THE POWER OF PERSUASION: ANALYZING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON CLOTHING BRAND IMAGE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

In today's digitally driven world, social media influencers have emerged as powerful voices shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours, particularly in the realm of fashion and clothing brands. This paper delves into the intricate dynamics between social media influencers, clothing brand image, and consumer behaviour. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, as well as empirical research, this study examines how social media influencers exert influence, the mechanisms through which they shape clothing brand image, and the resulting impact on consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the study investigates the various ways in which consumers engage with influencer-generated content and the subsequent effects on purchase intentions, brand loyalty, and word-of-mouth communication. The study is conducted using questionnaire method in order to collect the responses from the consumers in Mangaluru City. The research findings highlight the significant role of social media influencers in enhancing brand visibility, credibility, and desirability among consumers.

Keywords

social media influencers, clothing brands, brand image, influencer marketing, digital marketing

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has revolutionized the way people communicate, share information, and make purchasing decisions. Among the myriad of content creators on these platforms, social media influencers have emerged as powerful arbiters of taste, style, and consumer behavior. With their ability to cultivate vast followings and engage audiences with curated content, influencers wield significant influence over their followers' preferences and purchasing decisions. This research paper aims to explore the profound impact of social media influencers on the clothing brand image and consumer behavior. Specifically, it seeks to investigate how influencers shape perceptions of clothing brands, influence consumer attitudes towards these brands, and ultimately drive purchasing behavior.

In recent years, the traditional advertising landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. Consumers are increasingly turning to social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok for product recommendations and style inspiration. Social media influencers, with their authentic and relatable content, have become trusted sources of information in this digital ecosystem. The phenomenon of influencer marketing has become particularly prevalent in the fashion industry. Clothing brands collaborate with influencers to leverage their reach and credibility, effectively outsourcing brand promotion to individuals who resonate with their target audience. By partnering with influencers, brands can tap into their followers' aspirational lifestyles and align their products with the influencer's personal brand.

However, the influence of social media influencers goes beyond mere brand endorsements. Through carefully curated content, influencers shape narratives around clothing brands, imbuing them with certain values, aesthetics, and identities. They create aspirational lifestyles that resonate with their followers, positioning certain brands as symbols of status, exclusivity, or authenticity. Moreover, social media influencers engage in various forms of content creation, including sponsored posts, product reviews, and styling tutorials. These diverse formats allow influencers to showcase clothing brands in different contexts, demonstrating their versatility and suitability for various occasions and lifestyles. Despite the widespread adoption of influencer marketing, questions remain about its effectiveness and ethical implications. Critics argue that influencer content blurs the lines between authentic recommendations and paid promotions, leading to skepticism among consumers. Moreover, concerns have been raised about the transparency of influencer-brand partnerships and the potential for misleading advertising practices.

This research paper aims to address these concerns by critically analyzing the influence of social media influencers on clothing brand image and consumer behavior. By examining existing literature and conducting surveys, we seek to provide insights into the mechanisms through which influencers shape consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics between brands, influencers, and consumers in the digital age. By shedding light on the power of persuasion wielded by social media influencers, we hope to inform marketing strategies and foster ethical practices in influencer marketing.

Objectives of the study

This study has been done with the following objectives.

❖ To analyze the influence of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behaviour.

❖ To investigate the extent of influence that social media influencers have on shaping perceptions of clothing brands and impacting consumer behaviour.

❖ To analyze how consumers perceive clothing brands promoted by social media influencers.

❖ To assess how clothing brands' images are transformed through influencer marketing.

❖ To provide practical recommendations for marketers and brands seeking to leverage social media influencers effectively.

Problem statement

In recent years, the rise of social media influencers has transformed the landscape of advertising and consumer behaviour, particularly within the fashion industry. While influencer marketing has become a ubiquitous strategy for clothing brands to engage with consumers, questions remain about its effectiveness, transparency, and ethical implications. Therefore, the problem this research seeks to address is: Despite the widespread adoption of influencer marketing in the fashion industry, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the influence of social media influencers on clothing brand image and consumer behaviour. By providing evidence, insights, and recommendations, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the power of persuasion wielded by social media influencers and its implications for clothing brand image and consumer behaviour.

