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Impact of Social Media on Online Shopping Behaviour for Apparel Products among Youths

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Abstract

Social media platforms have transformed apparel retail by integrating product discovery, persuasion, and purchase facilitation within unified commercial ecosystems. This study investigates how social media influences online shopping behaviour for apparel products among youth consumers, examining three key dimensions: platform usage patterns, influencer marketing effects, and social interaction mechanisms. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 178 youth participants (aged 16-30) from Damoh and Sagar districts using stratified purposive sampling. Notably, perceptual measures of social media experiences showed consistently stronger correlations with purchase intention than raw behavioural frequency measures, indicating that quality of exposure and perceived credibility matter more than mere time spent on platforms. The findings support an integrated pathway where exposure quality, influencer credibility, and social proof jointly influence youth apparel purchasing decisions. For marketers, this suggests prioritizing contextually relevant content exposure, partnering with credible influencers, and designing campaigns that encourage meaningful social sharing rather than focusing solely on reach metrics. Univariate normality in data suggests need for robust estimation methods in future structural equation modelling. Social media's impact on youth apparel shopping is not simply about platform usage frequency, but rather the interaction of exposure quality, credible influencer endorsement, and meaningful social validation. This multi-dimensional framework provides both theoretical insights for social commerce research and practical guidance for apparel marketers targeting digitally native youth consumers.

Keywords: Social-Media, Online Shopping, Consumer Behaviour, Youths, Influencers.

1. Introduction

The contemporary retail environment for apparel is being reconfigured by the rapid diffusion of social media platforms, which now operate as multifaceted commercial ecosystems encompassing product discovery, persuasion, purchase facilitation and post-purchase engagement. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook combine high-resolution visual affordances, algorithmic content curation and integrated transactional pathways, enabling firms and individual sellers to reach consumers with unprecedented precision and frequency (Vithayathil, Dadgar & Osiri, 2020; Tzavara, Clarke & Misopoulos, 2019). Empirical research across regional and international settings finds that social media marketing activities influence consumer responses, augment brand equity and increase purchase intentions for apparel brands, suggesting that social media constitutes a central channel in contemporary fashion marketing strategy (Ahmad et al., 2015).

Youth cohorts are of particular interest in studies of social commerce because they exhibit both high intensity of social media use and distinctive fashion consumption patterns. Generation Y and younger cohorts display strong visual orientation, higher susceptibility to trend cues and greater propensity to integrate online content into their evaluative and purchase processes (Tripathi, 2019; McCormick & Livett, 2012). Research on student and youth samples demonstrates that social networks operate as primary information sources for apparel shopping, where image-based content (photos, short videos, reels, stories) performs dual functions: it supplies utilitarian details for product evaluation while simultaneously generating hedonic appeal and self-expressive cues that motivate purchase (McCormick & Livett, 2012; Najihah et al., 2018). These characteristics make youth an analytically important population for examining how social media influences online apparel purchasing behaviour (Akter et al., 2024).

Researchers have conceptualised the social media → purchase pathway by isolating three interrelated antecedent dimensions that are especially relevant for apparel: (1) platform usage and affordances (e.g., Instagram's visuality; Facebook's community features), (2) frequency of exposure to apparel-related content, and (3) trust in social media advertising and transaction mechanisms (Abbas et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2021). Platform-specific studies indicate that Instagram's image-centric design promotes discovery and aspirational engagement, while Facebook's group and page structures foster information exchange and eWOM that assist comparative evaluation (Anupama Jayasuriya & Ferdous Azam, 2017; Francis, Mikda & Ganeshamoorthy, 2024). Repeated exposure to relevant posts increases familiarity and aided recall—processes linked to the mere-exposure effect and shown to raise purchase intention—though the positive influence of frequency is conditional on perceived relevance and non-intrusiveness of content (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018; Jan, De Jager & Sultan, 2020). Trust, meanwhile, emerges as a critical moderator: credibility cues such as transparent brand communication, secure payment options and authentic peer reviews determine whether exposure converts into transactional behaviour (Sharma et al., 2021; Prakash et al., 2023).

A second major axis of recent inquiry concerns influencer marketing. Influencers act as contemporary opinion leaders who combine narrative identity, demonstrative trial and symbolic endorsement—modes of persuasion that resonate strongly in apparel categories where style and identity are central (Madhura, Aithal & Panakaje, 2023). Literature differentiates macro-influencers (broad reach) from micro-influencers (niche audiences and higher perceived authenticity), and several comparative studies find that micro-influencers often generate higher engagement per follower and greater conversion among fashion consumers due to a stronger perception of credibility and contextual fit (Hussain Khan et al., 2019; Xue, Li & Zeng, 2023). Source credibility theory (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) explains much of this effect; when influencer persona and content align closely with the apparel category and the consumer's self-image, persuasive impact on purchase intention is amplified (Kim, Park & Lee, 2013; Schivinski et al., 2022).

