



# **THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN RURAL AND URBAN REGIONS OF NORTH GUJARAT**

**Rimpal Patel**

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Management Studies, Sankalchand Patel University, Visnagar,  
Gujarat, India. Email: [rimpal.patel@spu.edu.in](mailto:rimpal.patel@spu.edu.in)

Received: 20/05/2026 Revised: 03/06/2026 Acceptance: 10/06/2026 Published: 17/06/2026

## **ABSTRACT**

Social media advertising has emerged as one of the most powerful tools reshaping consumer behaviour across diverse socio-economic and geographic landscapes. This research paper investigates the differential influence of social media advertising on consumer behaviour in rural and urban regions of North Gujarat, India. The study addresses a critical gap in the existing literature: the comparative analysis of social media advertising effectiveness across sharply contrasting digital access environments. Drawing on data collected through a structured 36-item questionnaire administered to respondents from both rural and urban localities in North Gujarat, this study examines key dimensions of consumer response including brand awareness, attitude formation, purchase intention, and post-purchase behaviour. The research integrates mediating factors such as ad relevance, credibility, emotional appeal, and personalization, while also investigating negative consequences including ad fatigue, privacy concerns, and cultural misalignment. Preliminary findings suggest significant urban–rural disparities in ad exposure frequency, platform usage, digital literacy, and responsiveness to various ad formats. Urban consumers tend to engage more with interactive and video-based content, while rural consumers demonstrate stronger responses to culturally localized and static image-based advertisements. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative Likert-scale analysis with qualitative open-ended responses, to generate holistic insights. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is proposed as the analytical framework to test ten hypotheses governing the relationships among advertising inputs, mediating factors, and consumer outcomes. The findings carry significant implications for marketers, digital strategists, and policymakers seeking to bridge the digital divide in semi-urban and rural India, offering region-sensitive advertising strategies rooted in empirical evidence.

**Keywords:** Social Media Advertising, Consumer Behaviour, Rural Consumers, Urban Consumers, North Gujarat, Purchase Intention, Ad Relevance, Digital Marketing



## **1. Introduction**

The proliferation of smartphones and the rapid expansion of internet connectivity have fundamentally transformed the advertising ecosystem in India. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp have transitioned from being mere communication tools to becoming sophisticated advertising channels capable of reaching millions of consumers with precision-targeted content. Within this evolving landscape, North Gujarat represents a particularly interesting and underexplored geographical context, where urban aspirations meet rural traditions, and where digital access varies dramatically across short distances.

Consumer behaviour, traditionally shaped by interpersonal influence, cultural norms, and conventional media, is increasingly being redefined by social media advertising. Advertisements now appear in the form of videos, sponsored posts, influencer endorsements, carousel ads, and stories, each designed to capture attention, foster emotional connection, and ultimately drive purchasing decisions. Yet, the effectiveness of these formats is far from uniform. Variables such as internet infrastructure quality, digital literacy levels, household income, and cultural values significantly moderate the relationship between social media advertising and consumer response.

In urban North Gujarat—comprising cities such as Mehsana, Patan, and Gandhinagar—consumers enjoy relatively robust internet access, higher smartphone penetration, and greater exposure to digital content. By contrast, rural communities in the same region often contend with unreliable connectivity, limited digital education, and a preference for traditional cultural values that may conflict with or remain unaddressed by mainstream advertising narratives. This divergence creates a fertile ground for comparative research, enabling scholars and practitioners alike to understand how geography, infrastructure, and culture interact with advertising stimuli to produce varied consumer outcomes.

This paper is situated within the broader discourse on digital marketing in developing economies, contributing to a literature that has grown substantially over the past decade but remains sparse in its attention to intra-regional rural–urban comparisons in Indian states. While national-level studies offer sweeping insights, they often obscure localized dynamics that are essential for the formulation of region-sensitive marketing strategies. By focusing on North Gujarat, this research aims to generate contextually grounded findings that can serve as a model for similar inquiries in other semi-urban and rural Indian contexts.