Hypothesis of the study

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between social media influencers' content and consumer perceptions of clothing brand image, nor does influencer content significantly impact consumer behaviour.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Social media influencers' content significantly influences consumer perceptions of clothing brand image and positively affects consumer behaviour, including

brand preference, product consideration, and purchase decisions.

Scope of the study

Any field of research must have a definite scope. This research focuses on the impact of social media influencers on clothing brand image and consumer behaviour. It encompasses an analysis of influencer effectiveness, transparency, and ethical considerations in the fashion industry. The study examines consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions influenced by influencer content, providing insights for marketers, brands, and policymakers.

Research methodology

The study is based on both Primary & Secondary data. Secondary data are collected from various books, journals, articles, working papers, etc. Primary data are collected through the questionnaire method from Clothing customers in Mangalore City. The primary data collected from the sample respondents on various aspects has been organised in the tabular form. Such organised data has been analysed with the help of different statistical tools like average, percentage, etc. for easy understanding of the data and for drawing meaningful conclusion. The sample size of 120 has been considered for the current study using random sampling method.

Limitation of the study

➢ The study is limited to selected areas of Mangalore City.

➢ The sample size and composition of participants may not fully represent the diversity of consumers or influencers within the fashion industry.

➢ Due to the observational nature of the study, establishing causality between influencer content and consumer behaviour may be challenging.

➢ The findings of this research may be limited in their generalizability due to the specific focus on a particular demographic, geographic region, or social media platform. Variations in consumer behaviour and influencer effectiveness across different populations or platforms may not be fully captured.

Literature review

In recent years, the proliferation of social media platforms has facilitated the emergence of social media influencers as powerful agents of persuasion, particularly within the fashion industry. This literature review provides a comprehensive overview of existing research on the influence of social media influencers on clothing brand image and consumer behaviour.

- Influencer marketing has become a prominent strategy for brands to engage with consumers in the digital age. Studies by De Veirman et al. (2017) and Bhattacherjee et al. (2020) highlight the effectiveness of influencer endorsements in enhancing brand awareness, credibility, and purchase intent.

- Social media influencers wield significant influence over their followers through authentic and relatable content. Research by Jin et al. (2019) and Kim and Johnson (2016) explores the mechanisms through which influencers shape consumer perceptions and preferences, emphasizing the importance of authenticity and trust.

- Influencer content plays a pivotal role in shaping the image and identity of clothing brands. Studies by Perez and Stöttinger (2017) and Phua et al. (2017) examine how influencers imbue brands with certain values, aesthetics, and lifestyles, positioning them as aspirational symbols for consumers.

- The influence of social media influencers extends to consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. Research by Muntinga et al. (2011) and Lee et al. (2018) demonstrates that influencer endorsements can influence brand preference, product consideration, and actual purchase behaviour among consumers.

- Ethical considerations in influencer marketing have garnered increasing attention from scholars and practitioners. Studies by Wojdynski and Evans (2016) and Abidin (2018) highlight concerns about transparency, disclosure, and authenticity in influencer-brand partnerships, emphasizing the need for ethical guidelines and regulatory oversight.

- Measuring the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns remains a challenge for marketers. Research by Gao et al. (2020) and Chen and Wu (2019) explores various methods for evaluating influencer impact, including engagement metrics, sentiment analysis, and return on investment (ROI) calculations.

While existing research provides valuable insights into the influence of social media influencers on clothing brand image and consumer behaviour, several avenues for future research warrant exploration.

1. Data analysis:

Table 1: Showing the social media platforms respondents use regularly.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Instagram	97	80.83
Facebook	64	53.33
Twitter (X)	34	28.33
YouTube	103	85.83
TikTok	36	30.00
Snapchat	58	48.33
Others	31	25.83

N=120   MRR=3.525   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

NOTE: Percentage is not equal to 100 because of multiple responses and multiple response rate is equal to total number of response divided by the number of respondents.

Figure 1: Showing the social media platforms respondents use regularly.