Complementing platform and influencer effects are the informational signals embedded in social interactions—likes, shares and comments—that operate as social proof and eWOM. Engagement metrics perform both heuristic and informational functions: high like counts and widespread sharing signal popularity and normative approval, while substantive comments provide evaluative detail that reduces perceived risk and supports decision-making (Kim, Park & Lee, 2013; Bilal, Ahmed & Shahzad, 2014). Empirical work suggests that combinations of engagement types (balanced likes, shares and meaningful comments) produce stronger conversion effects than any single metric in isolation, because they jointly enhance perceived credibility and reach (Schivinski et al., 2022; Jan et al., 2020). Nonetheless, scholars warn that engagement quality—authenticity of comments, meaningful interactions—is a better predictor of durable buying behaviour than sheer volume of superficial metrics (Beig & Khan, 2018; Gul, Shahzad & Khan, 2024).

Despite robust evidence linking social media constructs to apparel purchase outcomes, notable gaps remain that motivate the present study. First, a large proportion of extant research is cross-sectional and skewed toward metropolitan or non-Indian contexts, limiting the generalisability of findings to heterogeneous youth populations and semi-urban settings (Singh & Shukla, 2022; Singhai & Walia, 2025; Madhura & Panakaje, 2023). Second, many studies examine individual constructs—platform usage, influencer effects, or engagement metrics—in isolation rather than within an integrated model that captures their interactive and mediating relationships (Abbas et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2023). Third, contextual moderators such as prior brand loyalty, perceived transactional risk, and local market dynamics (including district-level differences) have been insufficiently explored in youth-centred research, leaving open questions about boundary conditions for social media influence. These lacunae justify an empirically rigorous investigation that models platform usage, influencer credibility and social interactions jointly within a youth sample (Ahmad et al., 2015).

Accordingly, the present paper investigates the impact of social media on online shopping behaviour for apparel products among youths by operationalising three **objectives:** (1) to analyse the influence of social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook) via platform usage, exposure frequency and trust in Ads on consumer purchasing decisions in the apparel sector among youths; (2) to investigate the role of social media influencers through credibility, engagement and content relevance on consumer purchasing decisions of apparel products among youth demographics; and (3) to assess the impact of social media interactions (likes, shares, comments) on consumer purchasing of apparel products among youths. Hypotheses are derived from the literature: that platform usage, exposure and trust positively influence purchase decisions **(H1)**, that influencer attributes like credibility, engagement and relevant content positively affect youth purchase behaviour **(H2)**, and that higher social interactions (likes, shares and comments) increase purchase propensity **(H3)** (Tripathi, 2019; Schivinski et al., 2022; Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018).

The study's contributions are threefold. Empirically, it seeks to produce district- or population-relevant evidence that augments generalizable findings with locally meaningful insights; theoretically, it aims to refine understanding of how social media antecedents interact (usage × influencer credibility × engagement) to produce both attitudinal and behavioural outcomes; and managerially, it intends to yield actionable guidance for apparel marketers on optimizing platform strategies, influencer partnerships and engagement-focused content to reach youth consumers more effectively (Patel et al., 2023; Rai & Sherpa, 2024). This study contributes to theory by testing an integrated model of social media antecedents and consumer outcomes within a youth population, and to practice by offering actionable insights for apparel marketers seeking to optimise platform strategy, influencer partnerships and engagement tactics (Akter et al., 2024).

2. Literature Review

The intersection of social media and apparel consumption has emerged as a pivotal locus for understanding contemporary youth purchasing behaviour. Research in marketing and consumer behaviour increasingly treats social media not merely as an advertising channel but as an ecosystem that shapes information search, evaluative criteria, and final purchase decisions (Tripathi, 2019; Varghese & Agrawal, 2021). Social media platforms—particularly Instagram and Facebook—mediate both firm-created content and user-generated content, producing novel cues (visual affordances, peer signals, influencer endorsements) that modify the traditional buyer decision process for apparel products (Madhura, Aithal & Panakaje, 2023; Abbas et al., 2021). Given the disproportionate adoption of social media by youth cohorts and their elevated fashion consciousness, a focused literature synthesis on youths' apparel purchase behaviour in the context of social media is warranted (Tripathi, 2019; Najihah et al., 2018).

2.1 Social Media Platforms and Online Apparel Shopping (Objective 1 / H1)

Evolution of social media as a marketing tool

Social media platforms have evolved from community and networking spaces into integrated marketing environments that permit discovery, persuasion, transaction and post-purchase engagement within the same architectural frame (Vithayathil, Dadgar & Osiri, 2020; Francis, Mikda & Ganeshamoorthy, 2024). Empirical studies across diverse markets report that firms increasingly allocate resources to platform-specific strategies—Instagram for visual storytelling and product discovery, Facebook for community management and promotional campaigns—reflecting platform affordances that map onto stages of the consumer decision journey (Anupama Jayasuriya & Ferdous Azam, 2017; Tzavara, Clarke & Misopoulos, 2019). This reconfiguration has shifted promotional emphasis from unidirectional mass communication to interactive; content-rich engagements that materially influence purchase intentions in apparel categories (Ahmad et al., 2015).

