# Connected Consumers: How Digital Platforms Shape Youth Lifestyle and Consumption in Chennai

**Dr.M.Kalavathy**[1]

**Journalism and Communication,University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India**

***Corresponding Author**

**DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1013COM0048**

**Received: 21 September 2026; Accepted: 26 September 2026; Published: 15 October 2026**

## ABSTRACT

Digital technology and the digital economy have defined the modern era. In 2015, the Government of India introduced the Digital India initiative, aiming to empower citizens through universal access to e-governance, robust digital infrastructure, and improved digital literacy. A decade later, the rapid proliferation of online services is transforming the lives of young people, fundamentally changing how they shop, travel, work, dine, and vacation, etc. Guided by this perspective, the current study explores digital culture and consumerism among youth in Tamil Nadu, with a focus on Chennai. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach incorporating surveys and in-depth interviews, the findings reveal that for young people in urban Chennai, digital shopping has evolved from a niche alternative into a core lifestyle component, central to their cultural identity. This hyper-consumerism is heavily fuelled by targeted online advertisements, which successfully influence the purchasing decisions of 82% of the demographic. While consumerism remains vibrant across all groups, premium digital consumption (like online certification courses and high-end niche platforms) is concentrated among highly educated youth, whereas socioeconomically disadvantaged youth engage in a more passive, entertainment-heavy digital marketplace.

**Keywords:** Digital culture; Digital consumer; Urban youth; Chennai.

## INTRODUCTION

Digital technology and the digital economy have shaped today's modern world, driving global growth through data, automation, and high-speed internet networks. Historically, no other innovation has advanced as rapidly as digital technologies have, penetrating approximately half of the population in developing nations within a mere twenty years, thereby causing societal shifts. By enhancing digital connections, guaranteeing access to financial resources, and expanding opportunities for trade and public service utilisation, technology possesses the capacity to promote greater equality (UN75 2020 and beyond: shaping our future together, 2020). The emergence of numerous online services in recent years is reshaping the lives of young people, altering their traditional approaches to shopping, travelling, earning, eating, and taking vacations, etc.

The Government of India launched the Digital India project in 2015 with a vision of empowering everyone in the country to access e-governance services by providing them with a standard digital infrastructure and digital literacy. The introduction of several Indian initiatives, including the BharatNet project, aimed to deliver broadband services for accessing e-governance services (Bhawna Parmar, Risha Ramachandran, Sahana HM, 2025 December). Following the launch of Jio network's free service, internet penetration rose, and after Jio transitioned to paid services, Indian consumers demonstrated a greater willingness to spend specifically on data. Mid-2026 official data indicates that India's population constitutes around 76.59% of the global total. Additionally, the country had 1.09 billion internet subscribers during the January to March 2026 quarter, as reported in the Indian Telecommunication Services Performance Indicator Report (2026). This transformation

[1]kalavathymu@gmail.com, +919865052631

is a direct result of technological progression. Consequently the Smartphone and the data consumption influenced in the consumer cultures too.

Schiller, (1996) mentioned that since the 1990s, in the United States, the term new economy, defined by low inflation, high employment, and rapid growth, has further advanced the information technology revolution. After that the knowledge economy and the information economy seemed capable of solving every capitalist problem. But the inherent tension and contradiction in the relations of production remained hidden (Schiller, 1996, cited in Ding Xiaoqin and Chai Qiaoyan, 2023). Developing countries like India were passionate in the initial period of 21st century; the proliferation of mobile phones and the mobile internet, the growth of platforms and information technology, and the advancement of big data and artificial intelligence have all occurred in the second decade of the twenty-first century. With these developments, the digital economy has emerged as a dominant force in socio-economic development; this has revealed its surprising strengths and weaknesses, and has led to a rapid increase in scholarly interest in digital capitalism and related concepts.

