

OPTIMIZING SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING STRATEGIES: IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICES INFLUENCING ONLINE BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF GENERATION Y

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Abstract

With the spread of social networks, the nature of commercial communication has shifted fundamentally, and digital advertising has become one of the key factors that influence the purchase behavior of the consumer. This paper is research of social media advertising best practices that will impact the online purchasing behavior of Generation Y consumers, and the sole sources of secondary data will be peer-reviewed empirical literature published within the past five years, 2020-2025, and industry reports by DataReportal, IBEF, TRAI, and UNCTAD. The methodology of thematic content analysis was used to synthesize the results of existing empirical works in a systematic manner in order to find convergent evidence on five dimensions of advertising: content creativity, message clarity, consumer engagement, influencer credibility, and call-to-action effectiveness. The results show that the strongest drivers of online purchase behavior among the Millennials are consistently reported to be consumer engagement and influencer credibility, then effective call-to-action design, message clarity, and content creativity. The results are theoretically supported by the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior. The research adds a combined and supported framework of the knowledge of the social media advertising effectiveness among the generation Y consumers and this study is particularly applicable to the rapidly digitizing urban market in India.

Keywords: Social Media Advertising, Online Buying Behavior, Generation Y, Digital Marketing, Consumer Engagement, Influencer Credibility, Thematic Analysis

1. Introduction

The digital world of advertisement has also been changing structurally, and this change is brought by the combination of the social media platform with e-commerce application. By the year 2025, there are estimated to be 5.24 billion active social media identities worldwide, or 64.4 percent of the global population (DataReportal, 2025). Social media has turned into a promotional channel that is a supporting tool, which is now the main location in which consumers find products, compare options and make purchases, condensing the consumer decision-making process tremendously. The problem is that, despite an unprecedented investment in social media advertising, there is a critical gap in knowledge: brands often do not have a systemic understanding of which advertising strategies can best transform exposure into the purchase behavior. Most organizations spend a lot of money on digital campaigns without evidence-based knowledge over which creative design, message clarity, influencer relationships, engagement, or call-to-action architecture is the most likely to result in conversion. The Millennials (generation Y), who belong to 1981-1996 generation, are at the center of this landscape (Pew Research Center, 2024). Digital natives, economically active, and intensely socially connected, Millennials with peer-reviewed, influencer-recommended, and hyper-awareness of advertising authenticity Propaganda. In India, in particular, the population of the economically active urban population represented by Generation Y is a substantial portion of the economy, where the consumption behavior is mobile first, and the use of unified digital payment systems is extensive (IBEF, 2025). The e-commerce market of India is estimated to amount to USD 163 billion by 2026, and social media is serving as a powerful demand-generation platform in the growth (IBEF, 2025). The paper will fill the outlined gap by presenting a thematic analysis of secondary data using the method of convergent evidence synthesis to compile five best-practice constructs of advertising and plot its impact on the online purchasing behavior of Generation Y. It aims to create a combined, evidence-based framework that guides theoretical knowledge and working advertising strategy among the Millennial cohorts of digitizing emerging markets.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media Advertising as a Driver of Consumer Behavior

Social media advertising has become a qualitatively unique mode of communication where its characteristics of being interactive, personalized, and peer embedded stand out as the fundamental qualities that distinguish it as compared to traditional broadcast advertising (Ashley and Tuten, 2015). Consumers are no longer passive receivers of a brand message they actively participate in, contribute to, and creatively co-produce advertising messages in the ecosystems of participatory platforms. This paradigm change implies that perceived authenticity, relevance of content, and social validation determine the effectiveness of advertising and are not only the exposure frequency. Review of literature has continuously supported the fact that certain attributes of advertisement largely moderate the conversion of purchases. Khaleghian et al. (2025) have shown the consumer engagement mediates the relationship between features of social media marketing and purchase intention among Millennials. Ismael et al. (2025) established that content and believable influencer endorsements promote purchase intention and passive advertisements produce no conversion. These results put the effectiveness of advertising into the structural properties of format itself interactivity, source credibility, informational clarity and direction of behavior.