Social media platform usage: youth patterns and visual content

Youths display distinctive usage patterns characterized by high-frequency platform visits, preference for visually rich formats (images, short videos, reels, stories), and reliance on social feeds for trend cues and peer validation (McCormick & Livett, 2012; Tripathi, 2019). Research indicates that visual presentation and fashion information online generate both utilitarian and hedonic effects—functional product inspection and aesthetic inspiration—thereby enhancing both information sufficiency and emotional desirability for apparel items (McCormick & Livett, 2012). Studies focusing on Facebook and Instagram find passive exposure (scrolling) and active engagement (following, saving, messaging) both contribute to inspiration and later purchase behaviour, though the specific effect sizes vary by content type and user motivations (Tzavara et al., 2019; Singh & Shukla, 2022).

Frequency of exposure to apparel-related content

Advertising and exposure theories (e.g., mere-exposure) suggest repeated contact with brand-related stimuli increases familiarity and preference; empirical work in apparel contexts corroborates that frequency of exposure to fashion posts and advertisements correlates positively with intention to purchase (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018; Jan, De Jager & Sultan, 2020). Several quantitative studies report that content frequency—when coupled with high quality visual cues and contextual relevance—amplifies recall and accelerates the shift from awareness to evaluation, particularly among youth who consume large volumes of fashion content daily (Abbas et al., 2021; Madhura & Panakaje, 2023). However, exposure effects interact with perceived

intrusiveness and platform experience: users who perceive ads as disruptive show attenuated purchase responses, indicating that frequency alone is insufficient without perceived value (Akter et al., 2024).

Trust in social media advertisements

Trust is a decisive moderator of advertising effectiveness on social platforms. Studies identify credibility signals—brand reputation, transparency, secure payment mechanisms, and aggregated customer feedback—as central to converting social exposure into purchases (Sharma et al., 2021; Singhai & Walia, 2025). Research conducted in Indian and South-Asian contexts highlights that while social media broadens reach, consumers (including youth) evaluate ad credibility via multiple heuristics: endorsement sources (celebrity/influencer), content authenticity, and the perceived integrity of transactional infrastructure (Srinivasan, 2015; Prakash et al., 2023). Importantly, the mediating role of brand equity and perceived authenticity is repeatedly demonstrated: social media activities increase brand salience, but only when users perceive the communication as credible does it translate into purchase intention (Basit et al., 2021; Schivinski et al., 2022).

Implications for consumer purchasing decisions

Synthesizing these strands, the literature indicates that platform usage, exposure frequency, and trust operate jointly to shape apparel purchase decisions among youths. High-frequency, visually compelling posts increase awareness and preference; yet conversion hinges on trust and perceived value signalled by brand and peer cues (Patel et al., 2023; Rai & Sherpa, 2024). Consequently, platform-specific tactics—leveraging Instagram's visuality while preserving credibility through transparent messaging and robust service design—are most likely to convert youth engagement into sustained purchase behaviour (Arul Jothi & Mohmadraj Gaffoor, 2017).

2.2 Role of Social Media Influencers in Apparel Shopping (Objective 2 / H2)

Rise of influencer marketing in fashion/apparel sector

Influencers function as contemporary opinion leaders whose content blends personal narrative, product demonstration, and aspirational lifestyle—elements that are particularly potent in apparel categories where aesthetic and self-expression are central (Tripathi, 2019; Madhura, Aithal & Panakaje, 2023). The literature distinguishes macro-influencers (broad reach, mass appeal) from micro-influencers (niche credibility, higher engagement); with evidence suggesting micro-influencers often generate stronger conversion rates per follower in apparel due to perceived authenticity (Hussain Khan et al., 2019; Xue, Li & Zeng, 2023).

Influencer credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness)

Source credibility theory—expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness—remains robust for explaining influencer effects (Kim, Park & Lee, 2013). Empirical studies show that influencer credibility elevates perceived product reliability and reduces risk perceptions, thereby increasing purchase intention among youth (Kim et al., 2013; Schivinski et al., 2022). Credibility interacts with product-fit: when influencer persona aligns with apparel category (e.g., streetwear influencer for casual apparel), persuasive impact strengthens (Arul Jothi & Mohmadraj Gaffoor, 2017).

Influencer engagement metrics and social proof (followers, likes, comments)

Followers, likes and comments serve as quantitative proxies for social proof; research suggests these engagement metrics amplify persuasion via normative influence and perceived popularity (Singh & Shukla, 2022; Beig & Khan, 2018). However, studies also warn against overreliance on raw follower counts:

engagement quality (meaningful comments, repeated endorsements) is a better predictor of behavioural outcomes than superficial metrics (Gul, Shahzad & Khan, 2024; Schivinski et al., 2022).

Relevance of influencer content to apparel products

Content–product fit is crucial. When influencer content demonstrates use-cases, styling ideas, and honest appraisals, consumer purchase intentions increase because the content reduces perceived uncertainty and improves imagined ownership (McCormick & Livett, 2012; Kang, Johnson & Wu, 2014). Studies emphasize that narrative contexts (how the influencer styles or tests a garment) produce stronger behavioural cues than mere display posts or paid promotions lacking informative depth (Arul Jothi & Mohmadraj Gaffoor, 2017).