A recent report by Global Management Consultancy EY reveals that 'while India ranks third in daily mobile screen time behind Indonesia and Brazil, the collective hours spent by users in the country added up to 1.1 trillion hours in 2024, making it the world's largest digital market. The growing presence of Indians online has also intensified competition amongst global tech giants like Meta and Amazon, as well as billionaires such as MukeshAmbani and Elon Musk, who are planning to expand their businesses and dominate the growing digital market' (Bhati, 2025). In this sense, the current study aims to understand youngsters' digital engagements and their preferences in digital consuming behaviours in Chennai metropolitan city.

## REVIEWS OF LITERATURE

A study in Nepal (Shrestha, H. L., Dhital, K. P., Shrestha, A., Tramu, G., and Sejuwal, N., 2025) found that Nepali youth e-commerce had high homogeneity of platform choice and was characterised by extremely high and non-negotiable consumer demands for an uninterrupted online experience. The findings of this research indicate a significant change in consumer behaviour among Nepali youth, showing their preference for smooth digital experiences.

The authors additionally pointed out that Nepali youths are for the most part digital native consumers and they seek utmost comfort features such as easy price comparisons, easy interfaces, quick and free shipping, etc. The study's result of no age and gender variations in online shopping behaviour suggests a widespread pattern among young consumers that might affect marketing strategies and product selections in the future.

An Indian study said that boys in Delhi learned about money after following financial influencers on Instagram and YouTube. A lot of boys were also inspired to learn the basics of the trade. In order to find more sources, they turned to stocks and SIPs, which led many of them to start investing. Boys have been actively seeking out resources and accounts that could assist them in learning how to trade online, while girls have shown interest but have not taken the initiative to do so. They didn't want to go too far and enter what were thought to be men's areas of expertise (Bhawna Parmar, Risha Ramachandran, Sahana H. M., 2025 December).

Another study from India (Sasikala, P., and Guru, K., 2026) was conducted in Puducherry regarding digital consumerism and youth buying behaviour. The study concludes that online shopping behaviour among youth in Puducherry is rapidly evolving, and digital consumerism will continue to influence future consumer trends. Furthermore, the study mentioned that convenience, affordability, promotional offers, digital payment facilities, and product availability are the major factors influencing online shopping behaviour. Young consumers increasingly prefer digital platforms due to technological advancements and changing lifestyles.

Before COVID-19, Indians were digitally engaged more with entertainment. It was proved by a study conducted in six big cities, such as Delhi, Jaipur, Coimbatore, Pune, Guwahati, and Kolkata. This study found that the urban poor do have access to smartphones and are consuming online media using OTT platforms. OTT is emerging as a popular source of entertainment across all categories of gender, age group, and occupation. On average, 3-5 hours are spent on OTT daily. Free applications are more popular on OTT platforms among the urban poor, across age, gender, and occupation. People are paying to own smartphones, even if second-

hand, and recharge every month to remain connected. The simplicity and efficiency of 'on-the-go' content is preferred across various categories (Mukherjee, Anindita; Gupta, Pooja; Jain, Aastha; Raj, Deepti, 2020).

Another study was conducted in India to understand youth consumerism by Singh et al. (Singh, Chandra Bhooshan; Sharma, Nishtha; and Pandey, Shinki K., 2025). According to their study, algorithmic digital marketing and social media are major forces in Indian youth consumer culture. Young consumers are constantly exposed to trend-based campaigns, influencer ads, and targeted ads that prompt them to buy products. Websites like Instagram, YouTube, and Flipkart use complex machine learning algorithms to track users' preferences and show them personalised ads based on their browsing and previous purchases.

Accessibility of shopping platforms is a key component of consumer behavior driven by social media. Features like Instagram Shopping, WhatsApp Business, and TikTok Market eliminate the need for third-party e-commerce platforms, allowing users to purchase products directly from social media apps. This integration encourages instant buying, as young consumers can quickly purchase products without leaving their favorite social media apps. Countdown timers, flash deals, and limited-time promotions all create a sense of urgency that encourages quick purchases. The study also reveals that peer pressure is a major factor in determining consumer behavior. Influencer recommendations, product reviews, and user-generated content are trusted more by consumers than traditional advertising (Sing Chandra Bhooshan, Sharma Nishtha, and Pandey Shinki K, 2025). Indians are using their Smartphones more than ever, according to a recent study by international management consultancy EY. According to the reports, Indian users spend five hours a day on social media, gaming, and streaming videos. The report highlights how the world's most populous country is transforming media consumption, driven by affordable internet and increasing digital access. India's media and entertainment sector, estimated to be worth Rs 2.5 trillion ($29.1 billion) by 2024, is now dominated by a growing number of digital platforms; it has overtaken television for the first time, according to an EY analysis (Bhati, 2025).

