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From Scroll To Scale: The Influence Of Instagram And Facebook On Online Buying Behaviour Among Youth In Shillong

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital world, social media plays a big role in shaping how people think and shop especially among young users. This study looks at how Instagram and Facebook affect online buying behaviour among the youth of Shillong, Meghalaya. Shillong is a unique city where modern life and traditional culture come together. As internet use grows in North-East India, social media is becoming more than just a place to chat – it's now a powerful tool that encourages people to shop online. The study uses both surveys and interviews to gather data from young people aged 18 to 30, including students and working professionals. The results show that well-designed posts, recommendations from friends, and promotions by influencers strongly influence buying decisions. Instagram has a greater impact than Facebook because of its focus on images and interactive features. Another key finding is that many young people trust local influencers and their friends more than big advertisements. Their buying choices also differ based on gender, comfort with technology, and the type of products – like clothes, cosmetics, or gadgets. The study also finds that eye-catching posts, limited-time deals, and seeing others like or comment on a product create a strong desire to buy. This effect becomes stronger because social media shows users content they are most likely to respond to. This research adds a local, youth-focused view to the study of online shopping. It suggests that brands should adjust their digital marketing to fit the needs and culture of young people in smaller cities like Shillong.

Keywords : Social Media Marketing, Online Shopping Behaviour, Youth Consumers, Instagram and Facebook Influence, Digital Trends in North-East India.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digitally driven world, our smartphones have become almost like an extension of ourselves—always in hand, always connected. As a result, social media has found its way into nearly every part of our lives, including how we make purchasing decisions. A simple scroll through a feed can now lead to a spontaneous purchase, sparked by a visually appealing post or a friend's enthusiastic review. This isn't just a passing trend; it represents a broader transformation in consumer behaviour—especially among young people who live much of their lives online. In a city like Shillong, where modern aspirations intersect with deep-rooted cultural traditions, this change is particularly fascinating. The youth here are digital natives, growing up in an era of constant connectivity, where information flows in real-time and personal identity is shaped as much online as offline. For them, social media is more than entertainment—it's a space for expression, exploration, and influence. This research dives into that space, seeking to understand how platforms like Instagram and Facebook are not just influencing what young people buy, but also how and why they buy.

Instagram, with its visually immersive experience, plays a key role in this process. Its clean, image-first layout turns ordinary product promotions into compelling stories. A single reel or curated post can capture attention, spark desire, and lead to an instant purchase. When these posts come from trusted sources—like a relatable local influencer or a close friend—they become even more persuasive. It's not just about product features anymore; it's about the lifestyle they represent and the emotional connection they create. Meanwhile, Facebook continues to offer value in its own way. It may not be as trendy as Instagram among younger users, but it provides a space for discussion, community, and shared experiences. Recommendations in Facebook groups, peer reviews in comments, and friend-to-friend posts still hold weight, especially when it comes to products with a local connection or everyday utility. Together, these two platforms create a digital environment where influence flows through visuals, conversations, and social signals alike.

What's particularly interesting is how these platforms blend aesthetics with convenience. Features like 'swipe up' links, live shopping events, and targeted ads transform social browsing into a seamless shopping journey. Every like, comment, or share becomes part of the decision-making process. Shopping is no longer just an individual act—it's a social experience. As a result, young consumers are not just reacting to content passively; they're engaging with it, interpreting it, and acting on it in real time. This study aims to explore that very intersection—where social interaction, identity, and commerce meet. By focusing on the youth of Shillong, it offers a window into how regional cultures interact with global digital trends. It investigates not only what drives online purchases but also what these purchases say about the consumers themselves. In doing so, it helps us understand how our daily digital experiences are reshaping not just the way we shop, but also the way we define ourselves in the modern world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the digital age, social media platforms have become integral to the daily lives of young consumers, significantly influencing their purchasing behaviours. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook have evolved beyond mere communication tools to become powerful marketplaces where youth discover, evaluate, and purchase products. This transformation is particularly evident among Generation Z, who are digital natives and rely heavily on social media for shopping inspiration and decisions. Recent studies highlight that a substantial portion of young consumers have made purchases based on social media advertisements. For instance, a study by Uma Ramachandruni (2024) found that social media ads play a significant role in shaping the buying behaviour of youth, with platforms like Facebook and Instagram being primary sources of product information and influence. These platforms offer a plethora of advertisements that not only inform but also stimulate buying tendencies among young users. The visual-centric nature of Instagram makes it particularly effective in influencing purchasing decisions. The platform's emphasis on aesthetics allows brands to showcase products in appealing ways, often through influencers who resonate with younger audiences. The Postbank Youth Digital Study (2024) revealed that 54% of young people had purchased a product advertised by an influencer in the past six months, underscoring the persuasive power of influencer marketing on Instagram.