Influence on youth purchasing decisions

Cumulative evidence supports the hypothesis that influencers positively affect apparel purchases among youth, through direct recommendation, promotional mechanics (codes/promos), and identity-based persuasion (Tripathi, 2019; Miah et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the magnitude of influence depends on moderator variables including prior brand loyalty, perceived influencer authenticity, and demographic segmentation (age subgroups within youth). Comparative studies position influencer marketing as more cost-efficient and relational than traditional celebrity endorsement, especially for digitally native cohorts (Tzavara et al., 2019; Abbas et al., 2021).

2.3 Social Media Interactions and Consumer Purchasing Behaviour (Objective 3 / H3)

Social media engagement as a driver of consumer behaviour

Likes, shares and comments constitute interactional signals that perform several functions: they index popularity, provide evaluative information, and generate network diffusion effects (Bilal, Ahmed & Shahzad, 2014; Beig & Khan, 2018). Engagement operates both as a direct cue influencing perceptions of product desirability and as a mechanism for eWOM propagation that extends reach and credibility (Arul Jothi & Mohmadraj Gaffoor, 2017).

Number of likes on apparel posts: popularity and herd effects

Likes often operate as heuristic cues; higher like counts imply social endorsement and reduce uncertainty, thus increasing purchase propensity among impression-sensitive youth (Singh & Shukla, 2022). Nevertheless, research cautions that likes alone—without substantive comment content or source credibility—may produce transient interest rather than durable purchase behaviour (Gul et al., 2024).

Number of shares of apparel-related content: virality and credibility

Content that is shared generates peer-to-peer diffusion and confers a higher credibility premium than paid ads, because shares imply voluntary endorsement by peers or opinion leaders (Xue et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2013). Studies show shared apparel content often reaches network clusters that would remain inaccessible to direct brand posts, thereby widening the funnel for discovery and consideration (Chaturvedi & Gupta, 2014).

Number of comments and user-generated content

Comments—especially substantive user reviews—enhance perceived authenticity and deliver detailed product insights that facilitate risk reduction (Kim et al., 2013; Singhai & Walia, 2025). Research also documents that the sentiment and volume of comments influence youth purchase decisions: positive, specific comments are more persuasive than generic praise, and high comment volume amplifies perceived social validation (Nasir et al., 2012).

Relationship between engagement and purchasing decisions

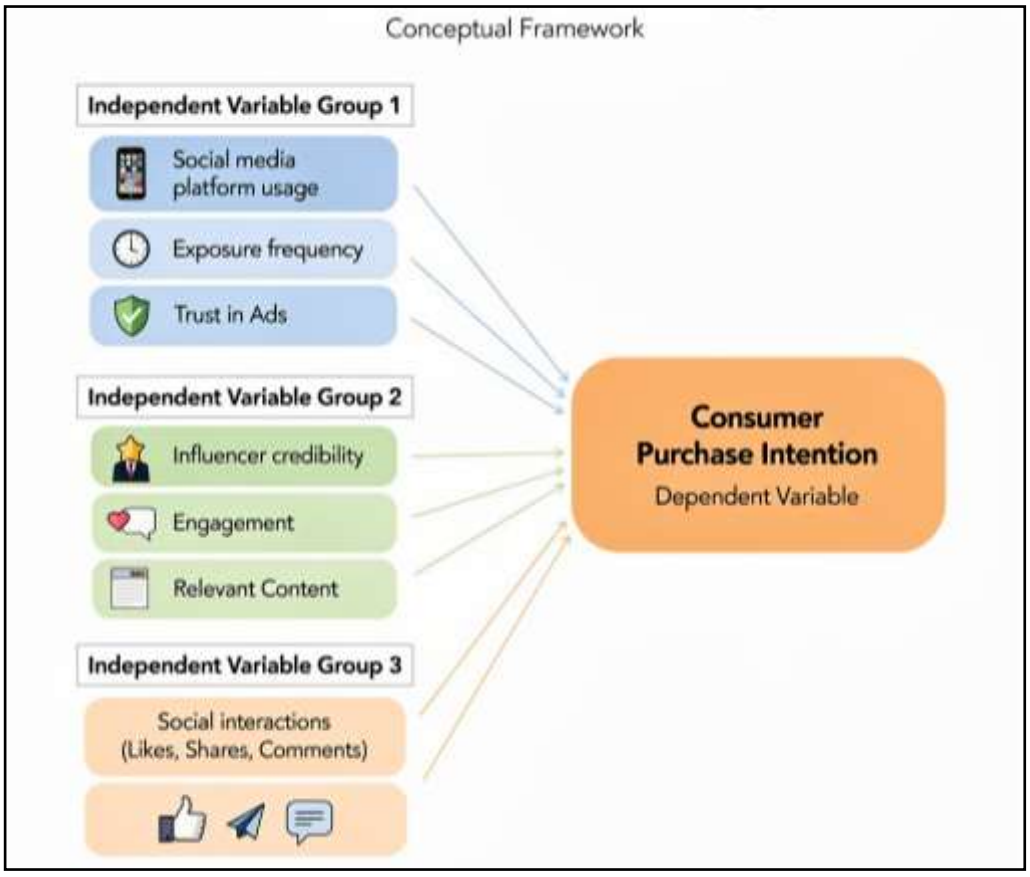
Taken together, interaction metrics are not merely vanity statistics; they shape the information environment in which youth form attitudes and intentions. The literature indicates a cumulative effect—where rich engagement (balanced likes, shares, and meaningful comments) produces stronger conversion than any single metric in isolation (Schivinski et al., 2022; Jan et al., 2020). Consequently, H3—that higher interactions increase purchasing behaviour among youth—finds broad empirical support, subject to conditionalities of content quality and source credibility (Ng et al., 2025).