Moreover a logistic company post in their webpage (Top 5 Mobile Entertainment Trends in India: How Smartphones Redefined Leisure in 2026, 2026), mentioned that one of the most notable features of mobile entertainment in India is the integration of excellent streaming services. Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and local rivals have tailored their services to cater to Indian consumers by offering a mix of domestic and international content. Furthermore, mobile gaming has expanded quickly, attracting millions of players with titles ranging from casual games to sports competitions. The use of social media for entertainment has also expanded since platforms like Instagram and TikTok make it easy for users to create and share content. These social media companies generate revenue not through direct user fees but by converting user attention into advertising opportunities. This business model creates a fundamental conflict between user well-being and platform profitability, as algorithms are optimized to exploit psychological vulnerabilities rather than promote healthy social interaction. The seamless integration of advertisements within social feeds demonstrates how consumer messaging penetrates previously protected social spaces, making commercial influence nearly indistinguishable from peer communication. Outside social media, the proliferation of on-demand service platforms has fundamentally restructured daily social interactions around consumer transactions. Applications like Swiggy, Zomato, and Zepto lead to hyper-commercialized consumer experiences optimized for convenience and speed. This process, known as the 'attention economy,' which underpins digital platforms reveals how human psychological processes are systematically transformed into commodities (The Consumer Self: How Digital Capitalism Rewrites identity, 2026).

All those previous research found that there is a rapid growth in digital media usage and digital consumerism. Some studies stated that there were no age variations in the digital culture and digital consumerism, since some other studies mentioned that it predominantly spreads among youngsters. The researcher found there were no studies recorded in the Chennai metropolitan study, particularly among youth. Based on this understanding, the current study substantiate the digital culture and the digital consumerism among youngsters in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Chennai Metropolitan City.

# METHODS

The current study adopted a mixed method research approach that used surveys and in-depth interviews as research methods. The researcher used structured questionnaires and unstructured interview questions to collect data. The population for the study was those coming under the age group between 20 and 31 years and living in and around Chennai for the last 10 years; as well as those who are accessing Smartphones. The samples were selected through purposive (survey) and volunteer (interviews) sampling techniques. Totally 190 samples were included based on the North, South, East, West, and Middle parts of Chennai. For the in-depth interview, only 12 samples were selected and conducted face-to-face interviews; each interview had snatched 20 to 30 minutes.

# THE RESULTS

### Smartphone Usage

The survey data were distributed among 54.5 percent male and 45.8 percent female for this study. Most of the samples (55.3%) participated in the survey are coming under the age group of 20-22. 28 percent were 24-27 years and 16 percent were 28 – 31 years, participated in the survey. All the samples were educated. Most of them were postgraduates (53.2%) and the majority of the samples (54.7%) were working in a private organisation. Most of the samples were middle class (65.3%) and lower middle class (17.4%) in their social status.

According to their Smartphone experience, 42.6 percent were using Smartphones for six to ten years, 38 percent were using two to five years, and 17 percent were using more than ten years. Only two percent were the new users of Smartphones. All the samples were using social media like WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn; very few were using Twitter, Telegram, and Snapshot.

