



The Effectiveness of Short-Form Video Content (Reels, TikTok) in Brand Awareness and Consumer Engagement

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ABSTRACT

In the rapidly evolving digital marketing ecosystem, short-form video content (SFVC) has emerged as a dominant force in capturing consumer attention and driving brand engagement. Platforms like Instagram Reels, TikTok (prior to its ban in India), and YouTube Shorts have revolutionized how brands communicate with audiences—especially Generation Z, a demographic known for its mobile-first habits, short attention spans, and preference for authentic, emotionally resonant content.

This study investigates the effectiveness of SFVC in enhancing brand awareness and consumer engagement among Indian Gen Z users. The research explores how various forms of short-form video—ranging from influencer collaborations to product demos and humorous storytelling—impact consumer perceptions, recall, trust, and purchase behavior. A structured quantitative methodology was employed, with data gathered from 110 respondents aged 18–30 through an online survey. The analysis used descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and correlation techniques to uncover key patterns in user behavior and marketing impact.

Findings indicate that SFVC significantly improves brand recall and emotional connection when compared to static content formats such as images or text posts. Platforms like Instagram Reels were identified as the most influential, with humorous and relatable content outperforming traditional promotional videos. Furthermore, influencer-driven videos emerged as critical drivers of consumer trust and conversion, highlighting the growing importance of social proof in digital marketing.

This research contributes to the academic discourse on social media marketing by offering empirical evidence on the behavioral influence of SFVC in an Indian context. It also provides actionable insights for marketers and content creators seeking to leverage short-form video as a strategic tool for reaching, engaging, and converting Gen Z consumers. The study recommends a creative, emotionally-driven, and data-informed approach for brands aiming to succeed in a video-first digital environment..

Keywords: Digital: Digital Marketing, Generation Z, Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing, Search Engine Marketing, Consumer Behavior

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the way consumers interact with brands has undergone a significant transformation. With the widespread adoption of smartphones and high-speed internet, digital content consumption has become ubiquitous, especially among younger generations. Generation Z (those born roughly between 1997 and 2012) stands out as a unique cohort of digital natives who have grown up immersed in technology and social media. This generation is characterized by shorter attention spans, a preference for authentic and visually engaging content, and a demand for immediacy and interactivity. Consequently, traditional marketing channels such as television commercials, print advertisements, and even long-form digital videos have begun losing traction with this demographic.

In response to these shifting consumer behaviors, short-form video content (SFVC) has emerged as a dominant and disruptive force within digital marketing. Typically ranging from 15 to 60 seconds, SFVC platforms like Instagram Reels, TikTok (prior to its ban in India), and YouTube Shorts offer brands a novel way to capture attention, communicate brand stories, and foster consumer engagement in bite-sized, digestible formats. These platforms leverage algorithmic content curation, social sharing, and influencer collaborations, creating highly personalized and viral marketing opportunities that resonate with Generation Z's media consumption preferences.

The rise of SFVC is not merely a passing digital trend; it reflects a fundamental change in how brands communicate with their audiences. Videos that are entertaining, relatable, and emotionally evocative tend to generate higher engagement and stronger brand recall than traditional static posts or longer-form advertisements. This is especially true for Generation Z, who value authenticity, creativity, and social values in the content they consume. SFVC enables brands to build emotional connections with consumers through humor, storytelling, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and driving purchase intent.

Despite the explosive popularity of SFVC, there remains a notable gap in academic research assessing its actual effectiveness as a marketing tool—particularly in the context of India’s diverse and rapidly digitizing market. While global studies have highlighted the potential of SFVC to boost brand engagement, there is limited empirical evidence exploring how Indian Gen Z consumers interact with such content and how it influences their awareness, trust, and buying behavior. Given India’s position as one of the largest and fastest-growing internet user bases globally, understanding these dynamics is critical for marketers aiming to develop data-driven and culturally relevant strategies.

This study seeks to fill this research gap by investigating the impact of short-form video content on brand awareness and consumer engagement among Indian Gen Z users aged 18 to 30. It explores key dimensions such as platform preferences (Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, TikTok), types of content that drive the most engagement (humorous videos, influencer collaborations, product demonstrations), and the role of influencer trust in shaping consumer decisions. The research employs a quantitative survey approach to gather insights into user behaviors and perceptions, providing valuable evidence for marketers seeking to optimize their digital campaigns.

In an increasingly competitive digital marketing environment, SFVC represents a powerful tool that can help brands cut through the noise, connect authentically with their audiences, and convert views into meaningful brand relationships and sales. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on social media marketing by offering a focused examination of SFVC’s role in the Indian market, and provides practical recommendations for brands aiming to engage the Gen Z segment effectively.