The objectives of this study are fourfold: (1) to assess the frequency, format, and nature of social media advertising exposure among consumers in North Gujarat; (2) to evaluate the impact of social media advertising on consumer awareness, attitudes, purchase intentions, and post-purchase behaviour; (3) to examine the role of mediating variables including ad relevance,



credibility, emotional appeal, and personalization; and (4) to compare these dynamics across rural and urban sub-populations, identifying structural differences and similarities.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Social Media Advertising: Theoretical Foundations**

Social media advertising refers to the use of social networking platforms to deliver promotional messages to targeted audiences. Unlike traditional advertising—which operates through a one-to-many broadcast model—social media advertising is characterized by interactivity, personalization, and social sharing capabilities (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). The theoretical underpinning of this research draws on several established frameworks. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence a consumer's engagement with digital media (Davis, 1989). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) distinguishes between central and peripheral routes of persuasion, offering insights into how ad content quality and emotional cues differentially influence attitudes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

More recent theoretical contributions include the Social Influence Theory, which underscores the role of peer endorsements and influencer marketing in shaping purchase decisions (Cialdini, 2001), and the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that consumers actively seek media content that satisfies specific needs—a premise particularly relevant in understanding why certain ad formats resonate more than others (Katz et al., 1973). These frameworks collectively inform the conceptual model underlying this research.

### **2.2 Consumer Behaviour and Digital Advertising**

The relationship between digital advertising and consumer behaviour has been extensively studied across multiple dimensions. Research consistently demonstrates that social media ads can enhance brand awareness, particularly when leveraging visual storytelling and user-generated content (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). Attitude formation studies show that **consumers** develop more favourable brand perceptions when advertisements are perceived as credible, relevant, and emotionally resonant (Brackets & Carr, 2001; Ducoffe, 1996).

Purchase intention, as a critical intermediate outcome, has been found to be positively influenced by ad interactivity, social proof, discount incentives, and perceived product quality as communicated through ads (Pavlou & Stewart, 2000). Post-purchase behaviour—including loyalty, advocacy, and repeat purchase—is similarly linked to the quality and memorability of social media advertising experiences (Yoo et al., 2010). However, these relationships are moderated by factors including demographics, cultural context, and digital literacy, areas where research specifically addressing rural India remains limited.



---

### **2.3 Rural–Urban Digital Divide in India**

The digital divide in India manifests not only in terms of internet access but also in digital literacy, device capability, and content preferences. According to TRAI (2023), rural internet penetration in India has been growing rapidly, yet significant gaps persist in bandwidth quality, data affordability, and digital skill levels. Studies on rural consumer behaviour indicate a stronger reliance on community-based word-of-mouth, localised cultural references in advertising, and a cautious approach toward online transactions (Sriram & Mishra, 2019).

In the Gujarat context specifically, rapid industrialisation and government-led digital initiatives have accelerated rural connectivity, yet scholars have noted that digital marketing strategies designed for urban populations often fail to resonate with rural audiences due to cultural incongruence and format incompatibility (Shah & Patel, 2021). This underscores the need for granular, region-specific research to inform more inclusive and effective advertising practices.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative responses to generate a comprehensive understanding of social media advertising's influence on consumer behaviour. The mixed-methods approach is particularly suited to this inquiry because it allows for statistical generalization (through Likert-scale data) while also capturing the nuanced, context-specific experiences of respondents (through open-ended questions).

### **3.2 Sampling and Data Collection**

The target population comprises social media users aged 18 and above residing in rural and urban localities of North Gujarat, specifically in the districts of Mehsana, Patan, Banaskantha, and Sabarkantha. A stratified random sampling technique is employed, ensuring proportional representation of rural and urban sub-populations across income, gender, age, and education strata. A minimum sample size of 400 respondents (200 rural, 200 urban) is targeted to ensure statistical power for Structural Equation Modelling.

Data is collected through a structured, 36-item questionnaire encompassing seven sections: demographic information, social media exposure, consumer behaviour dimensions, mediating factors, negative effects, rural–urban comparative perceptions, and open-ended qualitative responses. The questionnaire incorporates reverse-coded items to detect and minimize response bias, and is piloted with 30 respondents before full deployment.



---

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

Quantitative data is analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software. Descriptive statistics provide baseline insights into respondent profiles and exposure patterns. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is conducted to validate the factorial structure of multi-item constructs, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess measurement model fit. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is employed to test the hypothesized relationships among latent constructs, with mediation effects examined using bootstrapping procedures. Qualitative data from open-ended questions is subjected to thematic analysis to complement and contextualise the quantitative findings.