2.4 Research Gaps

Although the literature robustly demonstrates linkages between social media constructs and apparel purchase behaviour, several gaps persist. First, much of the extant evidence is cross-sectional and concentrated in metropolitan or foreign samples; district-level, semi-urban and localized studies (e.g., Sagar district) are limited, constraining contextual generalization (Singhai & Walia, 2025; Singh & Shukla, 2022). Second, comparative analyses that simultaneously model platform usage, influencer effects and interaction metrics in a single integrated framework are scarce; most studies examine only one or two constructs rather than the full assemblage of social media affordances (Madhura & Panakaje, 2023; Abbas et al., 2021). Third, the conditional role of moderators—such as self-congruity, prior brand loyalty, and perceived transactional security—warrants further empirical unpacking within youth populations (Schivinski et al., 2022; Srinivasan, 2015).

2.5 Conceptual Framework (based on objectives)

Based on the reviewed literature, a parsimonious conceptual model emerges: platform usage, exposure frequency and trust (Objective 1); influencer credibility, engagement and content relevance (Objective 2); and interaction metrics (likes, shares, comments — Objective 3).



3. Research Methodology

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design will be used to test the hypothesised relationships among platform usage, exposure frequency, trust, influencer attributes, social interactions and purchase behaviour among youth (16–30 years). This deductive approach—employing structured measurement scales and inferential statistics—is consistent with prior empirical work in the domain and is well-suited for hypothesis testing and model estimation (Jan, De Jager & Sultan, 2020; Miah et al., 2022). Cross-sectional survey data allow estimation of associations and mediation/moderation effects via regression techniques commonly applied in social-commerce research (Chaturvedi & Gupta, 2014).

Population: Youths (aged 16–30) who use social media (Instagram/Facebook) and have purchased or considered purchasing apparel via social media in Damoh & Sagar District.

Sampling frame: University/college students, young working professionals and active social media users identified through educational institutions, local youth clubs, and social media communities/pages that cater to Damoh & Sagar district audiences.

Sampling technique: A stratified purposive sampling approach is recommended. Strata will be formed by age subgroups (16-18, 19-21, 22-24, 25-27, 28-30), gender and urban/semi-urban residence to ensure representation across key demographic controls. Purposive elements (targeting social-media shoppers) are necessary to ensure respondents meet the eligibility criterion (recent social-media apparel shopping) — an approach used in comparable studies examining SNS shopping behaviour (Miah et al., 2022; Sultana, 2018).

Sample size: For robust analysis, the literature recommends moderately large samples. Empirical studies in the field typically range from ~100 to 222 respondents (Jan et al., 2020; Schivinski et al., 2022). Following these precedents and rules-of-thumb (10 observations per estimated parameter/item), a target sample of 100–200 usable responses is proposed. Actual 178 samples were collected from Damoh & Sagar District (Park & Cho, 2012).

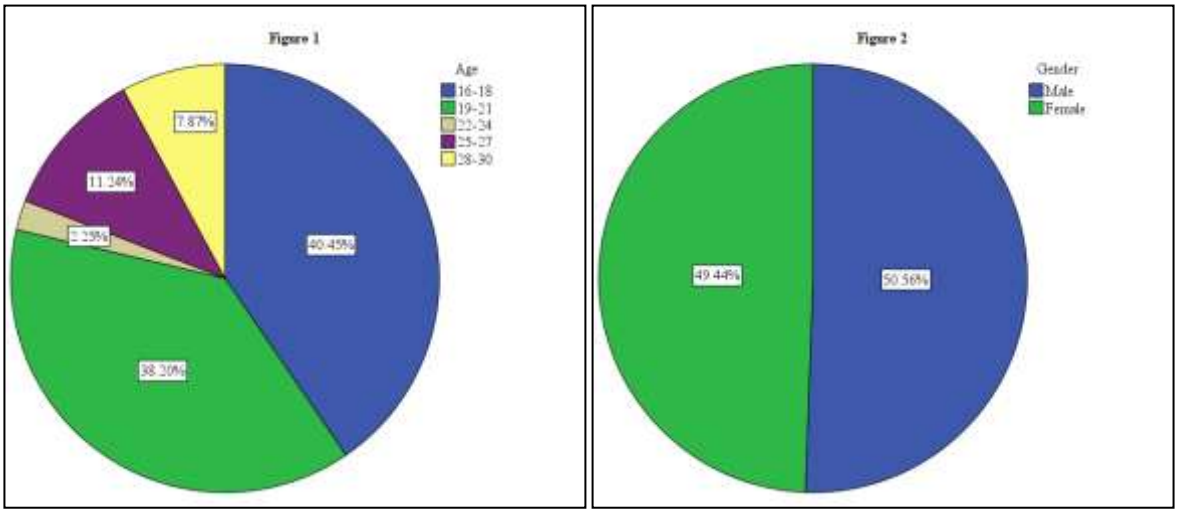
Instrument: A structured self-administered questionnaire combining demographic items, behavioural frequency items, and multi-item psychometric scales (Likert-type). Several prior studies in apparel/social-media contexts have successfully employed similar instruments (Abbas et al., 2021; Jan et al., 2020; Rai & Sherpa, 2024).

