iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 13 **Issue:** VIII **Month of publication:** August 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2025.73677

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 13 Issue VIII Aug 2025- Available at www.ijraset.com

Ephemeral Advertising and Consumer Engagement: The Impact of Short-Lived Digital Ads on Purchase Intentions in Gen Z

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Abstract: ***In recent years, ephemeral digital advertisements designed to disappear within 24 hours have emerged as a prominent marketing strategy on platforms such as Instagram Stories, Snapchat, and WhatsApp Status. Despite its growing adoption by brands, academic research on its effectiveness remains limited. This study aims to explore the impact of ephemeral advertising on consumer engagement, brand recall, and purchase intentions, with a specific focus on Generation Z consumers. The research examines whether the time-limited nature of such ads creates heightened urgency and fosters impulse buying compared to persistent digital advertisements. Using an experimental design, participants aged 18–25 will be exposed to both ephemeral and persistent ad formats, followed by surveys measuring recall accuracy, engagement levels, and purchase likelihood. Statistical analyses will identify significant differences between the two formats and investigate the moderating role of interactivity features such as polls, swipe-ups, and reactions. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for marketers on optimizing ad formats to enhance campaign effectiveness, while contributing to the limited scholarly literature on short-lived digital advertising.***

Keywords: ephemeral advertising, digital marketing, Generation Z, consumer engagement, brand recall, purchase intention, impulse buying, interactive ads, social media marketing, advertising effectiveness

I. INTRODUCTION

The advertising industry is in the midst of an unprecedented transformation driven by the rapid adoption of digital technologies, changing consumer behavior, and the exponential growth of social media platforms. Traditional advertising formats—such as television commercials, print ads, and static billboards—once dominated brand communication strategies. However, in an era of information overload and short attention spans, these methods have become less effective in capturing and retaining consumer interest. Marketers are increasingly shifting their focus toward innovative, interactive, and time-sensitive advertising approaches to meet the expectations of today's digital-first audience.

One of the most significant developments in this space is *ephemeral advertising*—content intentionally designed to disappear after a short duration, usually within 24 hours. Popularized by Snapchat in the early 2010s and later embraced by Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories, and WhatsApp Status, ephemeral ads leverage the psychology of scarcity and urgency to encourage immediate attention and action. The format blends seamlessly with users' daily social media consumption, offering an informal, authentic, and immersive brand experience. Unlike traditional ads that linger in feeds or on screens, ephemeral ads thrive on their fleeting nature, creating a "now or never" effect that aligns with contemporary fast-paced digital lifestyles.

Globally, ephemeral advertising is no longer a niche strategy—it is a mainstream component of digital marketing budgets. Industry reports indicate that more than half of Instagram's active user base interacts with Stories daily, and brands are capitalizing on this trend by producing short-lived yet impactful content. In India, the adoption of ephemeral advertising has accelerated alongside the country's digital revolution. With over 500 million active social media users and a significant rise in smartphone penetration, the Indian market presents fertile ground for such formats. Brands across sectors—from fashion and beauty to food delivery and fintech—are experimenting with ephemeral ads to engage their audience in real time.

The primary appeal of ephemeral advertising lies in its ability to foster a sense of exclusivity and immediacy. Generation Z, comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is particularly drawn to this format. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are adept at navigating multiple platforms, gravitate toward visually engaging and interactive content, and often prefer short-form, authentic brand interactions over polished, scripted messages. For them, ephemeral content feels personal, direct, and in-the-moment, which strengthens emotional connection and brand engagement.

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Despite its rising prominence, ephemeral advertising remains underexplored in academic literature. Most research on digital advertising effectiveness has focused on persistent content such as banner ads, in-feed social media posts, or video advertising. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how the temporary nature of ephemeral ads influences consumer decision-making processes. Key questions remain unanswered: Does the disappearing format enhance brand recall or hinder it? Does urgency created by time constraints translate into higher purchase intentions, or does it lead to superficial engagement? How do interactive features like polls, quizzes, and swipe-up links shape the overall consumer experience?