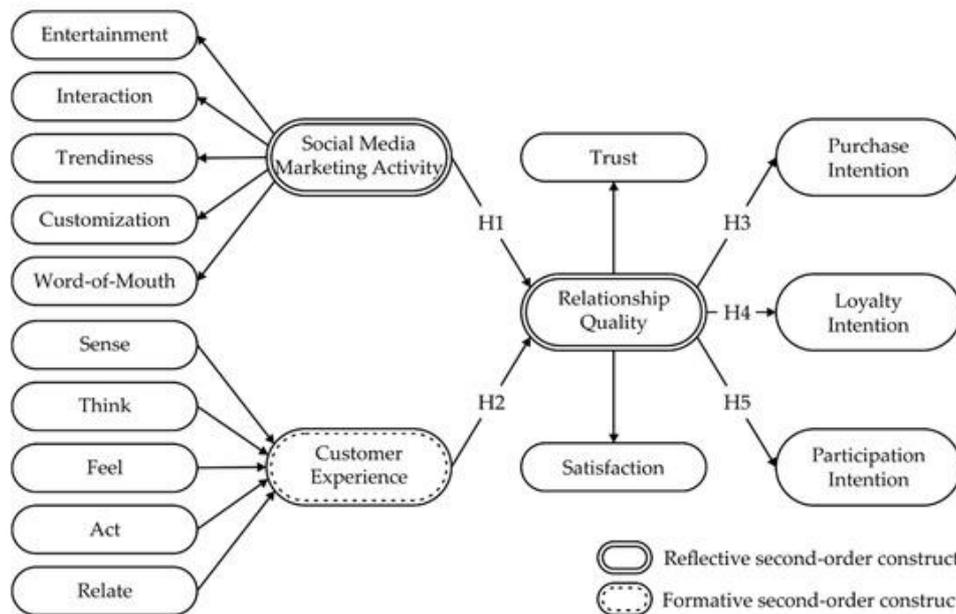


Figure 1: Customer Behaviour as an Outcome of Social Media Marketing
(Source: Khaleghian et al. 2025)

2.2 Role of Engagement, Influencer Marketing, and Content Quality

Consumer activities, such as likes, shares, comments, and interactive involvement, can be considered a behavioral proxy of involvement/brand connectedness (Kumar et al., 2016). Among the advertising characteristics studied, Khan and Bhutto (2023) have identified interactivity as the most effective predictor of purchase intention. By showing that the conversion effect of engagement is boosted by platform trust, Sudiarto and Indarto (2024) confirmed that the most effective way to influence the purchase behavior is through interactive advertising in trustworthy settings.

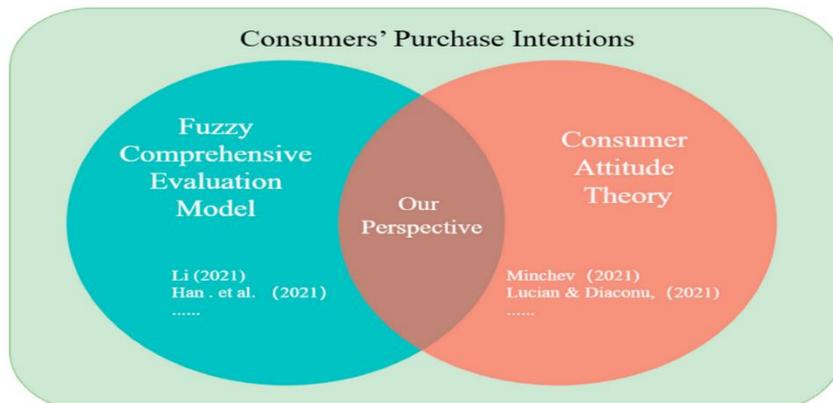


Figure 2: The Power of Influencers

(Source: Chan, 2025)

Influencer credibility based on perceived trustworthiness, expertise and genuine alignment of the brand is always a predictor of purchase conversion by Millennial consumers. Ao et al. (2023) confirmed that trustworthiness has a greater influence on the buying decision than entertainment value, and Joshi et al. (2025) verified that the credibility of the influencers to the audience and the relatability of the content to the audience have a stronger predictive capability of brand awareness and purchase behavior than the number of followers. Content creativity leads to attention and emotional reaction but never alone maintains conversion without additional supporting trust and engagement systems (Chan, 2025).

