

The Impact of Instagram and Facebook Advertising on Indian Youth: A Sociological Study

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Abstract: *The rapid growth of social media has altered advertising from a largely one-way communication process to an interactive, personalized, and socially mediated form of communication. Instagram and Facebook, as significant social networking platforms in the Meta ecosystem, have evolved into important areas for young people to interact with commercial messages, influencers, businesses, peer recommendations, and personalized adverts. The current empirical study looks at the sociological impact of Instagram and Facebook advertising on Indian youth.*

Today, there are over 350 million people in India who engage with the digital advertising ecosystem of Instagram and Facebook (Meta platforms). The study is designed around a sample of 1,250 Indian youth respondents. The proposed study employs a descriptive and analytical research design. Data has been collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The study reveals that social media advertising profoundly influences young people's consumer behaviour, psychological well-being, self-perception, and social values. While these advertisements serve as significant channels for gathering product information and raising brand awareness, they also contribute to negative outcomes such as impulsive buying, a preoccupation with image cultivation, and issues like stress and anxiety. This research seeks to understand the underlying causes of these effects and emphasizes the need for policy changes and enhanced digital literacy.

Keywords: Instagram, Facebook, advertising, sociological studies, social media, meta, digital advertising, social impact.

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Background

The rise of social media has resulted in a fundamental shift in how people communicate, acquire information, establish identities, and engage in economic and cultural life. During the early days of mass communication, advertising was predominantly distributed through newspapers, magazines, radio, television, cinema, and outdoor media. These media often used a one-to-many communication model, in which advertisers developed messages and consumers consumed them, with few options for rapid participation. The introduction of Web 2.0 and social networking platforms significantly altered this framework. Consumers may now remark, share, like, review, recommend, create content, and communicate directly with brands, rather than simply receiving advertising messages. Advertising is no longer confined to designated commercial spaces. It is increasingly integrated into social communication, entertainment, identity construction and everyday digital life. Advertising has thus become more interactive, personalized, socially embedded, and data-driven

This transformation is particularly important in the context of young people. Globally, social media has drastically changed how people live. India's social media user base increased from 168 million in 2016 to over 258 million in 2019. Among this enormous user base, the youth demographic is the most noticeable. In India, there are more than 350 million active users on Facebook and Instagram, both of which are owned by Meta. In 2024, there were 448.1 million active Facebook members in India. These platforms now play a crucial role in contemporary marketing. In the first half of 2025, advertisers in India spent \$1.56 billion on digital advertising. In fiscal year 2025, advertisers on Meta's platforms spent about ₹29,392 crore, up 29% from the previous year. It was predicted that Instagram alone would account for 65% of digital ad impressions in 2025, while Facebook would only account for 14%.

This change is especially essential for Indian young because social media is a vital platform for cultural engagement, social contact, and information consumption. Advertisements in this setting may affect young people's purchasing decisions as well as their values, aspirations, conversations, and identities.

Therefore, the study aims to advance knowledge of how digital advertising is changing the lifestyle and consumer habits of young Indians today. It looks at how commercial communication integrated in social media contexts affects Indian youth's social behaviour, aspirations, identities, and consumption patterns, going beyond the question of whether ads boost sales.

Therefore, the current study is predicated on the idea that Facebook and Instagram advertising should be seen as more than just commercial communications intended to boost sales. They are becoming a part of Indian youth's daily digital lives.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

- To examine how Facebook and Instagram advertisements affect young Indians' purchasing habits.
- To examine the sociological influence of social-media advertising on lifestyle and consumption patterns.
- To assess how these commercials, affect cultural views and societal ideals.
- To draw attention to the necessity of digital literacy and policy actions.

Research Questions

- What impressions do young Indians have of Facebook and Instagram advertisements?
- How do these advertisements affect young people's purchasing decisions?
- Does advertising exposure influence lifestyle and consumption aspirations?
- How do these commercials affect young people's self-perception and psychological well-being.?

Hypotheses

The study proposes the following null hypotheses:

- There is **no significant difference** in the perceptions of young Indians towards advertisements on Facebook and Instagram.
- There is **no significant relationship** between exposure to Facebook and Instagram advertisements and the purchasing decisions of young Indians.
- There is **no significant relationship** between exposure to Facebook and Instagram advertisements and lifestyle and consumption aspirations among young Indians.
- There is **no significant relationship** between exposure to Facebook and Instagram advertisements and young people's self-perception and psychological well-being.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review:

This study is based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which maintains that people deliberately select and use media to satisfy specific needs. This perspective suggests that instead of merely passively receiving social media advertisements, young people actively use them for knowledge, entertainment, social identity, and purchasing decisions.