### Information Seeking and Communicative Behaviours

Their information seeking behaviours were differing from previous generations. Nearly 86 percent of the respondents rely on social media for their everyday information and news. Thirty percent of respondents lean on traditional media like newspapers/ magazines (33.2%) and TV/radio (30.5%) too. Majority (49.5%) stated that social media is the first trustworthy medium to believe information, and the 2nd majority (42.6%) mentioned WebPages and Search Engines as the most trustworthy medium; only the 3rd majority (41.1%) mentioned the Newspapers and Magazines; 5th majority or the least respondents (21.6%) believed TV/Radio as a trustworthy medium for information. The previous generations fully relied on traditional media to seek their information and the above data showed the younger generation switched to online media for their everyday information and news. Concurrently, the youngsters felt that they were very comfortable in face-to-face communication (60%), although they preferred phone calls and mobile text (71.1%); moreover, 48 percent preferred social media calls and texts to communicate with others.

### Online Transactions

The result showed that 98.9 percent of respondents used online transactions through various apps such as G-Pay, PhonePe, Paytm, Net banking, MobiKwik, etc. Only two respondents stated that they never used online transactions. 61 percent mentioned always and 38 respondents sometimes used online transactions. 83 percent of respondents were Google Pay customers; within this, 56% used only G-Pay for all their online transactions. Respondents used two (16%) and more than two (26%) applications for the money transaction.

### Security Concern

Nearly 43 percent of the respondents automatically updated their Smartphones; some (24%) of them once a month and some (18%) once a week updated their Smartphones. But interestingly, 16 percent of respondents mentioned that they were not aware of the software update. Regarding the security concern, the majority (72%) of the respondents were aware of the two-step verification for using e-mail, social media accounts, and digital

transaction apps, etc. Only 28 percent stated that they were not aware of two-step verification in using digital devices/ apps.

Regarding the actions for the unknown emails/ or text in the WhatsApp, 56 percent of the respondents mentioned that 'if it is not expected or unknown, won't click it' and 38 percent said that 'I would check the link without any concern'. Moreover, if they faced any security breach, 41 percent of the respondents tried to solve the problem by themselves; only 36 percent immediately took the action like informing IT security or registering the complaints. Remaining 23 percent of the respondents answered that they won't do anything even if they face any security breach.

**Online Consumerism**

The respondents depend on various apps for online shopping such as Amazon, Flipkart, Ajio, Mantra, Nyka, Jeomart, Snapdeal, Meesho, etc. However, most of them (67%) preferred Amazon and the 2nd majority (53%) preferred Flipkart for their online purchases. Over 58 percent of the respondents favored having more than two apps for online purchases.

**Preference of Things**

The products purchased online include various items like fashionable clothing, electronics, home appliances, health products, beauty items, books, and stationery. Most of the respondents (51%) purchased fashionable things and clothes. Second-largest numbers of respondents (46%) purchased electronic goods, and 3r largest group of respondents (33%) purchased food products through online. Books (27%) and stationery products (27%) were the least number of the respondents purchased through online.

**Food**

Popular food apps were chosen by 81 percent of the respondents for ordering food online. 60 percent used Zomato and 50 percent used Swiggy too. 18 percent used other apps. Only 19 percent of respondents stated that they had never ordered food online.

**Entertainment**

Almost 95.3 percent of the respondents watched cinema or series online, the same amount as the respondents who subscribed to Netflix. 14 percent subscribed to Zee5. 10 percent of respondents paid their subscriptions for other apps such as JioStar, Amazon Prime, etc. Nearly five percent of the respondents mentioned that there were no such subscriptions for any entertainment applications.

**Influence of advertisements VS Income Generation**

Nearly fourty-four percent of the respondents expressed disagreement, while about twenty-five percent affirmed that online ads draw users towards purchasing the new products. However, only 18 percent stated that they had never purchased any product based on the online advertisements. Nearly 82 percent stated that they were purchasing products based on the online advertisements.A majority of the respondents, 60%, reported no income from online activities, compared to 40% who did. 32 percent sold the product online to generate income.

**Opinion of Digital users**

Participants in the in-depth interviews were aged between 21 and 30, coming from different occupations including students, professionals, and business owners. The discussion spanned various subjects including digital technology usage, online habits, and the impact of digital platforms on their daily lives and choice-making.

