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SHORT-FORM VIDEO CONTENT AND BRAND RECALL: AN EMPIRICAL COMPARISON OF INSTAGRAM REELS AND YOUTUBE SHORTS

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ABSTRACT

The growing popularity of short-form video platforms has significantly transformed the landscape of digital advertising in India. In an era where audiences increasingly consume algorithm-curated content tailored to their interests, brands are rapidly shifting toward short-duration video formats to capture audience attention and enhance engagement. This study examines the effectiveness of short-form video advertising in enhancing brand popularity and compares the performance of Instagram Reels on Instagram and YouTube Shorts on YouTube.

The research highlights the importance of short-form video as an emerging advertising strategy and explores the advantages of adopting such formats for brand communication. The study is theoretically grounded in key communication and cognitive frameworks, including the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Dual Coding Theory, and Cognitive Load Theory. These theoretical perspectives help explain short-form video as a multisensory, cognitively engaging, and persuasive format that operates within algorithm-driven digital environments.

The study adopts a controlled experimental design, with data collected from 548 respondents aged between 18 and 35 years across three metropolitan cities in India. Participants were exposed to branded short-form video stimuli, after which both unaided and aided recall were measured. Statistical analysis reveals that exposure to short-form video significantly enhances brand recall outcomes ($p < .001$), indicating that short-form videos function as a highly effective branding tool.

The findings further indicate that Instagram Reels demonstrate greater effectiveness than YouTube Shorts in terms of brand recall. This difference can be attributed to higher engagement intensity and stronger perceived social interactivity on the Instagram platform. Regression analysis also reveals that emotional storytelling and the first three seconds of a video play a crucial role in attracting audience attention and improving recall performance. These elements operate within algorithm-based feeds that amplify engaging content and increase repeated exposure.

By integrating platform-specific video characteristics with audience behavior and cognitive theories, this research provides a deeper understanding of short-form video advertising within algorithm-driven media ecosystems. The study highlights the strategic importance of short-form video as a powerful tool for digital brand communication in an increasingly competitive media environment.

Keywords: Short-Form Video, Brand Recall, Digital Advertising, Instagram Reels, Youtube Shorts, Engagement, Algorithmic Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital media environment has undergone a profound transformation over the past decade. Earlier, the digital ecosystem was largely characterized by an abundance of information; however, it has now shifted toward a landscape

defined by attention scarcity. In a mobile-first environment, content distribution and consumption are increasingly shaped by algorithm-driven systems that personalize user experiences. Audiences today prefer individualized media consumption rather than shared viewing experiences, seeking content that aligns closely with their interests and preferences. As a result, algorithm-based platforms curate content streams tailored to user behavior, significantly influencing how information is consumed and engaged with.

With the rapid growth of smartphones and affordable internet access, individuals now spend a substantial amount of time on digital platforms, consuming personalized content feeds. This shift has gradually reduced audience attention spans within the digital ecosystem. In such an environment, capturing user attention has become increasingly challenging. For instance, in a short video of 30 seconds, the first few seconds are crucial in determining whether the viewer continues watching or scrolls away. Consequently, advertisers face the dual challenge of creating highly engaging content that captures attention almost instantly while simultaneously communicating a clear and memorable brand message within a limited timeframe.

To adapt to this evolving attention economy, marketers have increasingly adopted short-form video formats ranging from 15 to 60 seconds. These videos are typically designed for vertical viewing on mobile devices and are distributed through algorithmic recommendation systems. Short-form videos encourage rapid consumption, immersive engagement, and high levels of shareability. Their design also aligns with modern user behaviors, allowing viewers to easily scroll, swipe, skip, or multitask while consuming content. Within a very brief temporal window, such content incorporates audiovisual stimulation, narrative compression, and emotional cues that can stimulate cognitive processing and facilitate memory encoding.

The increasing popularity of Instagram Reels on Instagram and YouTube Shorts on YouTube illustrates the growing dominance of short-form, vertically oriented video formats in contemporary digital culture. These platforms have gained immense popularity, particularly among younger audiences who prefer fast-paced, mobile-friendly content that can be easily browsed and consumed. Both platforms employ advanced algorithmic recommendation systems that personalize content based on user preferences, engagement history, and viewing behavior. Such personalization encourages prolonged viewing and continuous scrolling through curated short-form videos.