### **4. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

The conceptual framework of this study positions social media advertising exposure as the independent variable, with consumer behaviour outcomes (awareness, attitude, purchase intention, post-purchase behaviour) as the dependent variables. Ad relevance, credibility, emotional appeal, and personalization serve as mediating variables, while rural/urban context, digital literacy, and demographic characteristics function as moderating variables.

The following hypotheses are proposed for empirical testing:

- H1: Social media advertising has a significant positive effect on brand awareness among consumers in North Gujarat.
- H2: Social media advertising positively influences attitudes toward products and brands.
- H3: Social media advertising significantly increases purchase intentions among North Gujarat consumers.
- H4: Social media advertising positively affects post-purchase behaviour, including loyalty and advocacy.
- H5: There are significant differences in social media ad exposure between rural and urban consumers.
- H6: Digital literacy significantly moderates the relationship between ad exposure and consumer behaviour.
- H7: Ad relevance significantly mediates the effect of social media advertising on purchase intention.
- H8: Ad credibility positively mediates the relationship between social media advertising and attitude formation.



•H9: Emotional appeal in ads significantly mediates the path from advertising to post-purchase behaviour.

•H10: Ad personalization significantly enhances the effectiveness of social media advertising on purchase intention.

## 5. Preliminary Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Demographic and Contextual Profile

Preliminary analysis of survey data reveals a demographically diverse respondent pool. Approximately 54% of respondents identify as male, 44% as female, and 2% as other or preferring not to disclose. The largest age cohort is the 18–35 bracket, comprising approximately 61% of the sample, reflecting the disproportionately high social media engagement among younger adults. Urban respondents report higher educational attainment and household income levels, consistent with national socioeconomic trends. Internet access ratings differ markedly across geographic sub-groups: 72% of urban respondents rate their internet access as Good or Excellent, compared to only 38% of rural respondents. Social media comfort levels similarly diverge, with urban users expressing significantly greater platform familiarity. Facebook and WhatsApp dominate platform usage across both groups, while Instagram and YouTube are more prevalent among urban, younger, and higher-income respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Gender	Male	51%	57%
	Female	47%	41%
Age Group	18–25	38%	42%
	26–35	29%	32%
	36–45	21%	17%
Internet Access (Good/Excellent)	—	38%	72%
Daily Social Media Use (>2 hrs)	—	31%	58%



## **5.2 Social Media Advertising Exposure**

Across both rural and urban groups, Facebook and WhatsApp emerge as the most frequently used platforms for social media engagement and ad exposure. However, the frequency and diversity of ad encounters differ considerably. Urban respondents report encountering ads Often or Always at a rate of 68%, compared to 41% among rural respondents. Video ads and influencer endorsements are cited as the most common ad formats by urban consumers, while rural consumers more frequently report exposure to image/static ads and sponsored posts.

The mean daily social media usage time for urban consumers exceeds 2 hours for a majority of respondents, while rural consumers cluster predominantly in the 30-minute to 1-hour range. These exposure differentials have direct implications for the reach and frequency of advertising messages, with urban consumers receiving substantially higher cumulative ad impressions.

## **5.3 Consumer Behaviour Outcomes**

Regarding brand awareness, Likert-scale analysis indicates that urban consumers score higher on awareness-enhancing effects of social media advertising, with mean scores for items such as 'Social media ads introduce me to products I was unaware of' averaging 4.1 (urban) versus 3.5 (rural) on a five-point scale. Despite this gap, rural respondents report a notable responsiveness to ads featuring local products and regional promotions, suggesting that geographic and cultural relevance can partially offset lower exposure frequency.

For attitude formation, both groups demonstrate moderate to strong agreement that credible and emotionally engaging ads improve their brand perceptions. Urban respondents are more responsive to user reviews and influencer endorsements embedded within ads, while rural respondents place greater weight on cultural alignment and community trust signals. Purchase intention scores are significantly higher among urban consumers across most survey items, with the exception of discount-driven intention items, where rural–urban differences are less pronounced, pointing to price sensitivity as a cross-regional motivator.

## **5.4 Mediating and Moderating Factors**

Among the four mediating variables, ad relevance and emotional appeal emerge as the most influential across both groups, though their specific drivers differ. Urban consumers associate relevance strongly with behavioral targeting and past search history, while rural consumers associate it more with culturally appropriate content and local language usage. Emotional resonance is a powerful driver across both groups, with humour and family-oriented narratives eliciting strong responses.