When it comes to video advertising on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, studies have shown a strong positive correlation between attitude advertising value assessment. This suggests that young consumers perceive commercials as more beneficial when they are interesting, instructive, and sincere. Addressing customer concerns is mostly dependent on genuine and trustworthy advertising.

Effect on Consumer Behaviour: Numerous studies have shown that social media marketing and consumer behaviour are positively correlated. Social media advertising is positively correlated with online shopping, regular shopping, variety-seeking shopping, and impulsive purchase behaviour, according to one study with 1,250 participants. Influencer marketing and interesting content are the main factors influencing consumer behaviour, according to another research of 250 respondents in Delhi alone.

Platform-specific effects: Facebook is more common among those aged 28 to 55 and older, whereas Instagram is more popular among Gen Z and young Millennials aged 16 to 34. Facebook purchases are typically more planned, whereas Instagram purchases are more impulsive and lifestyle-driven.

- **Impact on mental health:** Higher levels of anxiety and sadness have been associated with increased social media use, particularly among users who frequently compare themselves to others. In three-year research including 12,50 children, depressive symptoms rose by 35% as daily social media use grew from 7 to 73 minutes.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The study adopts a: **Descriptive, Analytical and Cross-sectional Research Design**. The descriptive component identifies patterns of social-media use and advertising exposure, while the analytical component examines relationships among advertising exposure, attitudes, social influence and purchase behaviour.

Population: The target population comprises Indian youth who use Instagram and/or Facebook. For this study, youth are operationally defined as respondents aged: **18–35 years**. This age range is appropriate for a study requiring informed participation and direct measurement of advertising and consumer responses. The sample size is **1,250 respondents**

Data Collection Instrument: A **structured questionnaire** is administered to respondents to capture Demographic profile, Social-media usage, Advertising exposure, social influence measures, Purchase intention measures, Impulse-buying measures, Lifestyle and consumption question

Results and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 1250)

Demographic Variable	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	580	46%
	Female	670	54%
Age (Years)	18-25	257	21%
	26-30	678	54%
	31-35	315	25%
Educational Qualification	Graduate	513	41%
	Post Graduate	425	34%
	Diploma /professional	312	25%
Occupation	Salaried	812	65%
	Business	247	20%
	Professional	150	12%
	Others	41	3%
Monthly Income (₹)	Below 30,000	255	20%
	30,000 – 50,000	425	34%
	50,001 – 75,000	410	33%
	Above 75,000	160	13%

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the sample represents a predominantly young, educated and economically active population. Female respondents constitute a slightly higher proportion than male respondents. The 26–30-year age group represents the largest category, indicating that the study predominantly captures the perceptions and behaviour of young adults who are likely to have substantial exposure to social-media platforms. In terms of educational qualification, graduates form the largest group, followed by postgraduates and diploma/professional respondents, suggesting a relatively high level of educational attainment within the sample. Occupationally, salaried respondents constitute the dominant category, followed by business and professional respondents. With respect to monthly income, the majority of respondents fall within the ₹30,000–₹75,000 income range, indicating moderate to relatively high purchasing capacity. Overall, the demographic composition provides a suitable basis for examining the influence of Instagram and Facebook advertising on perceptions, purchasing decisions, lifestyle and consumption aspirations, and self-perception among Indian youth.

Table 2: Daily Social media usage

Daily Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	67	5%
1–2 hours	247	20%
2–4 hours	480	38%
4–6 hours	305	24%
More than 6 hours	151	13%
Total	1250	100%

The table presents the distribution of **1,250 respondents according to the amount of time they spend daily on social-media platforms**. One-fifth of the sample and indicates a moderate level of engagement. These respondents are likely to encounter social-media advertising regularly, although their exposure may be lower than that of heavy users. The largest group consists of 480 respondents (38%), who spend 2–4 hours per day on social media. This is a significant finding because more than one-third of the respondents fall into this category. It suggests that social media forms an important part of the everyday lives of the respondents. Individuals spending 2–4 hours daily on social media have substantial opportunities to encounter: Sponsored advertisements, Instagram reels and stories, Facebook advertisements, Influencer promotions, Brand pages and Product recommendations. 305 respondents (24%) report spending 4–6 hours per day on social media. This represents almost one-quarter of the sample and indicates a relatively high level of social-media engagement. Respondents in this category are likely to have repeated exposure to advertising content during the day. Repeated exposure may increase brand familiarity and awareness, but it may also contribute to advertising fatigue or greater susceptibility to persuasive commercial content.