The participants showed varying degrees of expertise and use of digital media. Many participants indicated that they used smartphones, laptops, and computers for a variety of purposes including communication, entertainment, work, education, personal management, and business-related tasks. Social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook were widely used for maintaining social connections and for self-expression.

Participants showed varying degrees of reliance on digital technologies for both personal and professional advancement. Certain participants proactively explored online avenues for enhancing their skills. For example, when asked about their daily Smartphone usage, a 27-year-old female tailor from Arumbakkam, stated that she does sales on WhatsApp and gets clothes design inspiration from Pinterest. And she mentioned 'I developed my tailoring skills through YouTube resources. I also watch motivational videos every morning and do shopping'. Two additional respondents indicated enrolling in online courses for professional certifications. Digital platforms were employed for networking, accessing government services, and joining online communities by others.

Individuals with greater educational backgrounds and occupational statuses were more likely to engage in varied online activities, which included pursuing online courses, utilizing e-government platforms, and participating in knowledge-sharing communities. When queried about her online behaviors, Indulekha, a 21-year-old female student from Saidapet, stated that she communicates with strangers online to establish a community on platforms like Reddit, and Instagram. It assists with issues, posts inquiries, and receives responses, and offers guidance on a topic. Alternatively, participants from less educated backgrounds or with socioeconomically disadvantaged conditions demonstrated reduced digital engagement, mainly centered on entertainment and basic communication.

Chennai is a metropolitan city; all the public spaces are connected with a Wi-Fi network. But that was inadequate in terms of data speed. A 22-year-old female student from Velachery, stated, "I've linked to my university's wifi network to undertake my studies at college. I have also used the open networks in railway stations, but the network connection was very weak and slow. I always keep looking for open networks outside because my mobile data sometimes acts up. Hence, public spaces require robust digital infrastructure".

Furthermore, the analysis of interview data indicated that digital technologies have had a considerable effect on the lifestyles and decision-making habits of urban youth in Chennai. Participants indicated that their consumption patterns, fashion decisions, and even core values were shaped by the media they consumed online, such as social networks, news sources, and entertainment platforms.

A 24 year old Teacher from T-Nagar said, "My fashion sense is heavily influenced by Korean fashion. I use skin products based on what I see on Insta. I also get motivated by positive motivational pages. I am very much inspired by the Korean songs and speeches given by idols, especially the UN speech by Kim Namjoon from BTS. I learned to love myself and gained confidence by watching them".

"I exercise regularly and do skin cares, food, meditation, learn Hindi all of which were because of Social media," reports, a 26 year old male worker from the School Education Department of Tamil Nadu, Nungampakkam.

Although the male interviewees also admitted to buying clothes and footwear and minimal accessories every time there's a special occasion in their social circle."I usually get myself something as a token of appreciation, like T-shirts, or a watch or shoes" said a 25 year old, Chartered Accountant from Rayapuram.

Several participants acknowledged the influence of online content on their opinions, attitudes, and lifestyle choices, such as exercise routines, skincare routines, and fashion trends. This highlights the potential power of digital platforms in shaping the mindsets and behaviors of urban youth.

## CONCLUSION

While this study was conducted to understand the digital usage patterns of youth in the Chennai metropolitan

area, the findings reveal interesting insights—specifically regarding how shifts in digital habits among young people have influenced broader social trends. A notable finding is that young people's dependence on social media for information undermines the trustworthiness of conventional media sources like newspapers, radio, and television.

Research indicates that for young people in urban Chennai, digital shopping has evolved from a niche alternative into a core lifestyle component, central to their cultural identity. The digital marketplace, dominated by platforms like Amazon and Flipkart and near-universal mobile payment adoption (98.9%), now dictates the shopping habits of the youth for fashion, electronics, and groceries. This culture of excessive consumption is largely driven by targeted digital ads, which sway the buying choices of 82% of the target demographic.