Scale format: 5-point Likert (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree) for attitudinal items. Some prior apparel studies also used six-point scales; selection of 5-point is justified by respondent familiarity and comparability with numerous studies in the provided literature (Nasir et al., 2012).

Questionnaire development: Items will be adapted from validated scales used in the reviewed literature; where novel items are required (contextualised to youth); they will be piloted and refined (Park & Cho, 2012).

Mode: A mixed collection mode is advisable — primarily an online survey (Google Forms/Qualtrics) distributed via targeted social media communities, college email lists and local youth groups, supplemented with in-person distribution at colleges or youth events to reach respondents with limited online connectivity (Ng et al., 2025). Mixed modes have been used effectively in related research to improve representativeness (Abbas et al., 2021; Sammanasu & Tantuway, 2021).

Ethics: Participation will be voluntary, with informed consent, confidentiality assurances and a clear statement on the purpose of research. Data storage will conform to institutional ethics requirements. Ethical transparency aligns with the standards observed in prior empirical investigations in the literature (Nasir et al., 2012).



4. Data Analysis & Interpretation

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of samples collected, maximum were of age group 16-18 (40.45%) & 19-20 (38.20%), which represents ample youths data being collected for research. Figure 2 shows that almost half of the samples were male & half were female (50.56% & 49.44% respectively).

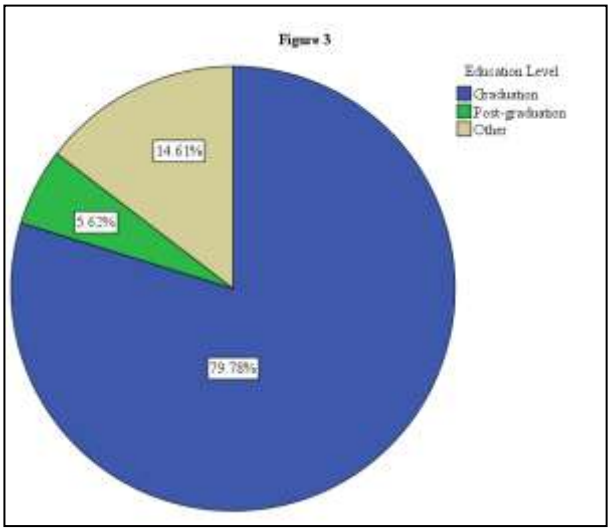


Figure 3 shows that maximum sample collected have the education level up to graduation (79.78%). Post-graduates were 5.62%. And rest 14.61% have any other qualifications.

Sample diagnostics and internal consistency

Reliability: The measurement instrument demonstrates excellent internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha for the full set of 19 items is **$\alpha = 0.946$** (standardised $\alpha = 0.948$), indicating that the items form a coherent scale suitable for multivariate analysis (Annexure 1; Table 1). High alpha supports aggregation of items into composite scores (or latent constructs) for subsequent factor analysis (Park & Cho, 2012).

Normality checks — distributional properties and analytic implications

Results: Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests are not statistically significant ($p>0.05$) for all measured variables, indicating consistency with univariate normality across items (Annexure 2; Table 2). With $N = 178$, these tests accept normality for every construct (Miah et al., 2022; Schivinski et al., 2022). **Sampling**

adequacy: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) = **0.876** and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (χ^2 = **2148.351**, df = 153, p < .001) confirm that the correlation matrix is factorable and that factor-analysis procedures are appropriate for these data (Annexure 3; Table 3). These diagnostics together indicate both internal consistency and suitability for dimension reduction / CFA (Sheela & Selvi, 2025). **Inference / literature connection:** Strong reliability and adequate KMO mirror standard psychometric quality seen in prior social-commerce and apparel-survey studies, which likewise stipulate α > .70 and KMO > .60 as preconditions for EFA/CFA (Jan et al., 2020; Schivinski et al., 2022).

Factor structure and explained variance

Principal component / extraction results: Principal Component Analysis reports a dominant first eigenvalue (8.981; 49.89% of variance). After rotation, three components together explain **≈63.98%** of the variance (rotation sums: component1 ~22.70%, component2 ~22.29%, component3 ~18.99%) (Annexure 4; Table 4) (Sheela & Selvi, 2025). **Interpretation:** The extraction indicates a multi-dimensional but parsimonious structure: three rotated components capture the bulk of information in the item set. Although the Table 4 show item loadings in the rotation matrix, the three-component solution is consistent with an a priori conceptual grouping (platform-related, influencer-related, and interaction-related dimensions). The retained variance (~64%) is acceptable for social-science scales and corresponds to findings from similar apparel/social-media studies in which a handful of latent dimensions typically represent the observed measures (Madhura & Panakaje, 2023; Kang & Johnson, 2013).