	Instagram	Facebook	Twitter (X)	YouTube	TikTok	Snapchat	Others
▪	80.83	53.33	28.33	85.83	30	48.33	25.83
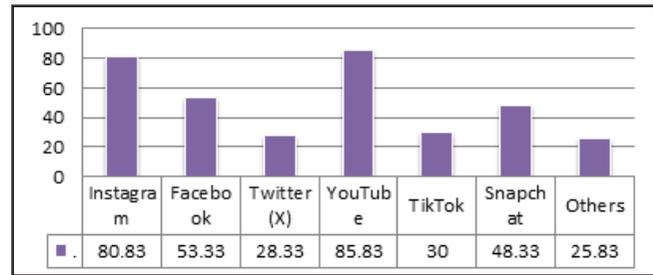
Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 86 percent of respondents has been using social media platform YouTube regularly, 80 percent use Instagram, 53 percent use Facebook, 48 percent use Snapchat, 30 percent use TikTok, 28 percent use Twitter(X) and 26 percent use other social media platform.
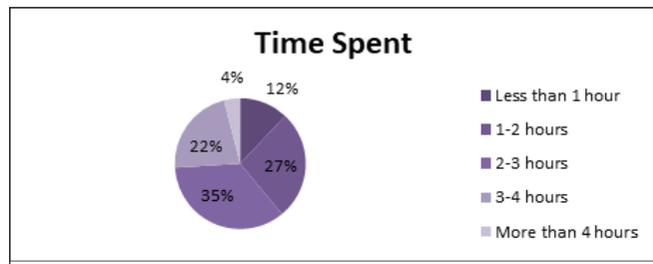
Table 2: Showing on an average how many hours per day respondents spend on social media.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	14	12
1-2 hours	32	27
2-3 hours	42	35
3-4 hours	27	22
More than 4 hours	5	04
Total	120	100

N=120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 2: Showing on an average how many hours per day respondents spend on social media.

Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 35 percent of respondents on an average spend 2-3 hours per day on social media, 27 percent spend 1-2 hours a day, 22 percent spend 3-4 hours a day, 12 percent spend less than 1 hour a day and 4 percent of the respondents spend more than 4 hours a day.
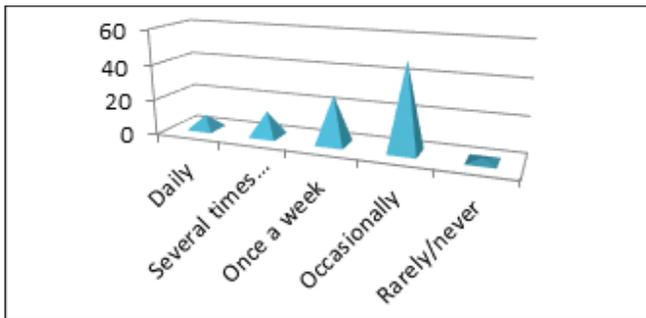
Table 3: Showing how often does respondents follow social media influencers who promote clothing brands

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Daily	09	08
Several times a week	17	14
Once a week	33	27
Occasionally	59	49
Rarely/never	02	02
Total	120	100

N=120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 3: Showing how often does respondents follow social media influencers who promote clothing brands

Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 49 percent of respondents occasionally follow social media influencers who promote clothing brands, 27 percent follow once a week, 14 percent follow several times a week, 8 percent follow daily and 2 percent rarely/never follow social media influencers who promote clothing brands.
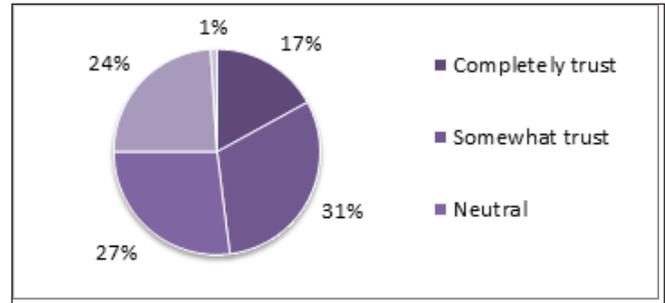
Table 4: Showing to what extent does respondents trust recommendations from social media influencers regarding clothing brands

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Completely trust	21	17
Somewhat trust	37	31
Neutral	32	27
Somewhat distrust	29	24
Completely distrust	01	01
Total	120	100

N= 120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 4: Showing to what extent does respondents trust recommendations from social media influencers regarding clothing brands

Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 31 percent of respondents somewhat trust recommendations from social media influencers regarding clothing brands, 27 percent are neutral, 24 percent somewhat distrust, 17 percent completely trust and 1 percent of respondents completely distrust recommendations from social media influencers regarding clothing brands.
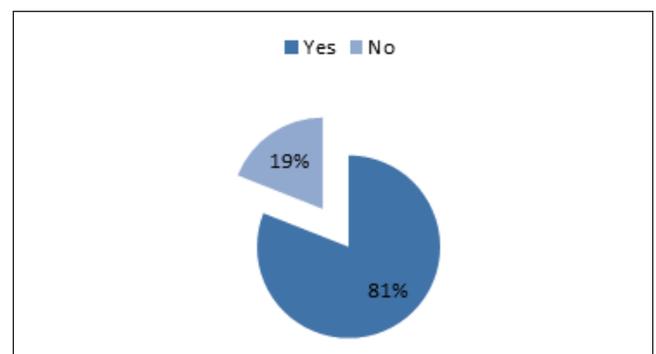
Table 5: Showing whether respondents have ever purchased clothing or accessories based on a recommendation from a social media influencer.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	97	81
No	23	19
Total	120	100

N=120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 5: Showing whether respondents have ever purchased clothing or accessories based on a recommendation from a social media influencer.

Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 81 percent of respondents have purchased clothing or accessories based on a recommendation from

a social media influencer and 19 percent have not purchased clothing or accessories based on a recommendation from a social media influencer.
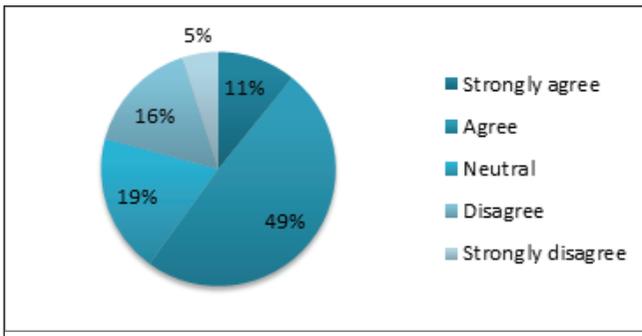
Table 6: Showing whether respondents believe that social media influencers have an impact on the image and perception of clothing brands

Particulars	Observed Frequency (O)	Percentage (%)	χ^2
Strongly agree	13	10.83	5.0417
Agree	59	49.16	50.8333
Neutral	23	19.17	0.0417
Disagree	19	15.83	1.0417
Strongly disagree	6	5.00	13.5
Total	120	100	70.4583

N=120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

6: Showing whether respondents believe that social media influencers have an impact on the image and perception of clothing brands

Analysis: For a significance level of 0.05 and 4 degrees of freedom, the critical Chi-Square value is approximately 9.49. Since our calculated Chi-Square value (70.4583) is greater than the critical Chi-Square value (9.49), we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, indicating that social media influencers do have an impact on the image and perception of clothing brands according to the respondents.

The above table and chart depicts that 49 percent of respondents agree that social media influencers have an impact on the image and perception of clothing brands, 19 percent are neutral, 16 percent disagree, 11 percent strongly agree and 5 percent strongly disagree that social media influencers have an impact on the image and perception of clothing brands.

Table 7: Showing factors influencing respondent's perception of a clothing brand promoted by a social media influencer
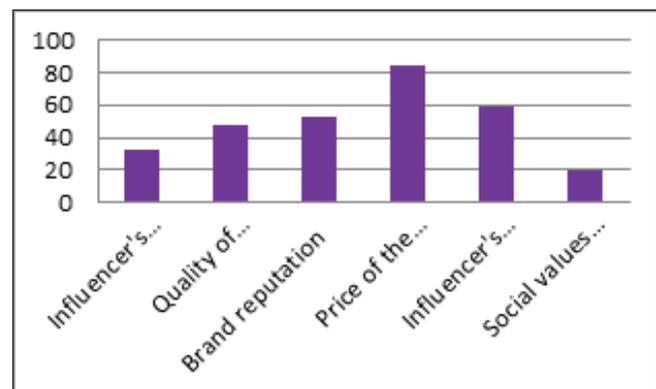
Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Influencer's authenticity	39	32.5
Quality of influencer content	58	48.33
Brand reputation	64	53.33
Price of the clothing	102	85.00
Influencer's popularity	71	59.17
Social values promoted by the brand	23	19.17

N=120   MRR=2.975 SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 7: Showing factors influencing respondent's perception of a clothing brand promoted by a social media influencer


Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 85 percent of respondents are of the opinion that price of the clothing influences their perception of a clothing brand promoted by a social media influencer, 59 percent as influencer's popularity, 53 percent as brand reputation, 48 percent as quality of influencer content, 33 percent as influencer's authenticity and 19 percent as social values promoted by the brand.