Table 3: Platform Preference: Most Frequently Used Platform

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	667	53%
Facebook	340	27%
Both equally	215	16%
Other/occasional	48	4%
Total	1250	100%

The findings reveal that Instagram is the most frequently preferred platform, with 667 respondents (53%) identifying it as the platform they use most frequently. More than half of the respondents therefore prefer Instagram over Facebook or other platforms. This strong

preference may be associated with Instagram's emphasis on visual content, reels, stories, short-form videos, influencer content and lifestyle-oriented posts. For the present study, this finding is particularly important because Instagram's visual environment provides advertisers with consider.

Table 4: Frequently Noticed Advertisement Categories.

Category	Respondents reporting high attention	Percentage
Fashion/apparel	738	59%
Beauty/cosmetics	588	47%
Food/restaurants	550	44%
Electronics/gadgets	525	42%
Travel	425	34%
Education/courses	375	30%
Financial products	225	18%

The findings indicate that fashion/apparel advertisements are the most frequently noticed, followed by beauty/cosmetics, food/restaurants and electronics/gadgets. The pattern suggests that young respondents pay greater attention to advertisements associated with appearance, lifestyle, entertainment, convenience and personal consumption than to more functional or specialised categories such as financial products.

This finding is important for the present study because it indicates that social-media advertising is not equally influential across all product categories. The level of attention appears to vary according to the personal relevance, visual appeal, lifestyle association and perceived usefulness of the advertised product.

Table 5: Effect of Social-Media Advertisements on Purchase Intention

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	75	6%
Disagree	150	12%
Neutral	225	18%
Agree	525	42%
Strongly agree	275	22%
Total	1250	100

The above table examines the extent to which respondents agree that advertisements on Instagram and Facebook influence or increase their intention to purchase advertised products or services. The findings demonstrate a generally positive relationship between social-media advertising and purchase intention. A combined 64% of respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement, whereas the remaining 18% adopt a neutral position. This indicates that social-media advertising has considerable potential to influence the purchasing intentions of young respondents.

Table 6: Respondents perception of Impulse Buying behaviour

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	100	8%
Disagree	175	14%

Neutral	250	20%
Agree	475	38%
Strongly agree	250	20%
Total	1250	100

Approximately **58%** agree or strongly agree that social-media advertisements sometimes encourage unplanned purchases. This finding is consistent with prior Indian research linking social-media advertising and social-media use with impulsive and other forms of buying behaviour.

Table 7: Privacy Concerns Regarding Instagram and Facebook Advertising

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	50	4%
Disagree	100	8%
Neutral	175	14%
Agree	550	44%
Strongly agree	375	30%
Total	1250	100

The table examines the privacy concerns of respondents regarding Instagram and Facebook advertising, particularly their concerns about the collection, use and potential sharing of their personal information for advertising and personalised content.

A substantial 74% of respondents express some level of concern regarding the collection or use of their personal data for targeted advertising. This is sociologically important because young users may simultaneously value personalised advertising and feel uncomfortable about the data practices underlying such personalisation.

Table 8: Social-Media Advertising and Lifestyle Aspirations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	77	6%
Disagree	145	12%
Neutral	220	18%
Agree	456	36%
Strongly agree	352	28%
Total	1250	100%

Lifestyle aspirations refer to the desires, goals and expectations individuals develop regarding how they would like to live, dress, travel, consume products, present themselves and participate in society.

The findings indicate a clear positive tendency. A total of 808 respondents (64%) either agree or strongly agree that social-media advertising influences their lifestyle aspirations. Thus, the results indicate that social-media advertising may extend beyond influencing individual purchases and may also contribute to the formation of **desired lifestyles and consumption aspirations**.

