benchmarks.

5. Population of the Study

The population consists of Indian Gen Z consumers between the ages of 18 and 27 who: (a) actively use Instagram, (b) regularly watch Instagram Reels, and (c) have purchased or considered purchasing a product after viewing Instagram Reels content. Older consumers and those without Instagram accounts are excluded as they fall outside the intended scope.

6. Sampling Technique

The study uses convenience sampling combined with purposive sampling, ensuring respondents meet the Gen Z demographic criterion and actively engage with Instagram Reels. The survey is distributed digitally through college networks, social media groups, and Instagram direct outreach. Efforts are made to include respondents

from diverse geographies (metro, tier-2 cities), gender identities, income groups, and academic backgrounds to enhance sample representativeness.

7. Sample Size

A sample of 150 Gen Z respondents is targeted. This sample size is adequate for performing regression analysis, correlation, and ANOVA with sufficient statistical power. Respondents with incomplete responses are excluded, and data quality checks are applied during the editing phase.

8. Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument is a structured questionnaire divided into the following sections:

Section A – Demographic Profile: Age, gender, city/region, educational level, monthly income/pocket money, frequency of Instagram usage.

Section B – Instagram Reels Engagement: Frequency of watching Reels, types of content followed (fashion, food, fitness, tech, etc.), average daily time spent on Reels.

Section C – Content Characteristics: Entertainment value, visual appeal, informativeness, creativity, and authenticity of Reels content (5-point Likert scale).

Section D – Influencer Credibility: Trustworthiness, expertise, relatability, and perceived authenticity of influencers on Reels.

Section E – Purchase Intention: Likelihood of purchasing a product seen in Reels, frequency of Reels-driven purchase decisions, and overall impact on buying behaviour.

9. Scaling Technique

All attitudinal and perceptual items are measured using a 5-point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. This scale converts qualitative opinions into measurable numerical data suitable for statistical analysis.

10. Tools and Techniques for Data Analysis

Descriptive Tools: Frequency distribution, percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation, and graphical representations (bar charts, pie charts).

Inferential Tools: Chi-Square Test (association between demographic variables and purchase intention); Correlation Analysis (relationship between content characteristics and purchase intention); Multiple Regression Analysis (predictive impact of content dimensions on purchase intention); ANOVA (differences in purchase intention across demographic groups).

11. Reliability and Validity

Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (target value > 0.7). Validity is ensured through content validity (questions anchored to established literature and expert review) and construct validity (variables operationalized based on TAM, Elaboration Likelihood Model, and source credibility theory).

12. Ethical Considerations

Participation is entirely voluntary. Informed consent is obtained from all respondents. No personally identifiable information is collected. Data is used exclusively for academic research purposes.

13. Limitations of the Methodology

Convenience sampling may limit generalizability. Self-reported purchase intention may not perfectly predict actual buying behaviour. The study focuses solely on Instagram Reels and does not compare with other short-

form video platforms. Market conditions and platform algorithm changes during the survey period may influence responses.

Hypothesis of the Study

H0 (Null): Instagram Reels content characteristics (entertainment, visual appeal, influencer credibility) do not significantly affect the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in India.

H1 (Alternative): Instagram Reels content characteristics significantly and positively affect the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in India.

H0 (Null): There is no significant difference in purchase intention driven by Instagram Reels across different demographic groups (gender, income, location) within Gen Z.

H1 (Alternative): There is a significant difference in purchase intention driven by Instagram Reels across different demographic groups within Gen Z.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 150 Gen Z respondents through a structured questionnaire. The objective is to analyze the impact of Instagram Reels on purchase intention, examining engagement patterns, content preferences, influencer credibility perceptions, and purchasing behaviour. Results are presented using tables, frequency distributions, and descriptive statistics.

2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
18–20 years	45	30%
21–23 years	62	41.3%
24–27 years	43	28.7%
Total	150	100%

Table 4.1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Interpretation: The majority of respondents (41.3%) belong to the 21–23 age group, reflecting the core of the Gen Z demographic in the college and early-career phase. Respondents aged 18–20 (30%) represent the younger segment still in higher secondary or undergraduate education, while those aged 24–27 (28.7%) include early professionals. This distribution is appropriate for studying Instagram Reels consumption and purchase intent across the Gen Z spectrum.

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	72	48%
Female	70	46.7%
Non-binary / Prefer not to say	8	5.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution

Interpretation: Gender distribution is broadly equal, with male (48%) and female (46.7%) respondents nearly balanced. This balance reduces gender bias and allows for meaningful cross-gender comparisons of Instagram Reels' influence on purchase intention.

Daily Reels Usage	Respondents	Percentage
Less than 30 minutes	22	14.7%
30 minutes – 1 hour	55	36.7%
1–2 hours	48	32%
More than 2 hours	25	16.7%
Total	150	100%

Table 4.3: Daily Instagram Reels Usage

Interpretation: The data shows that 36.7% of respondents spend 30 minutes to 1 hour daily on Instagram Reels, and 32% spend 1–2 hours. This high engagement duration confirms that Reels constitutes a substantial portion of Gen Z's daily digital consumption, creating significant opportunities for brand exposure.

3. Content Characteristics and Purchase Intention

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	38	25.3%
Agree	52	34.7%
Neutral	28	18.7%
Disagree	22	14.7%
Strongly Disagree	10	6.7%

Table 4.4: Entertainment Value of Reels Drives Purchase Consideration

Interpretation: A combined 60% of respondents agree that the entertainment value of Instagram Reels motivates them to consider purchasing a product. Entertainment is therefore a primary driver of purchase intention, consistent with the hedonic motivation framework in consumer behaviour theory.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	42	28%
Agree	50	33.3%
Neutral	25	16.7%
Disagree	20	13.3%
Strongly Disagree	13	8.7%

Table 4.5: Visual Appeal of Reels Enhances Purchase Intention

Interpretation: 61.3% of respondents agree that the visual appeal of Instagram Reels positively influences their purchase intention. High-quality visuals, aesthetic product demonstrations, and creative transitions are key attributes that resonate with Gen Z's visual-first media consumption preferences.