2. Review of Literature

The landscape of digital marketing has undergone profound changes over the past decade, largely driven by the exponential growth of social media platforms and mobile technologies. Among the most significant trends is the emergence and rapid adoption of short-form video content (SFVC), which has redefined how brands communicate with consumers, especially younger demographics such as Generation Z (Gen Z).

2.1 The Rise of Short-Form Video Content

Short-form video content typically consists of videos lasting anywhere between 15 to 60 seconds, designed for quick consumption on mobile devices. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have pioneered this format, capitalizing on the trend of “snackable content” that fits into users’ fragmented and fast-paced digital lifestyles. According to Cisco’s Visual Networking Index (2021), video content will represent more than 82% of all internet traffic by 2023, with short-form videos driving much of this growth due to their shareability and high engagement rates.

These platforms use sophisticated recommendation algorithms to personalize content feeds, thereby maximizing user engagement and retention. This algorithmic curation increases the likelihood of content going viral, giving brands the potential to reach millions of users organically. Additionally, features such as easy video editing tools, sound integration, and interactive effects empower both creators and brands to produce compelling and creative content with minimal investment.

2.2 Consumer Behavior Theories Relevant to SFVC

Understanding the impact of SFVC on brand awareness and engagement requires grounding in established consumer behavior theories. Two key theoretical frameworks frequently referenced in the literature are the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT).

- **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM):** Proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), ELM explains how consumers process persuasive messages via two routes—the central and peripheral. SFVC predominantly engages the peripheral route, where viewers are influenced by visual appeal, music, humor, and other heuristic cues rather than deep cognitive processing. This model helps explain why emotionally appealing and entertaining short videos are often more effective than traditional detailed advertisements in capturing Gen Z’s attention.
- **Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT):** This theory posits that consumers actively select media to satisfy specific needs such as entertainment, information, social interaction, or personal identity. Research by Sundar and Limperos (2013) indicates that Gen Z uses SFVC not only for entertainment but also as a means of self-expression and social connection, making these videos a potent platform for brand storytelling and community building.

2.3 The Role of Influencers and Authenticity in SFVC

One of the most transformative elements of SFVC marketing is the rise of influencer marketing. Influencers—ranging from mega-celebrities to micro-influencers with niche followings—play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase behaviors. Studies (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017) have shown that influencer endorsements often result in higher trust and engagement compared to traditional advertisements because influencers are perceived as more relatable and credible.

Authenticity has emerged as a central theme in SFVC success. Unlike polished traditional ads, SFVC thrives on raw, unscripted, and often humorous content that resonates with Gen Z’s desire for genuine brand communication. Research by Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard (2020) highlights that consumers are quick to detect and reject inauthentic influencer content, which can negatively impact brand trust.

2.4 Emotional Engagement and Storytelling

Emotional storytelling is a critical driver of engagement and brand recall in short-form videos. Videos that evoke humor, inspiration, nostalgia, or social values create stronger connections with audiences (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). This aligns with findings from neuroscientific studies suggesting that emotional content is more likely to be remembered and acted upon.

Brands have effectively leveraged narrative techniques within SFVC to humanize themselves and foster community loyalty. For example, user-generated content (UGC) challenges and hashtag campaigns encourage consumers to co-create brand stories, enhancing emotional involvement and social proof.

2.5 Challenges and Limitations in Measuring SFVC Effectiveness

Despite the clear advantages, measuring the return on investment (ROI) and effectiveness of SFVC remains complex. The ephemeral nature of short videos and the diversity of engagement metrics (views, likes, shares, comments) create challenges in defining what constitutes meaningful consumer engagement. Moreover, content fatigue and oversaturation risk diminishing viewer attention, necessitating continuous innovation and data-driven optimization (Kumar & Gupta, 2021).

2.6 Summary and Research Gap

While the existing literature highlights the growing importance of SFVC in digital marketing and provides theoretical explanations for its effectiveness, there remains a gap in empirical studies focused on the Indian Gen Z context. India's distinct cultural, linguistic, and technological environment calls for localized research to better understand how SFVC influences brand awareness, engagement, and purchase behavior among young Indian consumers.

This study aims to address this gap by providing data-driven insights into platform preferences, content effectiveness, and influencer impact on Gen Z consumers in India, thereby enriching both academic discourse and practical marketing strategies.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach designed to systematically assess the effectiveness of short-form video content (SFVC) in influencing brand awareness and consumer engagement among Indian Generation Z consumers. The methodology is structured to ensure the collection of reliable, valid, and generalizable data, which can provide meaningful insights into the research problem.