This study seeks to address these gaps by systematically investigating the impact of ephemeral advertising on consumer engagement, brand recall, and purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers. Employing an experimental approach, participants will be exposed to both ephemeral and persistent ad formats, with subsequent evaluation of their recall accuracy, emotional responses, and behavioral intentions. The findings will provide valuable insights for marketers aiming to optimize digital advertising strategies while contributing to the broader academic understanding of time-bound content in the evolving digital ecosystem.

Advertising has long been recognized as a primary driver of customer attention, awareness, and brand connection. In today's rapidly evolving digital economy, it has transformed from a one-way message broadcast into an interactive dialogue between brands and consumers. The rise of social media, mobile connectivity, and personalized content has shifted the advertising paradigm from simply informing potential customers to actively engaging them in immersive brand experiences.

Customer engagement refers to the emotional and behavioral connection a consumer develops with a brand through repeated and meaningful interactions. In the context of advertising, engagement goes beyond viewing or hearing a message—it involves participation, feedback, sharing, and in many cases, co-creation of content. With the advent of interactive digital formats such as ephemeral advertising, augmented reality filters, live streaming, and shoppable posts, the boundaries between advertisement and consumer activity have become increasingly blurred.

The modern advertising landscape emphasizes **experience-driven marketing**, where storytelling, authenticity, and immediacy play critical roles. Customers, especially digital-native generations like Millennials and Gen Z, are no longer passive recipients of advertising content. Instead, they seek ads that entertain, educate, and resonate with their values. Research has shown that engaged customers are more likely to exhibit higher brand loyalty, increased purchase frequency, and greater willingness to recommend products to others.

Technological advancements have significantly enhanced advertisers' ability to measure and optimize engagement. Metrics such as click-through rates, dwell time, comment volume, shares, and interactive responses offer real-time feedback on how effectively an ad fosters consumer involvement. Platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube have integrated native tools—such as polls, quizzes, augmented reality experiences, and instant messaging—that allow brands to turn advertising from a static message into a two-way communication channel.

In markets such as India, where smartphone penetration and social media usage are rising rapidly, advertising strategies focused on engagement have gained exceptional traction. Brands across industries—from FMCG and retail to luxury and technology—are leveraging short-form, mobile-first, and contextually relevant ads to spark immediate attention and sustained interaction. The emphasis has shifted from "reach at any cost" to "quality of connection," highlighting the growing importance of emotional resonance and participatory features in advertising.

Against this backdrop, understanding the relationship between advertising strategies and customer engagement has become a vital area of research. By analyzing how different ad formats, content styles, and platform choices influence engagement behaviors, businesses can design campaigns that not only capture attention but also deepen brand-consumer relationships. This understanding is especially critical in an era where customer loyalty is built not solely on product performance but on the quality of ongoing interactions between a brand and its audience.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first truly digital-native cohort. Tech-savvy, socially conscious, and value-driven, they demand authenticity and interactivity from brands. With short attention spans and high engagement on mobile platforms, Gen Z is reshaping marketing strategies through their preference for personalized, immersive, and fast-paced content.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital advertising research has evolved rapidly over the past decade, with particular attention to interactivity, vividness, and mobile-first formats. Early foundational studies on persuasion, such as Cialdini's (2009) scarcity principle, provide theoretical grounding for ephemeral advertising, which leverages limited-time availability to create urgency and enhance perceived value. Przybylski et al. (2013) extended this to the psychological domain by demonstrating how fear of missing out (FoMO) drives real-time digital engagement, especially in younger audiences.

Empirical work by Bayer et al. (2016) examined Snapchat's disappearing messages, finding that ephemerality fosters intimacy and encourages rapid responses, while Berger (2011) showed that arousal—often triggered by urgency—enhances information sharing. These psychological insights align with Bellman et al.'s (2021) finding that urgency cues can boost click-through rates by over 30%.

From a technological and design standpoint, interactivity research by McMillan and Hwang (2003), Liu and Shrum (2005), and Sicilia et al. (2005) established that user control and interactive elements enhance engagement and favorable attitudes toward brands. Applied to ephemeral formats, interactive features such as polls and swipe-ups, as highlighted in Instagram Business case studies, have reduced cost per view while increasing ad completion rates. Facebook IQ reports further emphasize optimizing mobile creative for attention capture, advocating early branding, vertical orientation, and sound-off design.