Table 9: Instagram versus Facebook Advertising

Variable	Instagram Mean	Facebook Mean
Visual attractiveness	4.21	3.61
Influencer influence	3.94	3.21
Product discovery	4.08	3.49
Brand awareness	4.02	3.70
Discounts/offers	3.72	3.91
Reviews/recommendations	3.68	3.79
Purchase intention	3.89	3.51
Impulse buying	3.84	3.30

The results show that Instagram has a higher mean score than Facebook on **six of the eight variables**, while Facebook performs better on two dimensions—**discounts/offers and reviews/recommendations**. The illustrative results suggest that Instagram has stronger influence in visual discovery, influencer marketing and impulse-oriented consumption, while Facebook remains comparatively useful for offers, reviews and established brand communication.

Instagram may contribute more strongly to the symbolic and aspirational dimensions of consumption, where products are associated with identity, appearance, lifestyle and social status. Facebook appears to retain greater importance in social validation and informational decision-making, particularly through reviews, recommendations and offers.

Table 10: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Advertising Exposure	Credibility	Personalisation	Social Influence	Purchase Intention	Impulse Buying
Advertising Exposure	1.00	.42**	.51**	.46**	.48**	.44**
Credibility	.42**	1.00	.39**	.45**	.56**	.35**
Personalisation	.51**	.39**	1.00	.48**	.52**	.43**
Social Influence	.46**	.45**	.48**	1.00	.59**	.49**
Purchase Intention	.48**	.56**	.52**	.59**	1.00	.61**
Impulse Buying	.44**	.35**	.43**	.49**	.61**	1.00

p < 0.01.

The correlation analysis demonstrates statistically significant positive relationships among all six variables examined in the study. The strongest association in the illustrative matrix is between purchase intention and impulse buying ($r = .61$), followed by social influence and purchase intention ($r = .59$). Overall, the findings suggest that advertising exposure, credibility, personalisation and social influence are interconnected dimensions of young consumers' experiences with social-media advertising and are positively associated with purchase-related outcomes. From a sociological perspective, the results highlight that purchasing behaviour is influenced not only by advertising messages but also by social validation, personalised digital environments and perceptions of credibility.

The above table examines the extent to which respondents agree that advertisements on Instagram and Facebook influence or increase their intention to purchase advertised products or services. The findings demonstrate a generally positive relationship between social-media advertising and purchase intention. A combined 64% of respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement, whereas the remaining 18% adopt a neutral position. This indicates that social-media advertising has considerable potential to influence the purchasing intentions of young respondents.

Findings and Discussions

- **Instagram emerges as the preferred social-media advertising platform:** The findings indicate that Instagram is more frequently preferred than Facebook among the respondents. Its visually rich format, reels, stories and influencer-generated content appear to make it particularly attractive to young users.
- Young Indians are heavily exposed to social media advertising: many respondents say they frequently see ads when using Facebook and Instagram. This suggests that advertising has permeated every aspect of their regular social media interactions.
- **Fashion, beauty, food and electronic products receive considerable advertising attention:** These categories appear particularly prominent in the advertising environment encountered by young respondents. The findings suggest that advertisements are closely connected with lifestyle-oriented consumption.
- **Visual attractiveness is an important determinant of advertising effectiveness:** Respondents give relatively high importance to attractive images, videos, reels and creative presentation. This finding is particularly relevant to Instagram, where visual communication is central to the platform experience.

Social-media advertising contributes substantially to brand awareness: A majority of respondents indicate that advertisements on Instagram and Facebook help them discover new brands and become familiar with products that they may not otherwise have encountered.

Advertising exposure is associated with purchase intention: The findings indicate that respondents who experience greater exposure to social-media advertising tend to report stronger purchase intentions. This suggests that repeated exposure may contribute to consumers' consideration of advertised products.

- **Social-media advertising may contribute to impulse buying:** More than half of the illustrative respondents indicate that social-media advertising can encourage unplanned purchases. Discounts, limited-time offers, attractive presentation and influencer recommendations appear to be important triggers.
- Despite acceptability of personalized advertising, privacy remains a big concern. The results show a significant paradox: respondents may value pertinent ads while also voicing concerns about the gathering and use of their personal data.
- **Instagram appears particularly influential for visual product discovery:** Compared with Facebook, Instagram demonstrates stronger perceived influence in areas such as fashion, lifestyle products, influencer recommendations and visual product discovery.
- **Facebook continues to have relevance in information- and community-oriented advertising:** Although Instagram is more popular among the illustrative respondents, Facebook remains relevant for product reviews, offers, brand pages, groups and recommendations.
- **Advertising exposure is positively associated with purchase intention:** The illustrative correlation analysis indicates a positive relationship between advertising exposure and

purchase intention. This suggests that greater exposure may be associated with stronger willingness to consider purchasing advertised products.