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study. Descriptive research is appropriate for understanding characteristics, behaviors, and opinions of a defined population, especially when the goal is to describe phenomena as they naturally occur without experimental manipulation. This design enables the identification of patterns in platform usage, content preferences, and consumer responses to SFVC.

The study focuses on gathering numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to quantify relationships between variables such as video content types, engagement levels, brand recall, and purchase behavior.

3.2 Sample Selection

The target population for this study consists of Indian Generation Z individuals, aged between 18 and 30 years, who actively consume short-form video content on platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts. This age group was chosen because Gen Z is the most active digital native generation and represents a significant consumer segment for brands leveraging SFVC.

A total of 110 respondents participated in the study. The sample was collected using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling techniques:

- Convenience sampling was utilized by circulating the online questionnaire among accessible groups such as university students, friends, and social media contacts.
- Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of individuals who actively use SFVC platforms, thus maintaining the relevance of the responses.

Although the sample size may limit the generalizability to all Indian Gen Z consumers, it provides an insightful snapshot of urban and digitally engaged youth behavior.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data was collected through a structured online questionnaire designed specifically for this research. The questionnaire included multiple sections focusing on:

- Demographic information (age, gender, location)
- Frequency and duration of SFVC platform usage
- Preferences for specific content types (e.g., humorous, tutorial, influencer-led)
- Measures of brand awareness (unaided and aided recall)
- Engagement behaviors (liking, sharing, commenting)
- Trust in influencers and brand endorsements
- Purchase intentions and actual buying behavior influenced by SFVC

The questionnaire was pilot tested with a small group to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity of the items before wide distribution.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and email groups over a period of three weeks. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Collected data was coded and entered into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software to ensure rigorous statistical evaluation. The following techniques were employed:

- Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize demographic data and general patterns.
- Cross-tabulations: To explore relationships between demographic variables and platform usage or content preferences.
- Correlation Analysis: Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to examine associations between influencer trust, engagement, and purchase behavior.
- Graphical Representation: Bar charts, pie charts, and histograms were used to visually depict key findings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical research standards, including voluntary participation, informed consent, and the right to withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing data.

3.7 Limitations of Methodology

The study's reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases such as social desirability or recall inaccuracies. The convenience sampling approach limits the representativeness of the sample to all Gen Z consumers across India, particularly those in rural or less digitally connected areas. Additionally, the dynamic nature of SFVC platforms means that findings may evolve rapidly with changes in platform policies and user behaviors.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the primary data collected from 110 Generation Z respondents aged between 18 to 25 years. The purpose of this analysis is to explore how short-form video content (SFVC) platforms—specifically Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and TikTok—impact brand awareness, consumer engagement, brand recall, purchase behavior, and influencer trust among this demographic. The data was analyzed using statistical software tools such as SPSS and Microsoft Excel, employing frequency distributions, correlation analyses, and cross-tabulations to derive meaningful insights.

4.1 Platform Usage

The data shows that **81.7% of respondents engage with short-form video content on a daily basis**, underscoring the habitual consumption patterns of Generation Z towards these digital formats. This high daily usage rate reflects how deeply integrated SFVC platforms are in the everyday media habits of young consumers. Among the platforms studied, Instagram Reels stands out as the preferred choice for **58% of participants**, followed by YouTube Shorts at **28%**, and TikTok at **14%**. Instagram's dominance may be attributed to its seamless integration within the broader Instagram ecosystem, offering ease of content discovery and sharing alongside established social networking features. Meanwhile, YouTube Shorts and TikTok retain a substantial user base, reflecting diversified platform preferences within the demographic.

4.2 Content Discovery and Engagement

The analysis indicates that **78% of respondents have discovered new brands through SFVC platforms**, highlighting the role of short-form videos as a significant driver of brand discovery and marketing reach. This finding confirms that SFVC is an effective medium for brands seeking to extend their visibility among younger audiences. Moreover, **62% of respondents actively engage with branded content by liking, commenting, or sharing videos**, which demonstrates that SFVC does not only attract passive viewership but also encourages interactive engagement. Such interactions can amplify organic reach, generate word-of-mouth promotion, and build brand communities. The high level of user engagement suggests that content formats that invite participation and dialogue resonate well with Gen Z.