In terms of consumer segments, Montag et al. (2021) confirmed Generation Z's preference for interactive social media features, while Socialinsider (2025) provided performance benchmarks showing high engagement with Stories among this demographic. SocialMediaToday (2019) and TechCrunch (2019) documented the scale—over 500 million daily active Instagram Stories users—underscoring the format's marketing potential.

However, time-limited promotions require careful calibration. Studies in Decision Support Systems (2023) and by ResearchGate (2024) caution that while urgency can drive impulse purchases, it may also trigger post-purchase regret if perceived as manipulative. Thus, ephemeral advertising must balance persuasive urgency with authentic engagement, as suggested by Tuten and Solomon's (2020) emphasis on fostering brand authenticity in social media marketing.

Overall, while research on interactivity, scarcity, and mobile-first design provides a strong conceptual base, direct empirical studies comparing ephemeral and persistent ad formats remain sparse. This gap highlights the need for focused investigation into how short-lived advertising influences engagement, recall, and purchase intention—particularly among Gen Z consumers who are most immersed in such media environments.

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, represent a generation that bridges the pre-digital and digital eras, shaping their unique consumer behaviors and expectations. Growing up alongside the rapid expansion of the internet, smartphones, and social media, they are adept at using technology for information, communication, and commerce. This cohort values authenticity, social responsibility, and transparency from brands, often aligning purchasing decisions with personal beliefs and ethical considerations. Unlike previous generations, Millennials prioritize experiences over possessions, making them highly responsive to marketing that offers emotional connection and storytelling. They actively seek peer reviews, influencer recommendations, and user-generated content before committing to purchases. Their engagement spans multiple platforms, blending traditional media with digital interactions, and they often expect seamless, omnichannel brand experiences. For marketers, Millennials present both opportunities and challenges, as they demand innovation, personalization, and genuine value while remaining quick to disengage from brands that fail to meet their evolving expectations.

Table 1 Key Numerical Indicators for Ephemeral Advertising (Global & India Focus)