Descriptive means and one-sample t tests — central tendencies

Observed means (one-sample t tests vs. test value = 0). Annexure 5; Table 5 reports the sample means (expressed there as "mean difference" from zero because the t-test used 0 as the test value). Key observed means are: Platforms Usage: IV mean = **2.236**; DV mean = **2.674**. Platforms Exposure: IV mean = **1.989**; DV mean = **2.404**. Platforms Trust: IV mean = **2.820**; DV mean = **2.483**. Influencer Credibility: IV mean = **2.640**; DV mean = **2.843**. Influencer Engagement: IV mean = **2.966**; DV mean = **2.596**. Interactions — Likes/Shares/Comments: IV and DV means mostly in the **~2.08–2.99** range, with the highest single mean at **Interactions Shares (DV) = 2.989**.

All one-sample t tests are significant (p < .05) because the test compares observed means to zero; significance here primarily indicates respondents' scale scores are reliably non-zero. The substantive interpretation rests on the magnitude of the means relative to the measurement scale (presumed 1–5 Likert where a neutral midpoint = 3) (Sheela & Selvi, 2025). **Interpretation:** On average the sample's item responses lie below the neutral midpoint of 3 but cluster near it (grand mean reported in ANOVA section = **2.59**). This pattern indicates moderate (but not high) levels of agreement or intensity across platform usage, exposure, trust, influencer attributes and interaction metrics. In plain terms: youth respondents in this sample report mild-to-moderate engagement and influence rather than extreme enthusiasm or rejection. The highest relative scores for shares and some engagement indicators suggest that sharing behaviour and influencer credibility (DV) are comparatively stronger cues in this cohort (Siddiqui et al., 2025). Relation to prior studies: Moderate mean levels (rather than high ceiling effects) are consistent with studies that find variable intensity of social commerce adoption in semi-urban or district-level youth samples (Singh & Shukla, 2022; Madhura et al., 2023), suggesting context matters for absolute level of engagement even where relational effects may be strong (Tissera & Mudiyanse, 2022).

Bivariate relationships — Pearson correlations with purchase intention

Primary results (Annexure 6; Table 6): Pearson correlation coefficients between each construct and **Purchase Intention (DV)** reveal consistently positive and, in many cases, strong relationships. The strongest observed correlations with purchase intention are: Platforms Exposure (DV): r = 0.819, Influencers Credibility (DV): r = 0.817, Interactions Shares (DV): r = 0.799, Platforms Trust (DV): r = 0.746, Influencers Engagement (DV): r = 0.755, Interactions Comments (DV): r = 0.739.

Other notable correlations include Interactions Likes (DV) r = .680 and Platforms Usage (DV) r = .717. By contrast, the IV-coded (behaviour/frequency) measures tend to show moderately lower correlations (e.g., Platforms Usage IV r = .586, Platforms Exposure IV r = .481) than their DV counterparts.

Interpretation: The pattern is clear: perceptual or evaluative measures (labelled "DV" in the paired constructs) — which likely capture respondents' attitudinal or outcome-oriented perceptions — exhibit stronger correlations with purchase intention than raw behavioural frequency measures (the "IV" versions). In substantive terms, while mere usage frequency matters, how respondents experience exposure, trust, influencer credibility and the perceived value of interactions is more powerfully associated with their stated intention to purchase apparel via social media (Siddiqui et al., 2025). **Inferences about predictors:** The top three correlates (platform exposure, influencer credibility, and shares) point to a combined mechanism: Exposure (frequency/visibility of apparel content) drives awareness and familiarity — a classic advertising effect (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018). Influencer credibility provides persuasive authority and risk reduction (source-credibility mechanism; Kim et al., 2013). Sharing behaviour functions as social proof and peer endorsement that amplifies the effect of exposure and credibility (Bilal et al., 2014; Xue et al., 2023).

Taken together, the data suggest a mediation/chain effect is plausible in which exposure → influencer validation / interactional social proof → purchase intention. These empirical relationships are consistent with moderated-mediation frameworks recommended in contemporary social-commerce studies (Schivinski et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2023).

Between-group differences (ANOVA) — heterogeneity across strata

Results: ANOVA tables (Annexure 8; Table 8) show highly significant between-groups differences for every principal construct (all F tests p = .000). The reported between-groups df = 25 indicates multiple group partitions (e.g., demographic or segmented categories); across all constructs the between-groups mean squares exceed within-groups mean squares sufficiently to produce significant F statistics. Tukey's test of nonadditivity also produced a statistically significant estimate, and the grand mean reported was **2.59** (Annexure 7; Table 7). **Interpretation:** Significant ANOVAs mean that population subgroups differ systematically in levels of platform usage, exposure, trust, influencer perceptions and social interactions. This supports modelling demographic controls (age subgroups within the youth band, gender, income, education, urban/semi-urban residence) as covariates or interaction terms in multivariate models. In other words, while overall correlational patterns are strong, effects are not uniform across all respondent groups: segmentation matters (Tissera & Mudiyanse, 2022). **Link to literature:** Heterogeneity across demographic groups is widely reported in prior work; scholars emphasise the moderating roles of age, prior brand loyalty and socio-economic factors when explaining social-media effects on apparel purchasing (Srinivasan, 2015; Singh & Shukla, 2022; Patel et al., 2023). The ANOVA findings here justify the inclusion of control variables and subgroup analysis in subsequent modelling.