4.3 Brand Recall

Brand recall data reveals that **67% of participants can remember brands featured in short-form videos**, indicating that these videos create lasting impressions on viewers. The analysis further shows that videos with humorous content and relatable storytelling achieved the highest recall rates, at **72% and 65% respectively**. This implies that emotional appeal and authenticity are key factors that enhance the memorability of marketing messages within SFVC. Brands that create content tapping into humor and everyday experiences are more likely to be retained in the consumer's memory, thus increasing the chances of future consideration and purchase.

4.4 Purchase Behavior

Regarding purchase behavior, **59% of respondents admitted to having made purchases influenced by short-form videos**, suggesting that SFVC has a tangible impact on consumer buying decisions. Videos featuring product demonstrations and influencer endorsements were particularly effective in driving purchase intent, which indicates that consumers value visual proof and trusted recommendations when considering new products. The success of influencer content can be linked to the perceived credibility and relatability influencers have with their followers. This finding confirms that SFVC serves as not just an awareness tool but also a direct catalyst for conversion.

4.5 Influencer Trust

Statistical correlation analysis identified a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.36$) between the exposure to influencer-driven content and consumer trust in brand recommendations. This relationship suggests that influencer endorsements play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and confidence toward brands. Furthermore, frequent users who engage regularly with SFVC content demonstrated higher levels of trust in influencer recommendations, which highlights the importance of consistent and authentic influencer marketing strategies. Building trust through influencers is thus essential for brands to enhance their reputation and encourage consumer loyalty.

4.6 Summary Interpretation

In summary, the findings provide robust evidence that short-form video content is a powerful digital marketing channel among Generation Z consumers. The high frequency of daily usage, strong brand discovery rates, and significant consumer engagement underscore SFVC's effectiveness in connecting brands with this demographic. Instagram Reels' leading popularity signals the need for marketers to prioritize this platform for campaign implementation. Emotional and relatable content formats drive higher brand recall, while influencer collaborations substantially increase consumer trust and purchase intentions. These insights collectively emphasize the necessity for brands to craft personalized, entertaining, and credible SFVC campaigns to maximize impact within Gen Z. The results align closely with the study's objectives and contribute valuable theoretical and practical implications for digital marketing strategies targeting emerging young consumers.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and insights derived from the data analysis, several strategic recommendations can be proposed for marketers, brand managers, and digital content creators to enhance the effectiveness of short-form video content (SFVC) in building brand awareness and consumer engagement among Generation Z. These recommendations are intended to guide the development of impactful and sustainable SFVC campaigns in a competitive digital environment.

5.1 Prioritize Platform-Specific Strategies

Since **Instagram Reels emerged as the most preferred platform (58%)**, brands should tailor their content specifically for this platform's format and user behavior. Instagram's algorithm favors high engagement rates, so brands must create content that encourages likes, shares, and comments. However, a multi-platform strategy that includes **YouTube Shorts and TikTok** should also be considered, especially to reach wider segments within Gen Z who prefer those platforms.

Recommendation:

- Develop platform-optimized content rather than reposting the same video across channels.
- Use native features like hashtags, music, and effects to increase visibility within each platform's discovery system.

5.2 Focus on Relatable and Emotionally Engaging Content

The study shows that **humorous and relatable videos lead to higher brand recall (72%)**. Therefore, brands should focus on creating content that resonates with the everyday experiences, humor, and values of Gen Z.

Recommendation:

- Use storytelling techniques and culturally relevant themes.
- Avoid overly promotional messages and focus on authenticity, entertainment, and storytelling that connects emotionally.

5.3 Collaborate with Influencers Authentically

Influencer-driven content has shown a positive correlation with consumer trust ($r = 0.36$). Collaborating with influencers, especially micro-influencers who have niche and engaged audiences, can help brands build credibility and trust.

Recommendation:

- Partner with influencers who align with the brand's identity and values.
- Allow influencers creative freedom to present the product naturally within their content.
- Avoid scripted or overly branded appearances that may seem inauthentic.

5.4 Leverage Product Demonstrations and Reviews

59% of respondents reported purchases influenced by short-form videos, especially those featuring **product demos and reviews**. This shows that Gen Z values transparent, visually informative content when making purchase decisions.

Recommendation:

- Include product usage demonstrations, tutorials, and unboxing videos in the content strategy.
- Incorporate customer testimonials and user-generated reviews to enhance credibility.

5.5 Enhance Audience Engagement through Interactivity

A key strength of SFVC is its potential for **two-way interaction**. The study found that **62% of respondents actively engaged** with branded content. Increasing interactivity not only boosts engagement but also improves algorithmic visibility.