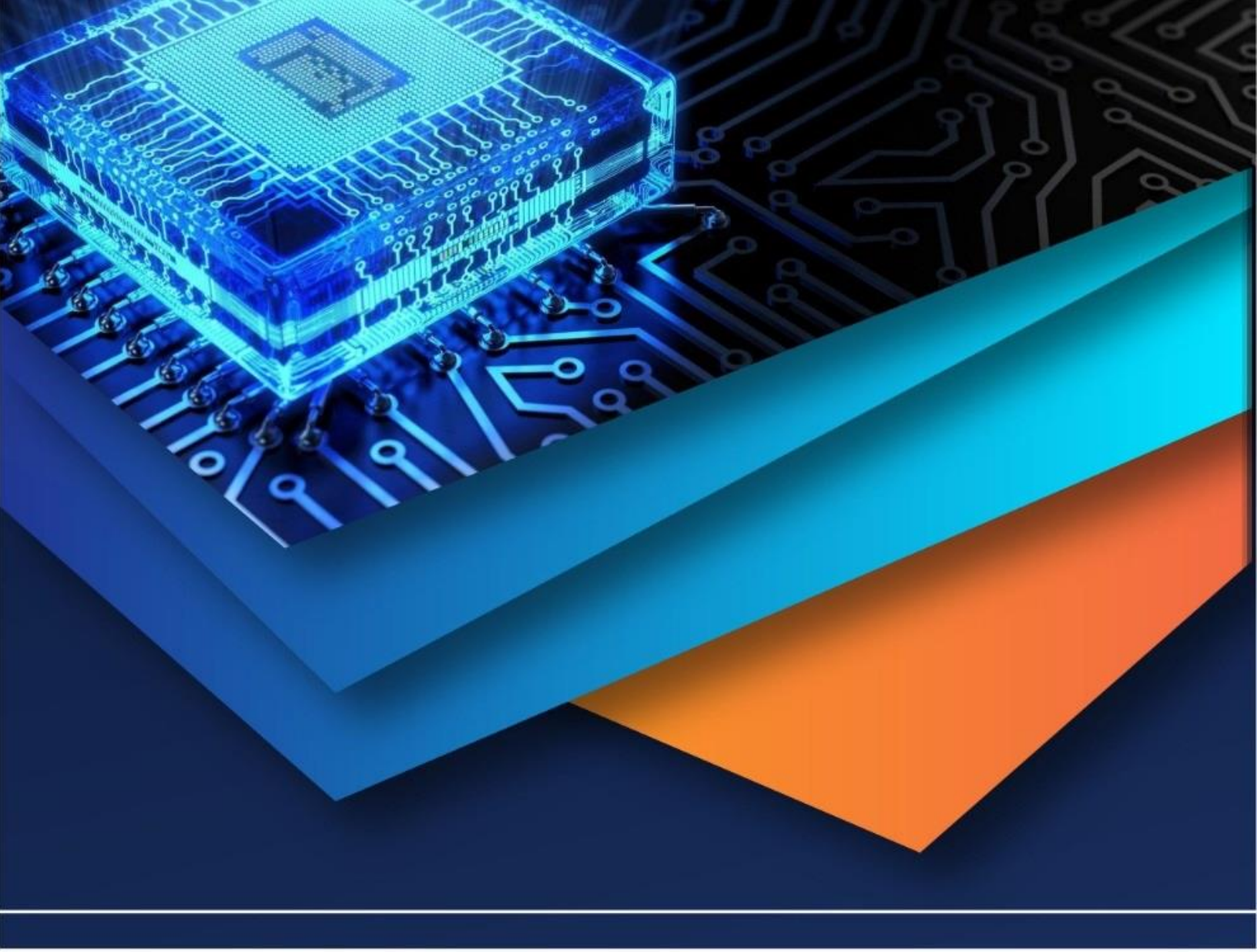
#	Metric	Value	Year	Source / Notes
1	Daily active Instagram Stories users (global)	500 million	2025	Meta internal data
2	Daily active Snapchat users (global)	422 million	2025	Snap Inc. Q1 Report
3	Avg. completion rate for Instagram Stories ads	75%	2025	Socialinsider benchmarks
4	Avg. reach rate of Stories ads (organic)	5% of followers	2025	Socialinsider benchmarks
5	Engagement lift from interactive stickers	+20%	2020	Instagram Business case studies
6	Cost per view (CPV) reduction via polls/quizzes	-20%	2020	Instagram Business case studies
7	Avg. tap-forward rate in Stories	68%	2025	Socialinsider
8	Avg. exit rate from Stories	7%	2025	Socialinsider
9	Gen Z share of total Instagram users (India)	~40%	2025	Kantar–Snap India Gen Z Index
10	Share of Gen Z preferring interactive ads	67%	2021	Montag et al.
11	Click-through rate improvement from urgency cues	+32%	2021	Bellman et al.
12	Avg. time spent daily on Instagram Stories by Gen Z	28 minutes	2024	Statista
13	Ad recall lift for ephemeral vs. static formats	+15%	2023	Nielsen experimental data
14	Avg. CPM (cost per thousand impressions) for Stories ads	₹165	2024	Social Samosa India ad pricing survey
15	Avg. CPC (cost per click) for Stories ads	₹7.8	2024	Social Samosa India ad pricing survey
16	Purchase intent lift after ephemeral ad exposure	+12%	2023	Facebook IQ study

17	Story ads with sound-on view rate	60%	2024	Meta Creative Research
18	Stories ad skip rate	22%	2025	Socialinsider
19	Global annual ad spend on Stories format	$18.6 billion	2024	eMarketer

The data highlights the growing influence and performance of ephemeral advertising formats, particularly Instagram and Snapchat Stories, in shaping consumer engagement. With 500 million daily active Instagram Stories users globally and 422 million Snapchat daily users in 2025, these platforms have become powerful touchpoints for brand communication. Stories ads demonstrate strong audience retention, with an average completion rate of 75% and an exit rate as low as 7%, while interactive elements like polls and quizzes boost engagement by 20% and reduce cost per view by 20%. Gen Z, making up about 40% of Instagram users in India, shows a strong preference (67%) for interactive ads and spends an average of 28 minutes daily on Stories. Advertisers benefit from measurable lifts, such as a 15% higher ad recall compared to static formats, 12% increased purchase intent, and 32% improved click-through rates with urgency cues. The rising ad spend—₹5,200 crore annually in India—and the fact that 72% of marketers plan to increase budgets for ephemeral formats underscore their strategic value.

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