Table 8: Showing how often influencer content influences respondent's decision to consider purchasing clothing from a particular brand.

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)	χ2
Always	14	11.67	4.1667
Often	26	21.67	0.1667
Sometimes	53	44.17	35.0417
Rarely	25	20.83	0.0417
Never	02	1.67	20.1667
Total	120	100	59.5833

N=120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 8: Showing how often influencer content influences respondent's decision to consider purchasing clothing from a particular brand.
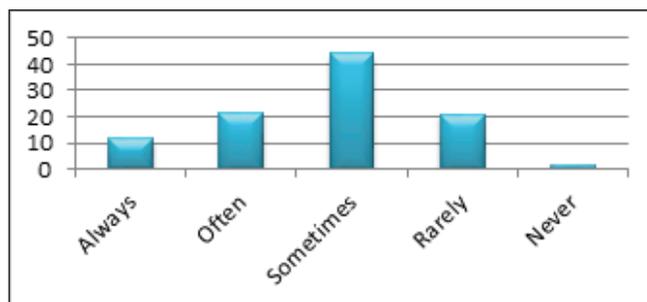
Analysis: For a significance level of 0.05 and 4 degrees of freedom, the critical Chi-Square value is approximately 9.49. Since our calculated Chi-Square value (59.5833) is greater than the critical Chi-Square value (9.49), we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, indicating that influencer content does have an impact on respondents' decision to consider purchasing clothing from a particular brand.
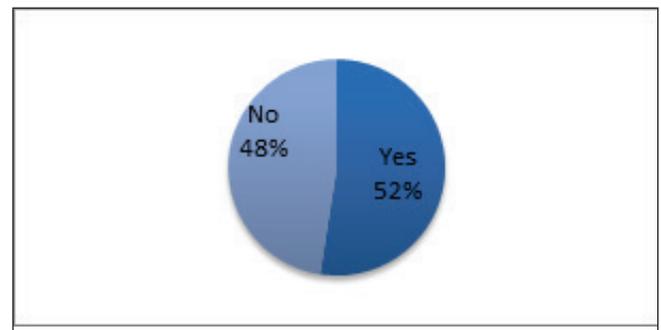
The above table and chart depicts that 44 percent of respondents are of the opinion that, sometimes influencer content influences respondent's decision to consider purchasing clothing from a particular brand, 22 percent as often, 21 percent as rarely, 11 percent as always and 2 percent as influencer content never influences respondent's decision to consider purchasing clothing from a particular brand.

Table 9: Showing whether respondent has ever made a purchase directly after seeing a social media influencer wearing clothing from a specific brand

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	63	52.5
No	57	47.5
Total	120	100

N=120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 9: Showing whether respondent has ever made a purchase directly after seeing a social media influencer wearing clothing from a specific brand

Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 52 percent of respondents have purchased directly after seeing a social media influencer wearing clothing from a specific brand and 48 percent have not purchased directly after seeing a social media influencer wearing clothing from a specific brand.
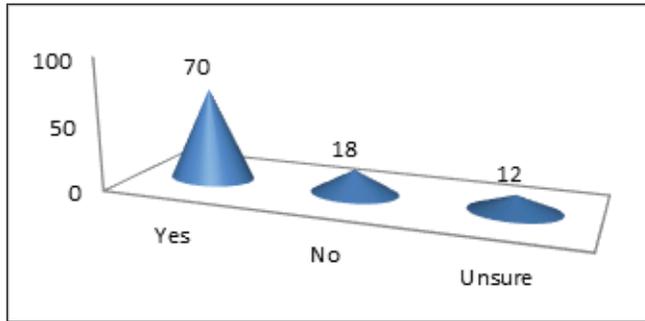
Table 10: Showing respondent's opinion on whether social media influencers should disclose when they are being paid to promote a clothing brand

Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	84	70
No	21	18
Unsure	15	12
Total	120	100

N=120   SOURCE: SURVEY DATA

Figure 10: Showing respondent's opinion on whether social media influencers should disclose

when they are being paid to promote a clothing brand

Analysis: The above table and chart depicts that 70 percent of respondents are of the opinion that social media influencers should disclose when they are being paid to promote a clothing brand, 18 percent as need not disclose and 12 percent are unsure about it.