Important nuance: Although many IV-coded behavioural frequency items are positively correlated with purchase intention, their correlation magnitudes are consistently lower than the respondents' evaluative DV measures. This suggests the quality of exposure and social signals (credibility, perceived authenticity,

meaningful comments and shares) is more consequential for intention than mere time-on-platform or raw frequency of encounters — a pattern noted in qualitative and mixed-method studies of fashion e-commerce (McCormick & Livett, 2012; Xue et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion

Given Platforms Exposure (DV) strongly predicts intention, marketers should focus on repetitive, contextually relevant exposures — not intrusive volume — to build familiarity and salience (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018). High correlations for Influencer Credibility and Engagement indicate influencer selection (fit, authenticity, and trustworthiness) will materially affect youth purchasing propensity. Micro-influencers with high engagement may be particularly effective (Madhura et al., 2023). Shares and substantive comments act as powerful social proof signals; campaigns that encourage peer-sharing and solicit meaningful user feedback are likely to amplify conversion. ANOVA results imply heterogeneity across strata; therefore targeted messaging by age subgroup, gender and local context will likely improve effectiveness.

Univariate normality (Annexure 2; Table 2) constrains some parametric inferences; corrective methods should be used in SEM/regression. The rotation/component summary is provided but individual item loadings and cross-loadings are not shown in the file; these are necessary to assign specific items to the three rotated components with confidence. Future reporting should include the rotated component matrix and factor loadings. Cross-sectional design and sample scope (N = 178) – the analysis supports associations and correlational inference but not definitive causal claims. Generalisability beyond the sampled youth cohort should be done cautiously.

This study examined the impact of social media on online shopping behaviour for apparel products among youths, operationalising three core objectives: (1) to analyse the influence of platform usage, exposure frequency and trust on purchase decisions; (2) to investigate the role of social media influencers (credibility, engagement, content relevance); and (3) to assess the effect of social media interactions (likes, shares, comments) on purchase behaviour. The research combined a focused survey approach with psychometric validation and multivariate analysis to test hypotheses derived from the extant literature on social commerce and fashion consumption among young consumers.

Empirical results demonstrate that the measurement instrument is psychometrically sound (Cronbach's α = .946; KMO = .876) and that a three-component latent structure captures the majority of variance in the item set (~64%). Most importantly, perceptual/evaluative measures — notably platform exposure, influencer credibility, and shareability — display the strongest positive associations with purchase intention (ranging approximately r = .799–.819), while raw behavioural frequency measures, though positively related, show smaller correlations. These patterns indicate that the quality and perceived value of exposure and social signals (credibility and meaningful engagement), rather than simple time-on-platform, are the principal drivers of youth propensity to buy apparel via social media in the sampled cohort.

The empirical findings align closely with prior theoretical and applied research. The dominant role of exposure quality is consistent with advertising and mere-exposure theory applied in fashion contexts, which emphasises familiarity coupled with contextual relevance as antecedents of preference (Aragoncillo & Orús; Jan et al.). Likewise, the strong effect of influencer credibility corroborates source-credibility formulations (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) that explain how influencers reduce perceived purchase risk and stimulate intention (Kim, Park & Lee; Madhura et al.). The pronounced influence of shares and substantive comments reinforces the importance of social proof and eWOM in amplifying persuasive effects and expanding reach (Bilal et al.; Schivinski et al.). In sum, the data empirically validate an integrated pathway in which exposure → credibility/social proof → purchase intention operates robustly among youth.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes by empirically supporting a multi-dimensional social-media antecedent system for apparel purchasing among youths, showing that platform affordances, influencer dynamics and interaction metrics should be modelled together rather than in isolation. The results encourage researchers to adopt conditional and mediated models (for example, testing influencer credibility as a mediator of exposure effects and trust/brand loyalty as moderators) to capture the nuanced mechanisms observed in the data. This integrative perspective responds to identified gaps in the literature that call for combined analyses of platform usage, influencer effects and engagement quality in non-metropolitan contexts.

Managerially, the findings suggest four actionable priorities for apparel marketers targeting youth segments: (1) emphasise quality, contextually relevant exposure on Instagram and Facebook rather than indiscriminate ad volume; (2) partner with influencers selected for genuine credibility and category fit (micro-influencers may offer favourable engagement-to-cost ratios); (3) design campaigns to encourage shareability and elicit substantive comments (user reviews and peer endorsements); and (4) segment communications by demographic and contextual moderators (age subgroups, prior brand loyalty, perceived transaction risk) because effects vary across groups. These prescriptions follow directly from the strongest empirical correlates identified in the analysis.

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