2.3 Importance of Trust, Personalization, and Call-to-Action

Trust acts as a mediator through the advertising-to-purchase channel. Kothari et al. (2025) fixed that valid, genuine advertisement has a favorable effect on brand confidence and purchase will. Personalization raises the relevance, which increases the trust level by lowering cognitive resistance to advertising messages (Macias and Ugonna, 2024). Call-to-action effectiveness the simplicity and smoothness of behavioral triggers completes the conversion cycle, and engagements and positive attitude are converted into executed purchase behavior. According to Jacinto and Zafar (2025), CTA clarity was one of the major distinctions between advertisements that generate awareness and the ones that promote conversion.

2.4 Theoretical Support and Research Gap

Platform adoption is elucidated by the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) by perceiving usefulness and ease of use. Social influence and subjective norms are the behavioral determinants in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Dual- route persuasion as described by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) takes place under central processing of the analysis and peripheral credibility cues. Although there are strong individual-construct studies, there is scanty integrated research that combines a host of advertising best practices at the same time in the Indian urban Generation Y setting the gap covered in this study.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study proposes an analytical framework positioning five advertising best-practice dimensions as determinants of Generation Y's online buying behavior, derived from the convergent evidence of the secondary literature and triangulated with macro-level industry data.

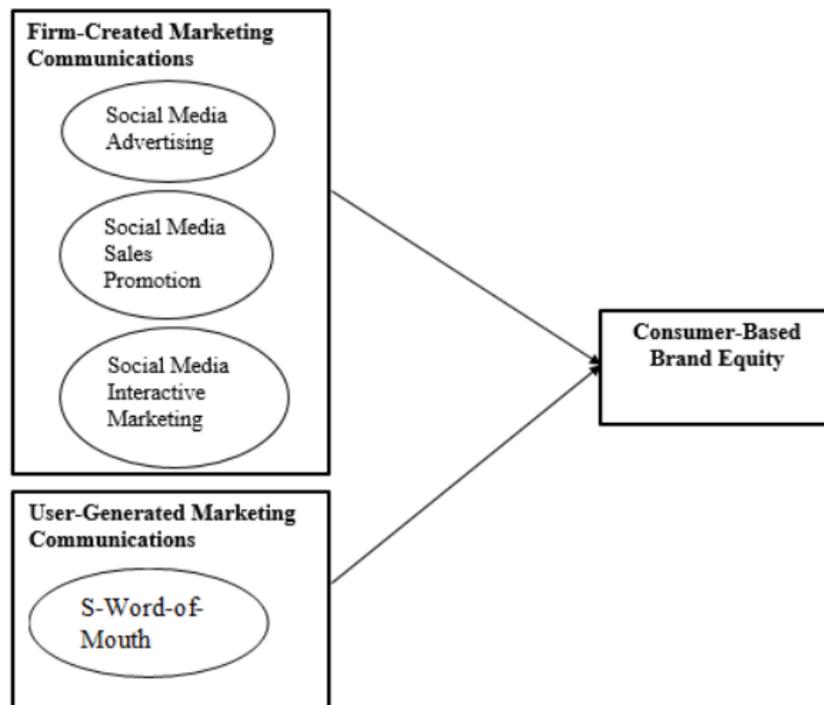


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of the Study

These five independent dimensions are content creativity, message clarity, consumer engagement, influencer credibility and call-to-action effectiveness. The dependent variable is the online purchase behavior of the consumers of the generation Y. The framework recognizes that these dimensions are not independent but rather a system of advertising that each element plays a specific functional role in the consumer process of exposure to advertising and conversion of the purchase. Initial conditions of attentional conditions are created by content creativity. The clarity of a message maintains consumer processing with the stage of evaluation, by decreasing friction of thought. ELM holds that consumer involvement enhances