Findings:

✓ Majority of respondents belong to age group 18-24.

✓ Majority of the respondents are Female.

✓ Almost all the respondents are from urban location.

✓ Most of the respondents have been using social media platform YouTube and Instagram regularly.

✓ Most of the respondents on an average spend 2-3 hours per day on social media.

✓ Most of the respondents occasionally follow social media influencers who promote clothing brands.

✓ Majority of respondents somewhat trust recommendations from social media influencers regarding clothing brands.

✓ Majority of respondents have purchased clothing or accessories based on a recommendation from a social media influencer.

✓ Many respondents agree that social media influencers have an impact on the image and perception of clothing brands. Thus we reject the null hypothesis, indicating that social media influencers do have an impact on the image and perception of clothing brands according to the respondents.

✓ Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that prices of the clothing influences their perception of a clothing brand promoted by a social media influencer.

✓ Most of respondents are of the opinion that, sometimes influencer content influences respondent's decision to consider purchasing clothing from a particular brand. Thus we reject the null hypothesis, indicating that influencer content does have an impact on respondents' decision to consider purchasing clothing from a particular brand.

✓ Most of the respondents have purchased directly after seeing a social media influencer wearing clothing from a specific brand.

✓ Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that social media influencers should disclose when they are being paid to promote a clothing brand.

Suggestions:

✓ Invest in Authenticity: Consumers value authenticity in influencer content. Brands should prioritize authenticity and transparency in influencer partnerships to build trust with their audience and enhance brand credibility.

✓ Diversify Influencer Partnerships: Consider collaborating with a diverse range of influencers, including macro and micro-influencers, to reach different segments of the target audience. Micro-influencers often have highly engaged niche audiences, which can lead to more authentic and impactful brand endorsements.

✓ Prioritize Engagement Over Follower Count: Rather than focusing solely on the number of followers an influencer has, prioritize engagement metrics such as likes, comments,

and shares. High engagement rates indicate a more active and loyal audience, increasing the likelihood of influencer content resonating with consumers.

✓ Enhance Transparency: Ensure clear and conspicuous disclosure of paid partnerships between influencers and clothing brands. Transparent communication about sponsored content builds trust with consumers and mitigates the risk of regulatory scrutiny.

✓ Educate Consumers: Provide consumers with information about influencer marketing practices and the potential for sponsored content on social media platforms.

✓ Regulatory Compliance: Adhere to relevant advertising regulations and guidelines governing influencer marketing, including disclosure requirements and truth in advertising standards. Compliance with regulatory standards helps maintain consumer trust and credibility within the industry.

✓ Long-Term Relationships: Foster long-term relationships with influencers based on mutual trust and shared brand values. Continuity in influencer partnerships can lead to deeper brand integration and sustained impact on consumer perceptions and behaviour.

By implementing these suggestions, brands can harness the power of social media influencers effectively to enhance clothing brand image and drive positive consumer behaviour. Additionally, policymakers can develop regulations and guidelines that promote transparency and ethical practices in influencer marketing, benefiting both brands and consumers.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this research has provided comprehensive insights into the profound influence of social media influencers on clothing brand image and consumer behaviour. Through an analysis of existing literature and empirical data, several key conclusions emerge. Social media influencers wield significant power in shaping consumer perceptions of clothing brands. Their authentic and relatable content resonates with audiences, leading to increased brand awareness, credibility, and purchase intent. Authenticity emerges as a critical factor in influencer marketing effectiveness, with transparent and genuine endorsements garnering greater trust from consumers.

Moreover, influencers play a pivotal role in enhancing brand image and identity, positioning clothing brands as symbols of status and authenticity. Their aspirational lifestyles and curated content shape consumer preferences and drive purchasing decisions across various stages of the buying journey. Ethical considerations, including transparency and disclosure in influencer-brand partnerships, are paramount. Clear and conspicuous disclosure of paid collaborations fosters trust and credibility with consumers, ensuring ethical practices in influencer marketing. Based on the study we reject Null hypothesis, thus indicating Social media influencers' content significantly influences consumer perceptions of clothing brand image and positively affects consumer behaviour, including brand preference, product consideration, and purchase decisions.

In conclusion, by prioritizing authenticity, transparency, and ethical considerations, brands can harness the power of social media influencers effectively to enhance clothing brand image and drive positive consumer behaviour in the dynamic digital landscape of the fashion industry.

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