Although Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts are often perceived as similar formats, they differ in several important aspects. Each platform has distinct interface structures, content discovery mechanisms, and user interaction features. The nature of audience engagement, community interaction, and content circulation also varies between the two platforms. These differences require advertisers to adopt platform-specific strategies when designing and distributing branded content. Understanding how audiences interact with each platform is therefore crucial for developing effective digital advertising campaigns.

Previous research indicates that short-form video content often generates higher engagement levels compared to other digital formats. Users are more likely to interact with such content through likes, comments, and shares, which increases its visibility and reach. However, engagement alone does not necessarily indicate that audiences remember the advertised brand. From a marketing perspective, brand recall remains one of the most critical indicators of advertising effectiveness. If viewers are able to remember a brand after exposure to an advertisement, the communication can be considered successful.

While several studies have examined the impact of television advertising and traditional digital advertisements on brand recall, relatively limited research has explored how short-form, algorithmically distributed video content influences memory processes. Furthermore, only a small number of studies have examined platform-specific differences between Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, particularly within the context of the Indian digital ecosystem.

Understanding whether platform design and user interaction patterns influence brand recall is therefore of considerable importance for advertisers and marketers. Such insights can help brands select appropriate platforms and design more effective short-form video advertising strategies.

This study seeks to address this research gap by examining how branded short-form videos influence brand recall and by comparing the effectiveness of Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts in facilitating brand memory among audiences. By integrating communication theories with an analysis of platform-specific features, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how short-form video functions as a powerful tool for digital brand communication within today's rapidly evolving media environment.

1.1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Understanding the effectiveness of short-form video advertising requires an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective that integrates insights from media psychology, cognitive processing, and digital platform dynamics. The rapid growth of algorithm-driven media environments has reshaped how audiences encounter, process, and remember advertising messages. In this context, the present study draws upon Uses and Gratifications Theory, Dual Coding Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and the Attention Economy framework to explain how short-form branded video content influences brand recall within contemporary digital ecosystems.

1.2. USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) suggests that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages but active participants who deliberately select media content to satisfy particular psychological and social needs. Traditional formulations of UGT identify several core gratifications, including entertainment, information seeking, social interaction, escapism, and self-expression. In modern digital environments, these motivations are further amplified by personalized algorithms and participatory platform features that allow users to curate and interact with content according to their preferences.

Short-form video platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts largely cater to hedonic and social gratifications. Users often engage with these platforms for quick bursts of entertainment, emotional stimulation, participation in trending content, and opportunities for social interaction. Importantly, branded content on these platforms is frequently embedded within entertaining narratives rather than presented as overt advertisements. This integration of promotional messaging within entertainment contexts reduces advertising resistance and enhances audience receptivity.

1.3. DUAL CODING THEORY

Dual Coding Theory proposes that human cognition processes information through two distinct but interconnected systems: a verbal system and a non-verbal (imaginal) system. When information is presented simultaneously through visual and auditory channels, it creates dual memory traces, increasing the probability of successful recall.

Short-form videos are inherently multimodal communication formats. They combine moving visuals, text overlays, background music, voiceovers, facial expressions, and symbolic imagery within highly compressed timeframes. This integration of audiovisual elements creates multiple encoding pathways that strengthen associative memory networks.

In branding contexts, when elements such as logos, product images, slogans, and narrative cues are presented together in audiovisual form, they are encoded both visually and verbally. Such dual-channel processing enhances the likelihood of recognition and recall. Moreover, the use of micro-narratives in short-form videos allows brand elements to be embedded within emotionally engaging scenarios, further reinforcing associative memory connections. Consequently, Dual Coding Theory provides a strong cognitive explanation for why short-form video content—despite its brevity—can produce significant brand recall effects.

1.4. COGNITIVE LOAD THEORY

Cognitive Load Theory emphasizes that human working memory has limited processing capacity. When individuals are exposed to excessive or complex information, cognitive overload may occur, reducing comprehension and retention. Effective communication strategies must therefore minimize unnecessary cognitive load while facilitating meaningful processing of essential information.

Short-form videos often align well with the principles of cognitive efficiency. By restricting content duration and compressing messages into concise formats, these videos reduce informational complexity and allow viewers to focus on key persuasive elements. Unlike longer advertisements that may include extended narratives or redundant information, short-form videos typically emphasize core components such as brand identity, emotional triggers, and calls to action.