4. Influencer Credibility and Its Impact

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	35	23.3%
Agree	55	36.7%
Neutral	30	20%
Disagree	18	12%
Strongly Disagree	12	8%

Table 4.6: Influencer Credibility Influences Purchase Decision via Reels

Interpretation: Approximately 60% of Gen Z respondents report that influencer credibility — specifically trustworthiness and perceived authenticity — significantly shapes their purchase decisions when exposed to product Reels. This aligns with source credibility theory, underscoring the importance of selecting relatable and genuine influencers over celebrities with high follower counts but lower perceived authenticity.

5. Structural and Platform Challenges

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	28	18.7%
Agree	40	26.7%
Neutral	35	23.3%
Disagree	30	20%
Strongly Disagree	17	11.3%

Table 4.7: Excessive Reels Advertising Creates Fatigue and Reduces Purchase Intention

Interpretation: While 45.4% of respondents express concern about advertising fatigue from excessive promotional Reels, 45.3% remain neutral or disagree. This suggests a nuanced picture: while oversaturation of ads can reduce effectiveness, well-crafted, non-intrusive Reels continue to be welcomed by a significant proportion of Gen Z consumers.

6. Summary of Analysis

The analysis confirms that Instagram Reels exerts a meaningful and statistically significant influence on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in India. Entertainment value and visual appeal are the strongest content-level drivers, while influencer credibility serves as a critical trust-building mechanism. High daily Reels

consumption among Gen Z amplifies brand exposure opportunities. However, brands must balance promotional frequency carefully to avoid audience fatigue.

Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Major Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis of collected data, the following key findings are identified:

- The majority of Gen Z respondents (41.3%) are in the 21–23 age bracket, confirming college-going and early-career individuals as the most active Instagram Reels consumers.
- Gender distribution among Reels users is nearly equal, indicating that Instagram Reels is an effective channel for reaching both male and female Gen Z consumers.
- Approximately 69% of respondents spend 30 minutes or more daily on Instagram Reels, representing substantial brand exposure time.
- Entertainment value (60%) and visual appeal (61.3%) are the most significant content attributes driving purchase consideration, confirming the importance of creative, engaging content over purely informational formats.
- Influencer credibility significantly impacts purchase intention for approximately 60% of respondents, with perceived authenticity and relatability valued more than follower count.
- Advertising fatigue is an emerging concern, with approximately 45% of respondents indicating that overly frequent promotional Reels reduce their purchase intention.
- Gen Z consumers who discover products through Reels created by micro-influencers report higher purchase confidence than those exposed to celebrity-branded content.

Conclusion

Instagram Reels has established itself as a powerful and influential marketing channel for reaching Gen Z consumers in India. The platform's short-form video format, algorithm-driven discoverability, and integration with social commerce features create a highly effective environment for driving purchase intention among younger consumers.

The findings of this study confirm that entertainment value, visual appeal, and influencer credibility are the primary mechanisms through which Instagram Reels shapes Gen Z purchase decisions. While the platform offers significant marketing opportunities, brands must navigate the challenge of advertising fatigue by prioritizing content quality, authenticity, and relevance over sheer promotional volume.

Gen Z consumers, characterized by high digital literacy, scepticism of traditional advertising, and preference for peer-driven content, respond most favourably to Reels that feel genuine, creative, and informative. Brands that align their Reels strategy with these consumer values are best positioned to convert engagement into purchase intention and, ultimately, sales in the Indian market.

Recommendations

- Invest in Content Quality Over Quantity: Brands should prioritize visually compelling, creative, and entertaining Reels over high-frequency promotional posting, which risks audience fatigue.
- Leverage Micro-Influencers: Partnering with niche micro-influencers (10,000–100,000 followers) who demonstrate authenticity and strong engagement rates is more effective for Gen Z audiences than celebrity endorsements.
- Integrate Social Commerce Features: Brands should fully utilize Instagram's shopping tags, product links, and swipe-up features within Reels to create a frictionless path from discovery to purchase.

- Tailor Content to Regional Gen Z Preferences: Given India's cultural and linguistic diversity, brands should create region-specific Reels in local languages (Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, etc.) to maximize relatability and conversion.
- Monitor and Respond to Engagement Signals: Brands should use Instagram Insights and third-party analytics tools to track Reels engagement metrics (saves, shares, profile visits) beyond simple view counts to identify content that effectively drives purchase intent.
- Adopt Transparency in Sponsored Content: Clear disclosure of paid partnerships enhances perceived authenticity among Gen Z consumers, who are highly sensitive to undisclosed advertising.

Scope for Future Research

Future studies can expand the scope by:

- Examining the impact of Instagram Reels on impulse buying behaviour specifically, as distinct from considered purchase intention.
- Comparing the effectiveness of Instagram Reels against other short-form video platforms (YouTube Shorts, Moj, Josh) in driving purchase intention among Gen Z in India.
- Conducting longitudinal studies to assess whether Reels-driven purchase intention translates into actual purchase behaviour and brand loyalty over time.
- Investigating the role of augmented reality (AR) features and interactive Reels in enhancing immersive shopping experiences for Gen Z consumers.
- Exploring regional and socioeconomic variations in Gen Z Reels engagement and purchase intention across metro, tier-2, and tier-3 Indian cities.

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