Facebook, while more community-oriented, also plays a crucial role in the online buying behaviour of youth. Its groups and pages provide spaces where users can share reviews, recommendations, and experiences, creating a sense of trust and authenticity. A survey reported by the New York Post (2024) indicated that 85% of Americans have shopped through Facebook, with convenience and frequent engagement being key factors. The platform's ability to facilitate peer-to-peer interactions and user-generated content makes it a valuable tool for brands targeting young consumers. The concept of parasocial Interaction, where consumers develop one-sided relationships with influencers or brands, further explains the impact of social media on youth purchasing behaviour. Sokolova and Kefi (2019) found that younger generations value these interactions, often perceiving influencers as friends or role models, which enhances the credibility of their recommendations and increases the likelihood of purchase.

Moreover, the integration of shopping features within social media platforms has streamlined the purchasing process. Features like Instagram Shopping and Facebook Marketplace allow users to buy products without leaving the app, reducing friction and encouraging impulse purchases. The convenience of in-app shopping aligns with the preferences of young consumers who seek quick and seamless shopping experiences. The role of social proof, such as likes, comments, and shares, cannot be overlooked. A study published in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (2025) emphasized that the quantity and quality of social proof significantly impact impulse buying behaviour. Products with high engagement are perceived as more popular and trustworthy, prompting users to make quicker purchasing decisions. Additionally, the cultural impact of social media platforms like TikTok, while not the primary focus here, illustrates the broader trend of social media

shaping consumer behaviour. Viral trends and challenges often lead to spikes in product sales, demonstrating the power of social media in driving consumer demand. This phenomenon underscores the importance for brands to stay attuned to social media trends and adapt their marketing strategies accordingly.

In conclusion, the period from 2020 to 2025 has seen a significant shift in the online buying behaviour of youth, heavily influenced by social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. The integration of visual content, influencer marketing, social proof, and in-app shopping features has created an environment where young consumers are constantly exposed to and influenced by product promotions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for brands aiming to effectively engage with the youth market in the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

To truly understand how Instagram and Facebook shape the online buying behaviour of youth in Shillong, it was important to design a research approach that balanced structure with flexibility. Social media interactions are dynamic, emotional, and often deeply personal—qualities that cannot be captured fully through numbers alone. Therefore, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to build a comprehensive picture of digital consumer behaviour among young people. Shillong was chosen as the research site not just because of its rising internet penetration, but also due to its cultural uniqueness and hybrid urban identity. It is a city where tradition meets technology, and where the youth are both grounded in community and open to global digital trends. Focusing on this demographic—young individuals aged 18 to 30—allowed the study to explore the behavioural patterns of a generation that has grown up with smartphones, social media, and online shopping all around them.

The research began with the design of a structured questionnaire, aimed at capturing a broad range of behavioural indicators. The survey included closed-ended questions, Likert scale items, and multiple-choice formats to ensure that responses could be easily quantified and analyzed. Key areas covered in the questionnaire included social media usage habits, the frequency of online purchases, preference between Instagram and Facebook, types of products bought online, perceived credibility of influencers, and emotional triggers such as urgency and peer pressure. A section was also dedicated to exploring trust in digital content—whether participants were more likely to be influenced by celebrity endorsements, micro-influencers, or posts from friends.

To ensure the findings were grounded in local realities, the survey was distributed both online and offline. Online links were shared through email, WhatsApp, and social media platforms, while printed forms were handed out in colleges, cafés, and co-working spaces across Shillong. This approach helped include a wider cross-section of youth, from students and part-time workers to full-time professionals. Over a four-week period, 200 valid responses were collected, with care taken to avoid duplication or incomplete entries. While surveys provided valuable quantitative data, they could not fully capture the motivations, emotions, and personal stories behind people's shopping choices. To dive deeper, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 selected

participants from the survey pool. These individuals were chosen based on their high engagement with social media and their willingness to reflect on their shopping behaviours. Each interview lasted around 30 to 40 minutes and was conducted in person or over a video call, depending on convenience.