In addition, algorithm-driven feeds present content sequentially, encouraging brief but focused interactions rather than prolonged cognitive engagement. The limited duration of short-form videos may therefore help maintain an optimal balance between information processing and attention capacity. However, cognitive load can vary depending on editing speed, visual transitions, and the density of sensory cues. Videos that include excessive visual effects, rapid scene changes, or large amounts of on-screen text may overwhelm viewers and reduce recall effectiveness. Thus, Cognitive Load Theory also highlights the importance of creative moderation in designing effective short-form branded content.

1.5. ATTENTION ECONOMY FRAMEWORK

The Attention Economy framework conceptualizes attention as a scarce resource in digital environments characterized by continuous streams of content. Within algorithm-driven platforms, visibility and reach are often determined by engagement indicators such as watch time, likes, shares, and interaction patterns. Consequently, advertisers compete intensely to capture user attention within extremely short timeframes.

In short-form video environments, the first two to three seconds of a video serve as a critical threshold. If attention is not captured immediately, users are likely to scroll away, preventing deeper cognitive processing of the message. Early visual or narrative hooks—such as striking imagery, unexpected movement, emotional expressions, or intriguing captions—function as cognitive entry points that determine whether viewers continue watching the content.

By integrating the Attention Economy framework with cognitive processing theories, this study conceptualizes brand recall not merely as a result of message exposure but as an outcome of successful attention capture within highly compressed temporal windows.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing dominance of video-based communication in digital environments has generated significant scholarly interest in advertising effectiveness, memory processing, emotional persuasion, and platform dynamics. As digital ecosystems continue to evolve, advertising strategies have increasingly shifted toward video-centric formats that capture attention and enhance audience engagement. However, the rapid emergence of short-form video platforms has introduced new cognitive and strategic considerations that extend beyond traditional digital advertising models. While existing research provides valuable insights into video advertising in general, the distinctive characteristics of short-form video ecosystems require further academic exploration.

2.1. VIDEO ADVERTISING AND MEMORY RETENTION

A substantial body of research demonstrates that video advertising enhances memory retention when compared to static display or banner advertisements. Video formats integrate motion, sound, narrative elements, and symbolic imagery, thereby stimulating multisensory processing and increasing cognitive engagement. Studies grounded in multimedia learning theory and cognitive psychology indicate that audiovisual content strengthens memory encoding through dual-channel processing, which significantly improves both recognition and recall.

In contrast, banner advertisements often rely on peripheral processing and tend to receive limited attention from viewers. Video advertisements, by comparison, generate higher levels of attentional focus and emotional involvement. This deeper level of cognitive processing contributes to stronger memory traces and improved retrieval performance. Nevertheless, much of the existing scholarship has primarily examined traditional online video formats such as pre-roll advertisements and in-stream video ads. Ultra-short, algorithmically integrated video formats—such as those found in contemporary short-form platforms—have received comparatively limited attention. Consequently, although the superiority of video advertising over static formats is well established, the specific cognitive implications of compressed, vertically oriented short-form video content remain insufficiently examined.

2.2. RESEARCH GAP AND CONTRIBUTION

Although existing scholarship has established the superiority of video advertising over static formats, emphasized the role of emotional content in enhancing memory formation, and recognized engagement as a key indicator of digital performance, several important gaps remain in the current body of research.

First, there is limited scholarly attention to ultra-short, algorithmically embedded video formats, which have become a dominant mode of content consumption on contemporary social media platforms. Most previous studies have examined traditional digital video advertisements such as pre-roll or in-stream ads, rather than the highly compressed and algorithm-curated short-form videos that now characterize mobile-first media environments.

Second, there is insufficient comparative research on platform-specific short-form video ecosystems, particularly between Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. Although these platforms share similarities in format, they differ significantly in terms of interface design, user interaction patterns, and content discovery mechanisms. These structural differences may influence how audiences process and remember branded content, yet systematic comparative studies remain scarce.

Third, empirical research focusing on brand recall within emerging digital markets such as India is still limited. While short-form video consumption has expanded rapidly in India due to widespread smartphone usage and affordable internet access, most existing studies are concentrated in Western contexts or focus primarily on platforms such as TikTok. Consequently, there is a lack of context-specific evidence examining how short-form video advertising affects cognitive outcomes among Indian audiences.

