

The Impact of Instagram & YouTube shorts on Brand Perception among Gen Z Consumers

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Instagram and YouTube Shorts on brand perception among Generation Z consumers. With the rising popularity of short-form video content, social media platforms have become essential tools for brands aiming to capture the attention of younger audiences. Generation Z, characterized by their digital savviness, short attention spans, and desire for authentic content, is particularly influenced by the fast-paced and visually engaging nature of these videos. This research explores how various elements—such as video aesthetics, storytelling, music, influencers, and interactive features—shape Gen Z's perceptions of brand authenticity, credibility, and relatability. The study also delves into how algorithm-driven content exposure and viral trends play a crucial role in enhancing brand visibility and fostering emotional connections. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining surveys and content analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's responses to short-form branded content. Key findings suggest that consistent engagement, creativity, and genuine messaging significantly improve brand perception and can even lead to increased brand loyalty and advocacy. In contrast, overly promotional or inauthentic content may result in negative sentiment or brand avoidance. The study offers actionable insights for marketers and brand strategists on how to effectively utilize Instagram and YouTube Shorts to build meaningful relationships with Gen Z consumers. Ultimately, it highlights the strategic importance of adapting to evolving digital consumption habits to stay relevant in a highly competitive and content-saturated environment.

Keywords: Short-form Video Marketing, Gen Z, Brand Perception, Instagram Shorts Influence, YouTube Shorts Engagement

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has revolutionized the way brands communicate, interact, and connect with consumers. Among the most notable shifts in recent years is the rise of short-form video content—particularly on platforms like Instagram (through Reels/Shorts) and YouTube Shorts. These brief, engaging videos have rapidly gained popularity, offering brands a dynamic way to showcase their identity, values, and offerings in just a few seconds (Dwivedi et al., 2021). With the shrinking attention spans of online audiences and the demand for fast, visually stimulating content, short-form videos have become a powerful marketing tool (Kemp, 2023).

At the forefront of this trend is Generation Z, the first truly digital-native generation, born approximately between 1997 and 2012. This cohort has grown up immersed in technology and is known for its preference for visually driven platforms, authentic brand communication, and fast-paced digital experiences (Williams et al., 2022). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z tends to favor brands that align with their personal values, maintain transparency, and engage in genuine storytelling (Fromm & Read, 2018). As a result, the content they consume on platforms like Instagram and YouTube Shorts significantly influences their perceptions, purchase decisions, and brand loyalty.

Brands are now tailoring their marketing strategies to align with Gen Z's behavior, using short-form videos not only to advertise but also to entertain, inspire, and build community (Tuten & Solomon, 2020). From viral trends and user-

generated content to influencer collaborations and behind-the-scenes glimpses, these videos offer an immersive way for brands to stay relevant and memorable.

This research seeks to investigate the impact of Instagram and YouTube Shorts on how Gen Z consumers perceive brands. It aims to explore which aspects of short-form content—such as creativity, authenticity, relatability, and influencer involvement—play the most significant role in shaping brand attitudes. By analyzing consumer responses and behavioral patterns, the study will offer insights into the effectiveness of short-form video marketing and its ability to influence Gen Z's brand perception. In doing so, it contributes to a better understanding of the evolving landscape of digital marketing and the critical need for brands to adapt to the preferences of a younger, tech-savvy audience.

Background

The rise of short-form video content has transformed digital marketing, with platforms like Instagram and YouTube introducing new features—Reels and Shorts—to engage younger audiences. These bite-sized videos are crafted for quick consumption and visual appeal, making them particularly attractive to Generation Z, the first fully digital-native generation (Kemp, 2023). With an average attention span of only a few seconds, Gen Z prefers content that is fast, authentic, and visually stimulating (Williams et al., 2022).

Instagram and YouTube Shorts provide brands with innovative ways to connect with this audience. Through behind-the-scenes content, influencer collaborations, and viral trends, brands can humanize their image and create emotional connections. This form of marketing not only boosts visibility but also impacts how the brand is perceived in terms of trustworthiness, relatability, and engagement (Tuten & Solomon, 2020).