Moreover, 95 percent of the respondents favour entertainment services (beyond their basic internet data plans). Primarily, for many, web series and films are their main sources of entertainment. Similar to findings from studies conducted by Shrestha et al. (2026) in Nepal and Sasikala and Guru (2026) in India, the habit of online shopping has increased significantly among Chennai's youth. Regardless of gender, these purchases focus heavily on categories such as fashion/clothing, electronics, and food products. Additionally, as found by Mukherjee et al. (2020), young people in Chennai allocate a significant amount of time and resources to entertainment through OTT platforms. Moreover, as noted by Singh et al. (2025), their purchasing behaviour and viewing habits are largely influenced by advertisements encountered on social media platforms.

However, this rapid digital adoption reveals a significant gap in digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness. Although the majority (72%) use two-step verification, a concerning segment of young people exhibits risky online behaviours; for example, failing to update software (16%), clicking on suspicious links (38%), or remaining passive during a security incident (23%).

In conclusion, the study highlights that engagement with digital tools is unequal, shaped largely by disparities in education and socioeconomic standing. Well-educated young people leverage online platforms such as Reddit to pursue career growth, acquire new skills, engage with e-governance and foster community connections. Conversely, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to restrict their usage to simple forms of communication and entertainment. The study highlights that despite the digital savvy of Chennai’s youth, the city's poor public Wi-Fi infrastructure necessitates urgent upgrades and improved cybersecurity awareness to close the digital gap and guarantee safer online engagement.

Additionally, the study highlights opportunities for future inquiry into aspects of digital capitalism, such as the attention economy, algorithmic advertising, data-driven consumption, and platformisation etc,.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bhati, D. (2025, May 28). News:Phone addicts? Indians love videos, gaming and social media as they spend average 5 hours on phone daily. Retrieved from India Today: https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/news/story/phone-addicts-indians-love-videos-gaming-and-social-media-as-they-spend-average-5-hours-on-phone-daily-2700489-2025-03-28
2. Bhawna Parmar, Risha Ramachandran, Sahana HM. (2025 December). The Complex Digital Lives of Young People. Quest Alliance.
3. Ding Xiaoqin and Chai Qiaoyan. (2023). The rise of digital capitalism and the social changes it caused: how to develop the digital economy in socialist China. China Political Economy (CPE), 6 (1), 35-43.
4. Hassan, R. (2020). The Condition of Digitality: A Post-Modern Marxism for the Practice of Digital Life. London: University of Westminster Press.
5. Indian telecommunication services performance indicator report for the quarter January- March 2026. (2026, March). Retrieved from Ministry of Communication: https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2276780&reg=3&lang=1
6. Mukherjee Anindita, Gupta Pooja, Jain Aastha, Raj Deepti. (2020). Connect the new entertainment paradigm for the urban poor. New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research.

7. Sasikala, P., and Guru, K. (2026). Digital Consumerism and Youth Buying Behaviour: Evidence from Puducherry. Journal of Marketing and Sales management., 1 (1).
8. Shreshtha, H.L., Dhital, K.P., Shrestha, A., Tramu, G., and Sejuwal, N. (2025). The digital consumer economy: Purchasing behaviour of youth in E-commerce markets. NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary research, 2 (8), 340-349.
9. Sing Chandra Bhooshan, Sharma Nishtha and Pandey Shinki K. (2025). How digital addiction fuels youth consumerism in India ? Involvement International Journal of Business, 2 (2).
10. The Consumer Self: How Digital Capitalism Rewrites identity. (2026, February 02). Retrieved from Monk Prayogshala: https://www.monkprayogshala.in/blog/2026/2/2/the-consumer-self-how-digital-capitalism-rewrites-identity?rq=digital%20capitalism
11. Top 5 Mobile Entertainment Trends in India: How Smartphones Redefined Leisure in 2026. (2026, July 24). Retrieved from Aarya Ocean Logistics Park PVT.LTD: https://aaryaocean.com/2026/07/24/top-5-mobile-entertainment-trends-in-india-how-smartphones-redefined-leisure-in-2026/
12. UN75 2020 and beyond shaping our future together. (2020). Retrieved from United Nations: https://www.un.org/en/un75/impact-digital-technologies