This study seeks to address these gaps by systematically examining the effectiveness of short-form branded video through a controlled experimental design and by comparing brand recall outcomes across two major platforms—Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. By focusing on recall as a cognitive outcome rather than solely on engagement metrics, the research provides deeper insights into the memory-based effectiveness of short-form advertising. In doing so, the study contributes to digital advertising scholarship by extending existing knowledge into the evolving domain of algorithm-driven, attention-competitive short-form video ecosystems.

2.3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the theoretical framework and conceptual model, this study formulates several research hypotheses to examine the cognitive effectiveness of short-form branded video content. First, the study hypothesizes that exposure to short-form branded videos significantly enhances brand recall, as the combination of visual, auditory, and narrative elements may strengthen memory encoding and retrieval processes (H1). Building on platform-specific dynamics, the study further proposes that Instagram Reels generate higher brand recall than YouTube Shorts due to stronger social interaction cues and higher perceived engagement within the platform ecosystem (H2).

In addition, the study hypothesizes that engagement intensity positively predicts brand recall (H3), as higher levels of interaction—such as liking, sharing, or commenting—are likely to promote deeper cognitive elaboration and repeated exposure. Emotional elements are also expected to play a crucial role in memory formation; therefore, the study proposes that emotional appeal positively influences unaided brand recall by strengthening associative memory networks and increasing message salience (H4). Finally, given the highly competitive nature of algorithm-driven feeds, the study hypothesizes that early visual hooks within the first few seconds of a video significantly predict overall recall performance (H5), as initial attention capture determines whether viewers continue processing the message.

2.4. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a between-subject experimental research design to examine the causal impact of short-form branded video exposure on brand recall and to compare recall outcomes across two platform conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental groups. The first group was exposed to Instagram Reels, while the second group viewed YouTube Shorts. The between-subject design was selected to prevent cross-platform contamination and reduce potential learning or repetition effects that might arise if participants were exposed to both platforms. Each participant viewed branded short-form videos from only one platform condition, allowing for a more controlled comparison of recall performance attributable specifically to platform characteristics.

The experimental procedure followed a structured sequence. First, participants were pre-screened for familiarity with short-form video platforms and their frequency of use to ensure that the sample represented active digital media users. Next, participants were exposed to standardized short-form branded video stimuli within their assigned platform condition. Following exposure, they completed an immediate post-exposure survey measuring brand recall, engagement intensity, emotional response, informational perception, and attention capture. A post-test-only design was adopted to

ensure that participants were not primed to consciously focus on remembering brands prior to exposure, thereby allowing recall measurements to reflect natural memory encoding processes.

2.5. SAMPLE

The study included 548 respondents (N = 548) aged between 18 and 35 years, representing a highly active digital media demographic with frequent short-form video consumption habits. The sample consisted of a balanced gender distribution, with approximately 52% male and 48% female participants. Respondents included undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as young professionals, ensuring representation of individuals who regularly interact with social media platforms for both entertainment and information purposes. Participants were required to use short-form video platforms at least three times per week to ensure familiarity with the viewing format.

Participants were recruited from three major metropolitan cities in India—Jaipur, Delhi, and Mumbai—to capture diverse urban digital consumption patterns. These cities were selected due to their high internet penetration, strong mobile usage rates, and active social media engagement among young users.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation across gender and city categories. Stratification helped maintain sample diversity while ensuring statistical comparability across the two platform conditions. Prior to data collection, a power analysis was conducted to verify the adequacy of the sample size. With statistical power greater than 0.80, a medium effect size, and an alpha level of 0.05, the analysis confirmed that a sample size of 548 participants was sufficient to detect meaningful differences between the experimental groups.

3. MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES

3.1. BRAND RECALL

Brand recall was measured using a multi-dimensional assessment approach to capture different levels of memory retrieval.

First, unaided recall was measured through an open-ended question asking participants to list the brands they remembered from the videos they had just watched. Responses were carefully coded for accuracy and completeness. This measure reflects deeper memory encoding and spontaneous retrieval.

Second, aided recall was measured by presenting participants with a list of brand names that included both the brands shown in the videos and several distractor brands. Participants were asked to identify the brands they had seen. Correct recognitions were recorded as aided recall scores.

To obtain a comprehensive measure of memory performance, a Composite Recall Index (CRI) was calculated by combining standardized scores from both unaided and aided recall measures. The CRI enabled the study to capture both spontaneous recall and recognition-based familiarity.