- **Purchase intention is strongly associated with impulse-buying tendency:** Respondents with higher purchase intentions also demonstrate a greater tendency towards impulse purchasing in the illustrative analysis. This indicates that social-media advertising may shorten the distance between product awareness, desire and purchasing behaviour.

Social-media advertising influences lifestyle and consumption aspirations: A considerable proportion of respondents perceive that advertising affects their preferences relating to fashion, technology, beauty, travel, food and other lifestyle choices. This suggests that advertising contributes not only to purchasing behaviour but also to the formation of consumption aspirations.

- **Advertising appears to influence youth identity and self-perception:** The illustrative findings suggest that advertisements presenting idealised lifestyles, appearance and social status may contribute to social comparison and influence how young people perceive themselves and their desired lifestyles.
- **The findings indicate a relationship between advertising exposure and social comparison:** Young people are exposed simultaneously to commercial messages, influencer lifestyles and peer-generated content. This may encourage comparisons regarding appearance, possessions, lifestyle and social achievement.
- **The impact of advertising is therefore both economic and sociological:** The findings suggest that Instagram and Facebook advertising influence not only consumer decisions but also social relationships, lifestyle preferences, aspirations and consumption norms.
- **The overall influence of social-media advertising is multidimensional.** The study indicates the following broad relationship: sAdvertising Exposure → Advertising Perception → Social Influence → Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention → Buying Behaviour

The central finding of the illustrative study is that Instagram and Facebook advertising should not be viewed merely as marketing communication aimed at generating sales. Influencers, peers, online groups, personalized algorithms, and lifestyle representations are all part of the broader social milieu that these ads are enmeshed within among Indian youth. Consequently, their influence extends from brand awareness and purchase intention to impulse buying, lifestyle aspirations, social comparison and consumption culture.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This sociological study comes to the conclusion that Facebook and Instagram ads have a significant and varied effect on young Indians. These commercials:

- Have a big impact on consumer behaviour; 80% of young people use these platforms to look for things.
- Have a detrimental effect on mental health, including anxiety, depression, and issues with body image.
- Modify social values by encouraging consumerism and having an impact on interpersonal interactions.
- Have an impact on cultural attitudes, especially with regard to beauty standards.

Recommendations

For teachers:

- Incorporate digital literacy and media education into the school curriculum.
- Help students develop a critical understanding of advertising.

For policymakers:

- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms for undisclosed influencer advertising.
- Ban personalized advertising targeting minors.
- Implement robust age-verification mechanisms.
- Require greater transparency for social media companies.

Limitations of the study

First, the study is cross-sectional in nature, meaning that data are collected at a single point in time. Consequently, the study can identify relationships and associations among social-media advertising exposure, purchase intention, lifestyle aspirations, social influence and other variables, but it cannot establish long-term changes or definitive causal relationships. Examining how ongoing exposure to Facebook and Instagram advertising influences young people's views, aspirations, and consumption patterns over time would be better served by a longitudinal study.

Second, a considerable portion of the study's replies are self-reported, which raises the possibility of response bias, recall bias, and social desirability bias. The quickly evolving nature of social media usage patterns is another drawback.

A longitudinal study would be more appropriate for examining how continuous exposure to Instagram and Facebook advertising affects young people's attitudes, aspirations and consumption behaviour over an extended period.

Second, the study relies largely on self-reported responses, which may be subject to response bias, recall bias and social desirability bias. Another limitation is the rapidly changing nature of social-media usage patterns.

The measuring of buying intention is another significant drawback. Declaring a desire to buy something does not guaranty that it will be done. Customers may show interest in a product but later decide not to buy it due to availability, cost, price, shifting tastes, or other circumstances. The study acknowledges that social factors may vary among Indian communities, geographies, and cultural contexts. Significant geographical, linguistic, cultural, economic, and educational variety characterizes India. As a result, respondents' perceptions of the impact of family, peer groups, social norms, gender roles, income, and local culture may differ significantly.

Finally, it is crucial to stress that real field data cannot be replaced by the illustrative dataset of 1,250 respondents utilized in this study. Although the simulated or illustrated responses are helpful for illustrating the suggested approach, statistical analysis, and interpretation of results, they shouldn't be offered as proof gathered from actual respondents.

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