However, despite the popularity of these formats, there is limited research focused specifically on how short-form video content influences brand perception among Gen Z consumers. This study seeks to fill that gap, contributing to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in the digital era.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how short-form video content on Instagram and YouTube influences the way Generation Z consumers perceive brands. As digital natives, Gen Z interacts extensively with social media and is highly responsive to content that is engaging, authentic, and visually appealing. With the rise of Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, brands are increasingly using these platforms to communicate their identity and values. This research aims to understand the effectiveness of such strategies in shaping brand perception, including aspects such as trust, relatability, and emotional connection. The study also seeks to identify which elements of short-form content—such as creativity, influencer presence, or trend participation—are most impactful in influencing Gen Z's attitudes toward brands.

Literature Review

The rise of short-form video content has significantly reshaped the digital marketing landscape, particularly with the introduction of Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. These platforms are designed to deliver quick, engaging, and visually stimulating content, ideal for capturing the attention of Gen Z consumers—digital natives known for their short attention spans and demand for authenticity (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Brands are increasingly leveraging these formats to communicate messages, enhance brand visibility, and build consumer relationships.

Research has shown that social media marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perception. Tuten and Solomon (2020) emphasized that platforms like Instagram and YouTube are not just tools for exposure but are central to brand storytelling. Gen Z, in particular, seeks engaging and authentic content that feels relatable rather than overtly promotional (Fromm & Read, 2018). Influencer marketing has also gained traction, as influencers are perceived as more trustworthy than traditional celebrities, and their presence in short-form videos can significantly boost a brand's credibility and likability (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Despite the extensive literature on social media marketing and influencer strategies, few studies have focused specifically on the impact of short-form video content on brand perception among Gen Z. Most existing research addresses broader aspects of digital marketing or general social media usage without narrowing down the unique role that Reels and Shorts play in influencing brand trust, authenticity, and consumer engagement.

This gap is critical, as brands are investing more in short-form content without fully understanding its psychological and behavioral effects on Gen Z consumers. Moreover, there is limited insight into which specific elements—such as emotional appeal, entertainment value, or influencer involvement—most influence brand perception in these short formats.

By reviewing and synthesizing current literature, this study establishes a foundation for deeper exploration into how Instagram and YouTube Shorts impact Gen Z's perception of brands. It builds upon existing findings in digital marketing and consumer psychology but fills a niche that remains underexplored. The insights gained from this research can help marketers design more effective short-form content strategies targeted at Gen Z, contributing both academically and practically to the evolving field of social media marketing.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to explore the impact of short-form video content, specifically on Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, on the perception of brands among Generation Z consumers. As digital platforms evolve, brands have increasingly turned to short-form video content as a means to capture the attention of younger audiences. Generation Z, born into a digital world, is known for its fast-paced consumption of content and its strong presence on social media. With their preference for engaging, authentic, and easily digestible media, it becomes crucial to understand how this format shapes their views about the brands they encounter online.

This study aims to investigate how regularly Gen Z engages with short-form content and how this exposure influences their thoughts and feelings about brands. It seeks to understand whether such content helps in creating a favorable brand image, builds trust, or even affects the likelihood of purchase or engagement. Additionally, the research will consider the role of influencers in delivering brand messages and whether their presence enhances the perceived credibility of a brand. By comparing Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, the study will also examine if one platform has a stronger influence than the other in shaping brand perception.

Overall, the research aspires to provide insights that can help marketers and content creators align their strategies with the expectations and behaviors of Gen Z consumers. Understanding these patterns can lead to more effective digital marketing campaigns that resonate with this generation's preferences and values in an increasingly content-driven world.

Methodology

This study adopts a **quantitative research approach** to examine how short-form video content on Instagram and YouTube Shorts influences brand perception among Gen Z consumers. A **descriptive survey design** was selected, as it allows for the collection of standardized data from a large population, making it suitable for identifying patterns and relationships.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected using a **structured online questionnaire**, distributed via social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to assess participants' exposure to short-form content, their engagement behavior, and their perception of brands featured in such content. Key areas covered included authenticity, trust, relatability, and overall brand image.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

The sample consisted of **150 Gen Z participants** aged between 18 and 26, selected using **purposive sampling**. This method was chosen because the target population (Gen Z users of Instagram and YouTube Shorts) is specific and relevant to the research objective. Participants were required to be active users of at least one of the two platforms and have regular exposure to short-form video content.