Ad credibility is undermined by perceived data privacy violations, which represent a significant concern, particularly among educated urban respondents. Rural respondents express relatively lower awareness of data privacy issues, though they remain skeptical of ad claims not supported by peer validation. Personalization is viewed positively when perceived as helpful, but negatively when experienced as intrusive, a tension that is more acutely felt among urban consumers who are more aware of tracking technologies.

## **6. Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this research offer several practical implications for marketers, brand managers, and digital advertising practitioners operating in North Gujarat and comparable regional contexts. First, the significant rural–urban disparity in internet access and ad exposure frequency necessitates a platform-differentiated advertising strategy. Marketers should prioritize WhatsApp-based campaigns and lightweight image ads for rural audiences, while deploying video-heavy, interactive content for urban segments.

Second, the strong influence of cultural alignment on rural consumer response suggests that advertising content should be developed with deep sensitivity to local languages, traditions, and community narratives. Generic national advertising campaigns should be supplemented with regional adaptations that speak to the values and aspirations of North Gujarat's rural population. Third, the credibility concerns identified across both groups—particularly around misleading claims and privacy—call for greater transparency in advertising practices and platform-level accountability mechanisms.

For urban consumers, personalization should be deployed thoughtfully to enhance relevance without crossing the threshold of perceived intrusiveness. Marketers should leverage interest-based targeting while providing clear opt-out mechanisms that reassure consumers of their data sovereignty. Post-purchase engagement strategies, including loyalty programmes and community-building initiatives delivered through social media, can further strengthen brand advocacy outcomes.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research paper presents a comprehensive investigation into the influence of social media advertising on consumer behaviour in the rural and urban regions of North Gujarat. By examining exposure patterns, consumer responses, mediating mechanisms, and negative effects through a structured mixed-methods framework, the study illuminates the complex and context-dependent nature of social media advertising effectiveness. The urban–rural divide emerges not merely as a technological gap but as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing cultural values, digital literacy, platform preferences, and trust dynamics.



The empirical findings validate the central premise that social media advertising differentially influences consumer behaviour across geographic and socioeconomic contexts, and that one-size-fits-all advertising strategies are insufficient in a demographically and culturally heterogeneous region like North Gujarat. The proposed SEM framework provides a rigorous methodological path for testing the hypothesized relationships, and the qualitative insights generated through open-ended responses offer a rich, humanistic complement to the quantitative data.

Future research directions include longitudinal studies tracking shifts in consumer response as rural digital infrastructure improves, cross-state comparisons extending beyond North Gujarat, and experiments testing specific cultural adaptation strategies in social media campaigns. As India's digital economy continues to expand, research of this nature will be indispensable in ensuring that the benefits of social media advertising are equitably and effectively distributed across all segments of the population.

## References

1. Brackett, L. K., & Carr, B. N. (2001). Cyberspace advertising vs. other media: Consumer vs. mature student attitudes. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 41(5), 23–32.
2. Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
3. Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3), 319–340.
4. Ducoffe, R. H. (1996). Advertising value and advertising on the web. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36(5), 21–35.
5. Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523.
6. Kumar, V., & Mirchandani, R. (2012). Increasing the ROI of social media marketing. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 54(1), 55–61.
7. Pavlou, P. A., & Stewart, D. W. (2000). Measuring the effects and effectiveness of interactive advertising. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 1(1), 61–77.
8. Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 19, 123–205.
9. Shah, D., & Patel, R. (2021). Digital marketing challenges in rural Gujarat: A consumer perspective. *Indian Journal of Marketing*, 51(3), 44–58.
10. Sriram, K. V., & Mishra, D. (2019). Rural consumer behaviour and digital adoption in India: Emerging trends. *Journal of Rural Development*, 38(2), 211–230.



11. TRAI. (2023). Telecom Regulatory Authority of India: Annual report on internet subscribers. Government of India.
12. Tuten, T. L., & Solomon, M. R. (2017). Social media marketing (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
13. Yoo, C. Y., Kim, K., & Stout, P. A. (2010). Assessing the effects of animation in online banner advertising: Hierarchy of effects model. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 4(2), 49–60.