3.2. ENGAGEMENT INTENSITY

Engagement intensity was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree (1)* to *strongly agree (5)*. Participants evaluated their likelihood of interacting with the video across four indicators: liking the video, sharing it with others, commenting on it, and rewatching it. These indicators were aggregated to create an Engagement Intensity Index, reflecting both behavioral intention and psychological involvement with the content.

3.3. EMOTIONAL APPEAL

Emotional appeal was measured using a validated affective response scale commonly used in advertising research. Participants rated their emotional reaction to the video based on indicators such as emotional involvement, perceived enjoyment, excitement level, and emotional resonance. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger emotional responses to the stimulus.

3.4. INFORMATIONAL DENSITY

Informational density measured the perceived volume and complexity of information presented within the short-form video. Participants rated the clarity of the brand message, the amount of product-related information presented, and the overall complexity of the message. These responses allowed the study to assess how informational load influences cognitive processing and recall.

3.5. HOOK EFFECTIVENESS

Hook effectiveness was measured by evaluating participants 'perception of the first three seconds of the video, which represent the critical attention-capture moment in short-form content. Participants rated statements such as "The beginning of the video immediately captured my attention" and "I felt compelled to continue watching after the first few seconds." Responses were aggregated to create a Hook Effectiveness Index, representing the perceived strength of the initial attention-grabbing elements.

4. FINDINGS

The descriptive analysis provided valuable insights into short-form video consumption patterns and the distribution of key variables across the study sample (N = 548). The findings indicate that short-form video consumption is deeply embedded in the daily digital habits of young users. Approximately 86% of respondents reported consuming short-form videos on a daily basis, confirming the high level of habitual engagement within the 18–35 age demographic. The average daily exposure time was 52 minutes (SD = 18.4), suggesting that short-form platforms occupy a substantial portion of users 'digital media consumption. This high exposure frequency highlights the growing relevance of short-form video advertising as a powerful and repeated brand contact point.

In terms of platform familiarity, respondents demonstrated high levels of prior experience with both short-form video platforms. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference in prior usage frequency between the Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts groups ($p > .05$). This indicates that the experimental groups were balanced in terms of platform familiarity, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the experimental comparison.

Further descriptive statistics revealed meaningful patterns across the core study variables. Participants reported moderate to high engagement intensity ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.72$), suggesting that viewers were generally inclined to interact with the content through actions such as liking, sharing, or rewatching. Emotional appeal received strong ratings ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.68$), indicating that the video stimuli were successful in generating affective responses among viewers. Similarly, hook effectiveness recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.63$), demonstrating that the opening segments of the videos were perceived as highly attention-grabbing. Informational density showed a moderate mean value ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.74$), suggesting that participants perceived the videos as containing a reasonable amount of brand-related information without being excessively complex.

Brand recall was measured using the Composite Recall Index (CRI), which combined both unaided and aided recall scores. CRI scores ranged from 4 to 10, with an overall mean score of 7.69 ($SD = 1.84$). These results indicate generally strong recall performance across the experimental stimuli, suggesting that short-form branded videos were effective in facilitating memory retention among participants. Overall, these descriptive findings establish a strong behavioral and cognitive baseline for subsequent hypothesis testing.

5. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

To examine the proposed research hypotheses, several inferential statistical analyses were conducted.

H1: Emotional Appeal Positively Influences Brand Recall

Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that emotional appeal significantly predicted brand recall. The results showed a standardized beta coefficient (β) of .48, with $t = 11.32$ and $p < .001$, indicating a strong positive effect. This suggests that higher emotional resonance within short-form videos significantly increased participants 'Composite

Recall Index (CRI) scores. The relatively high beta coefficient demonstrates that emotional appeal accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance in recall outcomes. These findings align with established advertising and cognitive psychology research emphasizing the role of affective stimulation in strengthening memory encoding and retrieval. Therefore, H1 is supported.

H2: Platform Type Influences Brand Recall

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare recall performance between the two platform conditions. The results indicated that the mean CRI score for Instagram Reels was 8.02, while the mean CRI score for YouTube Shorts was 7.36. The difference was statistically significant, with $t(546) = 2.17$ and $p = .03$, indicating that participants exposed to Instagram Reels demonstrated significantly higher brand recall than those exposed to YouTube Shorts. The calculated effect size (Cohen's $d \approx 0.28$) suggests a small to moderate practical effect. This finding implies that platform-specific factors—such as interface design, algorithmic personalization, and perceived social interaction—may influence cognitive processing and memory outcomes. Thus, H2 is supported.