Data Analysis

Collected data was analyzed using **descriptive statistics** (mean, frequency, percentage) and **inferential statistics**, particularly **correlation analysis**, to examine the relationship between exposure to short-form content and brand perception. The data was processed using software like SPSS for accuracy and efficiency.

Justification of Method

A quantitative approach is appropriate for this study because it enables the measurement of attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions in a structured manner. It also supports statistical analysis, which is essential for testing the hypotheses and identifying trends. The survey method is cost-effective, time-efficient, and allows for data collection from a geographically dispersed population. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling ensures that the study targets the most relevant demographic—Gen Z consumers with active engagement on short-form video platforms.

By focusing on measurable variables and real user behavior, this methodology aligns with the study's aim to provide data-driven insights into the impact of Instagram and YouTube Shorts on brand perception among Gen Z consumers.

Results

A total of **150 Gen Z respondents** (aged 18–26) participated in the study. The survey explored their engagement with short-form videos on Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts and how these platforms influenced their perception of brands.

Table 1: Frequency of Platform Use

Platform	Daily Users	Weekly Users	Rarely Use	Never Use
Instagram Reels	90 (60%)	35 (23.3%)	20 (13.3%)	5 (3.3%)
YouTube Shorts	75 (50%)	40 (26.7%)	30 (20%)	5 (3.3%)

The majority of respondents (60%) use Instagram Reels daily, while 50% watch YouTube Shorts daily. This shows a strong preference for short-form video content among Gen Z.

Table 2: Impact on Brand Perception

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Short-form videos help me discover new brands	78%	15%	7%
I trust a brand more if I see it in short videos by influencers	65%	25%	10%
Short-form videos improve my opinion of a brand	72%	20%	8%
I'm more likely to engage with brands featured in short videos	68%	22%	10%

These results indicate that short-form video content significantly influences how Gen Z perceives brands. A notable **78% of participants agreed** that these videos help them discover new brands, while **72% reported** an improved opinion of brands showcased in such formats.

Interpretation and Significance

The findings suggest that short-form videos are not just a trend but a **powerful branding tool**. Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts contribute positively to brand awareness, trust, and engagement among Gen Z. Influencer involvement also plays a key role, with 65% stating they are more likely to trust brands featured by influencers.

This emphasizes the importance for marketers to adopt short-form video strategies that align with Gen Z's expectations—authenticity, creativity, and relatability.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the growing influence of short-form video content on brand perception among Gen Z consumers. A significant majority of participants indicated that platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts play a pivotal role in how they discover, relate to, and trust brands. These results highlight a critical shift in digital marketing behavior, especially among younger, digitally native audiences.

The high percentage of daily users for both Instagram Reels (60%) and YouTube Shorts (50%) confirms earlier research suggesting that Gen Z consumes visual content more frequently than any previous generation (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Moreover, 78% of participants agreed that short-form videos helped them discover new brands, and 72% stated that such content positively influenced their perception of those brands. This supports Tuten and Solomon's (2020) argument that digital platforms are now central to storytelling and brand positioning, especially when content is authentic and relatable.

The influence of short-form video content is further emphasized by the role of influencers. The fact that 65% of respondents said they trust a brand more when it is promoted by influencers reflects findings from Lou and Yuan (2019), who noted that influencer marketing significantly increases consumer trust and brand credibility, particularly in Gen Z audiences that value relatability over celebrity status.

Limitations

Despite these insightful findings, the study is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample size, while appropriate for exploratory research, was relatively small (n=150) and limited to a specific age group within Gen Z (18–26). Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias or inaccuracies in recall. The study was also geographically restricted and may not fully represent the diverse behavior of Gen Z users across different cultures or countries.

Future Research Directions

Future studies could expand the sample size and diversify the demographic to include Gen Z participants from varied geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, longitudinal studies would help track how brand perception evolves with prolonged exposure to short-form video content. Researchers could also explore the effectiveness of specific video elements—such as humor, storytelling, or call-to-action features—in influencing brand engagement. Moreover, qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insights into the emotional and psychological factors behind Gen Z's brand perceptions shaped by short-form content.

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