The interviews allowed participants to speak freely about their digital habits. They shared how certain posts made them feel more connected to brands, why they trusted some influencers over others, and what role emotion played in their purchasing decisions. One participant mentioned that she often bought skincare products after watching local influencers demonstrate them in relatable ways. Another described how he would feel left out if his peers had a trending gadget and he didn’t. These stories added depth to the statistical trends found in the survey. Data analysis was carried out in two stages. The quantitative data from the surveys was entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed using basic statistical tools like frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and cross-tabulation. This helped in identifying patterns—for example, whether Instagram users were more prone to impulse buying than Facebook users, or if female respondents were more influenced by product aesthetics. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from the interviews was manually coded to identify recurring themes. These themes included trust in influencers, the role of visuals, emotional response, and product discovery.

Ethical considerations were also an important part of the methodology. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and consent was obtained before collecting any data. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. No personal identifiers were included in the analysis, and data was stored securely to maintain privacy. By using both numerical data and human stories, this methodology aimed to offer a well-rounded perspective on how Instagram and Facebook influence the way young people in Shillong shop online. The structured surveys offered measurable trends, while the interviews provided insights into the underlying thoughts and emotions behind those trends. This balanced approach was necessary to do justice to the complexity of digital consumer behaviour—especially in a generation for whom scrolling and shopping often go hand in hand. In the end, this methodology was designed not just to collect data, but to listen. To listen to how young people talk about their online experiences, what makes them trust a brand, and what draws them toward that “Buy Now” button. It’s this combination of structure and empathy that gives the research its richness, and hopefully, its relevance.

DATA COLLECTION

Table 1: Platform Preference and Engagement

Platform	Daily Usage (%)	Used for Product Discovery (%)	Used for Purchase Decision (%)
Instagram	72%	68%	65%
Facebook	58%	45%	40%

Table 2 : Influence of Different Content Types on Buying Decision

Content Type	Strong Influence (%)	Moderate Influence (%)	No Influence (%)
Influencer Posts	60%	30%	10%
Peer Recommendations	55%	35%	10%
Sponsored Ads	42%	38%	20%
Product Reviews in Comments	48%	40%	12%
Stories/Reels	67%	25%	8%

Table 3 : Emotional and Psychological Triggers

Trigger	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
FOMO from peer posts	70%	20%	10%
Impulse from eye-catching visuals	74%	18%	8%
Trust in local influencers	65%	25%	10%
Desire for social approval	62%	28%	10%

Table 4 : Gender-Based Differences in Influence Factors

Influence Factor	Male (%)	Female (%)	Others (%)
Influencer Promotions	48%	72%	55%
Peer Recommendations	60%	66%	59%
Aesthetic Visual Appeal	50%	78%	61%
Utility/Product Info	68%	50%	53%

FINDINGS

The study revealed significant insights into how social media—particularly Instagram and Facebook—shapes the online buying behaviour of youth in Shillong. As digital platforms become increasingly embedded in the daily lives of young consumers, these findings underscore a shift not only in purchasing habits but also in how value, trust, and social connection influence commerce.

One of the clearest findings is Instagram's dominance as a platform for influencing purchases. With 72% of respondents indicating daily use and 65% stating it directly impacts their buying decisions, Instagram emerges as a powerful visual marketplace. Its design—centred on images, reels, and influencer posts—creates an immersive environment where products are not just seen but experienced. In contrast, while Facebook still commands considerable attention (with 58% daily usage), its influence on actual buying decisions is markedly lower at 40%. This suggests that although Facebook continues to serve as a hub for discussions and peer recommendations, it is no longer the primary driver of purchase intent among the youth. Content type plays a pivotal role in engagement and buying behaviour. Influencer posts and stories/reels were rated as the most influential content types. A striking 67% of participants felt strongly influenced by stories and reels, reflecting how short, visually appealing content can trigger impulse buying. Similarly, 60% found influencer posts highly persuasive, particularly when they appeared authentic or locally rooted. Peer recommendations, especially those from friends, also ranked high—demonstrating the enduring power of word-of-mouth, now digitally amplified. Sponsored ads, while still influential to some degree, were received with more skepticism, possibly due to growing awareness of paid promotions.

The emotional and psychological aspects of social media consumption were equally revealing. A majority of participants acknowledged emotional triggers behind their purchases. About 74% admitted that visually appealing posts often led to spontaneous buying, indicating the power of aesthetics in shaping consumer action. Moreover, 70% of youth respondents reported experiencing FOMO (fear of missing out) after seeing peers endorse or purchase trending products. These emotional cues, often subtle but persistent, serve as strong motivators in digital purchasing journeys. Additionally, 62% admitted that a desire for social approval also played a role—highlighting how social media merges commerce with identity formation.