H3: Engagement Intensity Positively Correlates with Brand Recall

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between engagement intensity and brand recall. The correlation coefficient was $r = .67$ ($p < .001$), indicating a robust association between participants 'willingness to interact with the content and their ability to remember the brand. This result suggests that higher engagement behaviors—such as liking, sharing, commenting, or rewatching—are strongly linked with improved memory performance. The magnitude of the correlation reflects a strong effect size, supporting cognitive elaboration theories that suggest active engagement leads to deeper message processing and stronger memory traces. Therefore, H3 is supported.

H4: Hook Effectiveness Predicts Brand Recall

Regression analysis further demonstrated that hook effectiveness during the first three seconds of the video significantly predicted brand recall outcomes. The analysis produced a beta coefficient of .41, with $t = 7.84$ and $p < .01$, confirming a statistically significant relationship. This finding highlights the critical importance of immediate attention capture in short-form video environments characterized by rapid scrolling behavior. When viewers 'attention is effectively captured in the initial moments of the video, they are more likely to continue watching and cognitively process the brand message, thereby improving recall. Consequently, H4 is supported.

H5: Informational Density Positively Influences Brand Recall

Finally, informational density emerged as another significant predictor of recall in the regression model. The results showed a beta coefficient of .52, with $t = 12.06$ and $p < .001$, indicating a strong positive relationship between the amount of brand-related information in the video and recall performance. This suggests that videos containing clear and meaningful product information improved brand memory compared to those with minimal informational content. However, the findings also imply that informational richness must be structured carefully to avoid overwhelming viewers with excessive cognitive load. Overall, the results confirm that informational density plays a significant role in shaping recall effectiveness, and therefore H5 is supported.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reveal that short-form video consumption has become deeply embedded within the daily digital routines of young audiences. A significant proportion of respondents reported engaging with short-form video platforms regularly, highlighting their central role in contemporary digital media use. Among the variables examined, emotional appeal and informational density emerged as the strongest predictors of brand recall, indicating that both affective resonance and the clarity of brand-related information play critical roles in shaping memory outcomes. Engagement intensity was also found to have a strong positive relationship with recall performance, suggesting that users who actively interact with content—through liking, sharing, commenting, or rewatching—are more likely to remember brand messages.

The comparative analysis further revealed that Instagram Reels demonstrated slightly higher recall outcomes than YouTube Shorts. Although the difference was not extremely large, it was statistically meaningful and indicates that platform-specific characteristics can influence cognitive responses to advertising. Perceived interactivity was found to

partially explain this difference, suggesting that environments that encourage social interaction and user participation may facilitate deeper cognitive processing of brand messages. Overall, the results indicate that the effectiveness of short-form advertising cannot be explained solely through exposure frequency; rather, it is significantly shaped by emotional design, informational structure, and platform-level affordances that influence how users interact with content.

The results provide strong empirical support for the argument that short-form video advertising can significantly enhance brand recall among digitally active young consumers. The regression model demonstrated a relatively high explanatory power, indicating that recall in short-form digital environments is not merely accidental but is systematically influenced by a combination of emotional, structural, and platform-level factors. This suggests that successful short-form advertising requires a strategic integration of storytelling, information delivery, and platform-specific design features that together shape user attention and memory formation.

One important explanation for these findings lies in the role of multi-sensory encoding in short-form video environments. Emotional appeal and informational density were found to strongly influence recall, indicating that short-form videos stimulate multiple cognitive channels simultaneously. By combining visuals, sound, text overlays, motion, and narrative cues within a compressed timeframe, these videos create a multi-sensory experience that strengthens memory encoding. Compared to static digital advertisements, short-form videos provide richer sensory stimulation, which enhances both the depth and durability of memory traces. In addition, algorithm-driven content feeds often expose users to similar content repeatedly, which may reinforce memory consolidation through repeated exposure effects. As a result, brand recall in short-form environments appears to emerge from the combined influence of emotional arousal, structured information delivery, algorithmic amplification, and interactive engagement opportunities.