brand connectivity and triggers central and peripheral processing pathways in tandem, respectively (Petty, and Cacioppo, 1986). Influencer credibility is a form of trust based social validation cue that works within the subjective norm construct of TPB (Ajzen, 1991) to restage the product being advertised as desirable within the reference group of the consumer. The final behavioral sequence is the effectiveness of call-to-action, which directs the cumulative engagement and the positive attitude into purchase action that is frictionless and can be executed immediately. The following research questions based on the framework are discussed in the study: RQ1: In the current body of empirical research, what are the best practices of social media advertising most likely to relate to the online purchasing behavior of Generation Y? RQ2: Which content creativity, message clarity, engagement, influencer credibility, and call-to-action effectiveness independently and jointly affect purchase conversion by Millennial consumers? RQ3: What will be the integrated advertising strategy that is overall recommended to the marketers who target the generation Y in the digitizing urban market?

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The thematic content analysis used in the current study in terms of secondary data sources is suitable in case the research problem is the synthesis of evidence and the framework construction based on the available literature instead of direct data collection (Braun and Clarke, 2021). It is a methodology that allows convergent patterns to be identified in a systematic way in independent empirical studies and lead to more generalizable conclusions than any primary study can allow.

4.2 Data Sources

There were four complementary types of secondary sources used. To start with, the main analytical corpus was conducted as a set of peer-reviewed empirical journal articles, which limited the choice of sources to publications of 2020-2025 that discussed social media advertising as a measure of consumer buying behavior. Second, DataReportal (2025) and IBEF (2025) industry reports where macro-level contextual information on platform usage and e-commerce market trends could be obtained. Third, data on government and regulation by TRAI (2025) and UNCTAD (2024) provided infrastructure-level data on digital adoption trends that place the consumption habits of Generation Y into context. Fourth, the available survey datasets used in the empirical literature sources were supporting extra quantitative benchmarking.

4.3 Study Selection

The initially identified 187 potential studies were obtained in a systematic search in the Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and EBSCO databases using a combination of key words, such as social media advertising, Generation Y, online buying behavior, influencer credibility, and consumer engagement. Following the application of inclusion criteria, publication since 2020, empirical design with quantifiable results, relevance to at least one of the advertising constructs 30 studies were left to undergo full analysis.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

Braun and Clarke (2021) six-step framework was applied to the thematic analysis; familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and synthesis. Analysis was conducted using a deductive pattern of five advertising constructs to investigate analysis, with inductive coding of emergent patterns. Convergence frequency the percentage of researches that found significant relationships between a specific dimension of advertising and the buying behavior was a quantitative measure of the strength of the evidence and the qualitative interpretation of the themes.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Consumer Engagement: The Core Conversion Engine.

The most consistent advertising dimension that was consistently supported was consumer engagement, where 24 out of 30 studies (80%) found significant positive correlations with purchase behavior. Khaleghian et al (2025) made engagement an entire mediator between features of social media marketing and purchase intention. Khan and Bhutto (2023) have found that the strongest individual predictor of purchase intention is interactivity. The authors Sudiarto and Indarto (2024) showed that the conversion effect of engagement is enhanced by platform trust. The trend is supported by industry statistics; According to DataReportal (2025), the average time spent by Indian social media users is more than two hours of daily platform usage, and IBEF (2025) confirms that one of the most actively used forms of social commerce conversion in the Indian market is interactive content. In ELM, the engagement process involved simultaneously triggers central-directional analytical processing and peripheral social validation cues, which is why it is uniquely robust at different levels of consumer involvement.