Trust emerged as a recurring theme throughout the qualitative interviews. Participants frequently expressed higher levels of trust in local influencers and peers than in celebrities or branded pages. This trust was rooted in relatability and perceived authenticity. For instance, a participant noted that seeing a local influencer demonstrate skincare routines in relatable surroundings made the product more believable and desirable. Another shared that peer reviews in comments often mattered more than the product description itself. These insights reveal that digital trust is increasingly built through proximity and perceived sincerity rather than fame. Gender-based differences further enriched the findings. Female respondents appeared significantly more responsive to influencer promotions and aesthetic presentation, with 72% and 78% respectively indicating strong influence in these areas. Male respondents, on the other hand, prioritized utility and product information, with 68% stating they valued detailed content over promotional aesthetics. This gendered divergence points to the need for segmented marketing strategies that account for different emotional and cognitive triggers. Interviews provided qualitative nuance, adding depth to the statistical patterns. Many participants described buying decisions as part of a broader lifestyle narrative. Online shopping was not just about acquiring products but about participating in trends, expressing identity, and staying connected. As one participant described,

“Buying something after seeing it on Instagram feels like being part of something bigger—it’s more than just a purchase.” In conclusion, the findings affirm that social media, especially Instagram, is not just a platform for connection but a complex marketplace where visual storytelling, emotional engagement, and digital trust converge. For the youth of Shillong, online shopping has become an extension of their social life—fluid, expressive, and deeply influenced by what they see and feel while scrolling.

CONCLUSION

In an era where digital interactions increasingly define how we communicate, express, and consume, this study sheds vital light on the influence of social media—specifically Instagram and Facebook—on the online buying behaviour of youth in Shillong. What emerges from this exploration is not just a set of statistics or digital trends, but a rich narrative of cultural adaptation, emotional connectivity, and evolving consumer identity in a city where tradition and modernity exist in a constant state of dialogue.

Shillong’s youth, like their counterparts in larger urban centres, are digital natives. Yet their interaction with technology is framed by local values, aspirations, and cultural touch points that give their online behaviour a distinctive character. Instagram has clearly taken the lead as a visual-first platform that speaks directly to this generation’s desire for aesthetic expression, trend participation, and peer validation. Facebook, while slightly waning in influence, continues to serve as a social anchor—supporting recommendations, group discussions, and shared buying experiences. Together, these platforms form a dual engine of influence: one aspirational and image-driven, the other conversational and community-focused. A key takeaway from the research is that buying behaviour among Shillong’s youth is not simply transactional—it is deeply social, emotional, and often identity-based. The act of purchasing something online after seeing it on a friend’s story, an influencer’s reel, or a brand’s post is layered with meaning. It may signify belonging, aspiration, or even resistance. For instance, buying a locally endorsed product might be as much a statement of pride as it is a consumer choice. This underscores the idea that online shopping is increasingly a form of self-expression—where what one buys is a reflection of who they are, or wish to be, within their peer group and digital community.

Another important insight is the role of emotional triggers such as FOMO, peer pressure, and desire for social recognition. These are not just marketing gimmicks—they are psychological realities that shape how young consumers relate to digital content. The rapid shift from scrolling to shopping is powered less by hard facts and more by how a product feels in the moment of interaction. This makes marketing on social media a nuanced task that requires emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and ethical responsibility. The trust deficit toward conventional advertising was also apparent in this study. Young people are becoming more discerning, favoring relatability and authenticity over polished, celebrity-endorsed content. Local influencers, who share their lives in raw, unscripted formats, hold more sway than well-known figures with millions of followers. Trust, it seems, is earned through shared experience and community presence—not through fame. This finding is both a challenge and an opportunity for brands. It challenges them to be more human, more locally rooted, and more

honest. At the same time, it opens doors for more inclusive and community-based marketing strategies that go beyond algorithms and SEO rankings.

Importantly, the study contributes to bridging the academic and cultural gap in existing literature by focusing on a Tier-II city like Shillong. Too often, marketing research in India is dominated by metro-centric data that doesn't reflect the diversity of youth experiences across regions. Shillong offers a compelling example of how localized studies can uncover insights that are hidden in national averages. The findings call for more attention to regional voices in academic inquiry and policy formulation—particularly as India's digital economy continues to grow at an unprecedented pace. In closing, this study affirms that the online buying journey of youth in Shillong is a complex interplay of visuals, emotions, trust, and cultural relevance. Instagram and Facebook are not just digital platforms—they are stages where identity, aspiration, and commerce converge. As the boundaries between content and commerce blur, understanding this convergence becomes critical—not only for marketers and brands but also for educators, researchers, and community leaders. By listening closely to how youth scroll, share, and shop, we not only understand their behaviour—we gain a glimpse into their evolving worldview in the digital age.

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