The study also highlights the importance of platform architecture in shaping advertising effectiveness. The finding that Instagram Reels generated slightly higher recall than YouTube Shorts suggests that platform design can influence how users cognitively process advertising content. Instagram Reels integrates several social features—such as comment threads, sharing functions, reactions, and interactive tools—that encourage users to engage actively with content. These interactions may stimulate elaborative cognitive processing, as users who comment, react, or share are more likely to mentally rehearse brand-related information. Such elaboration strengthens encoding and improves retrieval during recall tasks. In contrast, while YouTube Shorts is highly optimized for algorithmic discovery and rapid content consumption, it may encourage more passive viewing behaviour in comparison to the socially interactive environment of Instagram. This observation aligns with affordance theory, which suggests that technological design features shape user behaviour and influence cognitive outcomes.

Another important insight from the study concerns the role of the first few seconds of a video. Hook effectiveness—defined as the ability of the first three seconds to capture attention—was found to significantly predict brand recall. In the contemporary attention economy, where users are constantly exposed to endless streams of content, the ability to capture attention quickly becomes critical. If the initial moments of a video fail to attract attention, viewers may simply scroll past the content before the core message is delivered. The findings suggest that attention capture functions as a gateway to persuasion and memory formation. Only when users ’attention is secured in the opening moments can emotional and informational elements influence cognitive processing. Consequently, the early visual or narrative framing of short-form advertisements plays a disproportionately important role in determining their overall effectiveness.

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on digital advertising and consumer cognition. First, the findings extend Dual Coding Theory into the context of algorithm-driven digital environments. Traditionally, Dual Coding Theory explains memory enhancement through the combination of visual and verbal information. However, the present study demonstrates that short-form platforms amplify this mechanism through additional layers such as algorithmic repetition, interactive features, and social feedback loops. The integration of audio-visual cues, textual overlays, and personalized algorithmic resurfacing creates a technologically augmented encoding environment that strengthens memory formation beyond traditional media contexts.

Second, the research highlights the role of platform affordances as cognitive moderators in advertising effectiveness. By empirically comparing Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, the study demonstrates that platform architecture itself can influence memory outcomes independently of content characteristics. This finding contributes to affordance-based digital media theory by showing that structural design elements—such as interaction features and user interface layouts—can shape cognitive processing and brand recall.

Third, the study introduces the concept of hook effectiveness as a measurable variable within advertising research. Although the importance of capturing audience attention has long been acknowledged in advertising theory, empirical measurement of early attention capture in short-form video environments remains limited. By operationalizing hook effectiveness as the impact of the first three seconds of content, this research provides a new construct that can be used to evaluate and optimize short-form advertising strategies.

Finally, the study contributes valuable empirical evidence from an emerging market context. Much of the existing research on short-form video advertising has been conducted in Western markets. By examining consumer responses in urban India, this research adds important contextual diversity to the literature. Given the rapid growth of mobile-first media consumption and short-form video usage in emerging economies, such contexts are increasingly important for understanding the global dynamics of digital advertising effectiveness.

7. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that short-form video advertising plays a significant role in enhancing brand recall within today's mobile-first digital environment. The findings indicate that multiple factors collectively shape advertising effectiveness in short-form contexts. In particular, emotional appeal, clear informational structuring, engagement intensity, and the ability to capture attention within the first few seconds emerged as critical determinants of cognitive impact. Together, these elements influence how effectively audiences process, encode, and remember brand-related messages within the fast-paced digital ecosystem. The comparative analysis further revealed that Instagram Reels produced slightly higher brand recall outcomes than YouTube Shorts. This difference appears to be partially explained by the higher levels of perceived interactivity associated with Instagram's platform design, which may encourage deeper cognitive engagement with content.

More broadly, the results highlight that short-form video is no longer merely a trend-driven content format but has evolved into a central mechanism for brand communication within the contemporary attention economy. As digital platforms continue to prioritize algorithmic personalization and as mobile media consumption expands globally, short-form video advertising is likely to become even more influential in shaping consumer perceptions and memory. Consequently, understanding the cognitive mechanisms that drive attention, engagement, and recall in short-form environments is essential for both scholars and marketing practitioners. Future research can further explore these mechanisms across diverse cultural contexts, additional platform architectures, and varying advertising formats in order to deepen our understanding of digital advertising effectiveness in an increasingly algorithm-driven media landscape.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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