5.2 Influencer Credibility: Trust-Based Conversion.

Twenty-two articles (73.3%), indicated significant positive relationships between credibility of the influencer and the purchase outcomes. The researchers Ao et al. (2023) had determined the trustworthiness has a greater purchase influence than entertainment value among the Millennials. Joshi et al. (2025) established that credibility and audience congruence are reliable predictors of conversion compared to the number of followers. According to Subitha (2024), the prevalent credibility drivers of student purchase intention were authenticity and domain expertise. In TPB, credible influencers act

as an agent of subjective norms, repositioning promoted products as a socially acceptable one in the reference group of the consumer an effect that is enhanced in the collectivist cultural environment of India.

5.3 Call-to-Action, Message Clarity and Content Creativity.

Sixty percent of the studies found CTA clarity as a determinant of conversion differentiation (18) and Jacinto and Zafar (2025) determined that specific behavioural prompt leads to engagement transformation to purchase. Clarity of the message was related to prolonged evaluation-stage processing especially with the Generation Y consumers who focus on the informational content (Chen and Lin, 2025). Content creativity also contributed to attention and emotional appeal in 22 studies but failed to maintain conversion on its own without it being complemented by trust and engagement processes (Chan, 2025; Ngo et al., 2024), and serves as a necessary but not sufficient condition of conversion.

6. Managerial Implications

The synthesized results provide clear and prioritized suggestions to digital marketers aiming at Indian urban markets, targeting consumers of the generation of Y. The most important investment that should be made by brands is that of interactive engagement architecture in which advertisement formats should explicitly seek behavioral response in the form of a poll, live session, user-generated content campaigns, and shoppable interactive content. Without the engagement design, strategic investment should be made on engagement rather than the reach maximization. The influencer partnerships should put credibility over reach. The high-reach macro-influencer plans will fail in comparisons with long-term partnerships with micro- and mid-tier influencers with proven strong domain expertise, audience congruence, and brand consistency in the outcomes of conversion in Millennial audiences. Each touchpoint of the advertising needs to have clear, specific, frictionless CTA, which is linked to the stage of purchase in the consumer. India In-app purchase integration ought to be exploited in the explicit sense with regards to CTA design in the growing social commerce infrastructure in India. The clarity of the message should be considered as an uncompromising limitation on the creative implementation and informational content should not be compromised to the creative complexity. Last but not least, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp should be worked out as platform-specific strategies that are customized to the principles of the engagement logic peculiar to each platform and the habits of Millennials.

7. Conclusion

It conducted a retrieval of 30 peer-reviewed empirical studies in the field (published between 2020 and 2025) and triangulated them with industry and regulatory data to find the social media advertising best practices that are most likely to be related to online purchasing behaviour of Generation Y. Using systematic thematic content analysis, the consumer engagement and influencer credibility were found as the most compelling and the most steadily supported conversion dynamics, then the effectiveness of the call-to-action, the clarity of the message, and content creativity. One of the cross-cutting findings determined that the effectiveness of advertising was systemic in origin that arises out of the concomitant working of all five dimensions and not optimization on any one element. Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Theory of Planned Behavior, the research provides an evidence synthesized model that may be applied to academic knowledge as well as the real world marketing approach to the Millennial population in the fast-digitizing urban consumer context of India.

8. Limitations and Future Scope

Thematic content analysis forms convergent association as opposed to causal inference, which is the main methodological drawback of the study. Published materials and English-language limitation put a limit on the corpus that might omit interested regional literature. The second methodology of secondary data does not allow measuring Indian Generation Y consumers contextually since specific population is not involved. Longitudinal primary investigation should be used in the future to determine causal directionality between identified advertising constructs. More causal evidence would be given by experimental designs that control certain advertising features among the comparable groups of consumers. Extrapolation to Generation Z consumers, cross-regional comparative research across the Indian urban markets, and cross-cultural comparisons with other similar Asia-Pacific emerging economies would significantly enhance the external validity of the framework derived here.

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