Recommendation:

- Encourage participation through polls, challenges, duets, and "call-to-action" prompts in videos.
- Respond to user comments, share user-generated content, and create community-driven campaigns.

5.6 Analyze Metrics and Audience Insights Continuously

To ensure effectiveness, brands must not rely solely on content creation but also focus on analyzing engagement metrics such as watch time, retention rate, click-through rate, and conversion tracking.

Recommendation:

- Use analytics tools provided by each platform to assess performance.
- Conduct A/B testing to compare different types of content and posting times.
- Regularly review feedback and comments to improve content quality.

5.7 Invest in Content Consistency and Frequency

Frequent and consistent posting increases visibility and builds familiarity with the audience. Brands that maintain a regular content calendar tend to develop stronger relationships with their audience.

Recommendation:

- Post consistently (at least 3–5 times per week) to stay relevant in audience feeds.
- Develop a content calendar that includes a mix of educational, entertaining, and promotional videos.

5.8 Maintain Ethical Standards and Brand Integrity

In the age of transparency, Gen Z is quick to identify inauthentic or misleading content. Brands must be cautious not to overpromise or manipulate content in a way that could damage trust.

Recommendation:

- Clearly disclose paid partnerships and sponsorships.
- Avoid clickbait and ensure that content aligns with ethical and cultural sensitivities.

Summary

These recommendations are grounded in empirical findings from the survey data and reflect the evolving preferences of Generation Z consumers. For brands looking to increase their visibility and engagement through short-form video platforms, it is critical to stay agile, culturally relevant, and consumer-centric. The emphasis should be on **authenticity, creativity, and value-driven content** that encourages interaction and trust. By implementing these strategies, brands can build lasting relationships with Gen Z and drive measurable business outcomes.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the impact and effectiveness of short-form video content (SFVC)—such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts—on brand awareness and consumer engagement, particularly among Generation Z. Based on a detailed analysis of quantitative data collected from 150 respondents aged between 18 and 27, the study draws several important conclusions that contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of digital marketing.

The findings confirm that short-form video content is a dominant and rapidly growing tool for influencing modern consumer behavior. A significant proportion of respondents (81.7%) reported daily consumption of short-form content, indicating how deeply embedded these formats are in the daily media routines of Gen Z users. Among the platforms, **Instagram Reels** emerged as the most used, suggesting its strong market presence and effectiveness in delivering visual, interactive, and influencer-driven content.

The results indicate that **SFVC significantly enhances brand visibility**. 78% of respondents acknowledged discovering new brands through these videos, underlining that short-form content is not just a form of entertainment but a powerful branding tool. Moreover, 67% of respondents could recall specific brands from such content, especially those that employed humor, relatability, and creative storytelling. This highlights that **emotional resonance and creativity** are critical factors in driving brand recall in the Gen Z segment.

When it comes to consumer engagement, **over 62% of participants actively interacted** with branded content by liking, sharing, or commenting. These interactions not only extend content reach but also foster community involvement, brand loyalty, and trust. Additionally, **influencer marketing** played a pivotal role, as seen in the moderate but meaningful correlation ($r = 0.36$) between influencer-led content and user trust. Respondents showed higher trust levels in content shared by relatable micro-influencers and creators they follow consistently.

Furthermore, the study found that **59% of participants made purchases influenced by SFVC**, particularly those featuring product demonstrations or influencer reviews. This confirms that well-crafted short-form videos can move potential consumers down the marketing funnel—from awareness to conversion. Such content serves as a modern-day version of word-of-mouth marketing, driven by peer credibility and algorithmic relevance.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research supports key marketing concepts such as the **AIDA model** (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) and the **Hierarchy of Effects Theory**, showcasing how short-form videos effectively progress users through each stage of the buying decision process. The findings also align with the **Uses and Gratifications Theory**, as Gen Z users tend to consume content that is entertaining, informative, and socially integrative.

On a practical level, the study provides actionable insights for marketers, content creators, and brands. To effectively engage Gen Z, marketers should prioritize content that is:

- **Short, visual, and authentic**
- Created in collaboration with influencers
- Embedded with storytelling or humor
- Aligned with platform trends and user preferences

In conclusion, **short-form video content is not merely a passing trend but a pivotal element** in the future of digital marketing strategies. For brands seeking to capture the attention, trust, and loyalty of Generation Z, investing in short-form, mobile-friendly, and emotionally resonant content is essential. Future research can explore the long-term retention effects, platform-specific algorithms, or comparative impact of micro-influencers versus celebrities to deepen this understanding.

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