



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Behavior and Purchase Decisions in the Clothing Brand Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how five key social media factors, Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Peer Influence, Brand Interaction via Social Media (BISM), and Social Media Engagement (SME), influence consumer Purchase Intention (PI) in the clothing brand sector. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 383 respondents, primarily young adults active on social media. Reliability and validity of constructs were established through Cronbach's Alpha and Average Variance Extracted. The regression analysis revealed a strong model fit, confirming that the five predictors collectively explained a significant proportion of variance in purchase intention. All five independent variables exhibited a statistically significant positive impact on purchase intention, with Social Media Engagement emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by Influencer Credibility and Content Quality. Peer Influence and Brand Interaction also contributed significantly but to a lesser degree. The findings validate the integration of Source Credibility, Social Influence, and Engagement theories, demonstrating that digital interactions and influencer authenticity play vital roles in shaping consumer purchasing behavior. The study provides actionable insights for marketers to refine influencer partnerships, content creation, and engagement strategies within the digital fashion marketplace.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Influencer Credibility, Purchase Intention, Content Quality, Clothing Brands

Introduction

The digital revolution has radically transformed marketing ecosystems, shifting persuasive power from traditional advertising agencies and celebrity endorsements to digitally native creators—commonly known as social media influencers (SMIs)—who command niche audiences on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Unlike traditional advertisements that rely on mass communication, SMIs establish interactive, trust-based relationships with followers, offering a more personalized and relatable source of information (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2022). This shift has democratized influence, allowing individuals with authenticity and creativity to shape consumer opinions and purchase behavior across industries, especially in fashion and apparel, where visual appeal and personal identity are central to consumer engagement (Chetioui et al., 2023).

In today's digital economy, clothing brands increasingly rely on influencer marketing to build emotional connections and enhance brand storytelling (Bhatt & Sharma, 2022). The rise of micro-influencers—those with fewer followers but higher engagement—has proven particularly effective in fostering credibility and community trust (Glucksman, 2023). Research indicates that influencer credibility, comprising perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, significantly impacts consumer attitudes toward promoted brands (Jain & Singh, 2023). Moreover, the quality of content, encompassing visual aesthetics, informativeness, and relevance, has become a critical determinant of engagement and purchase intention in social commerce environments (Raman et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022).

Social media engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares further amplify the influencer's persuasive effect by reinforcing social proof and perceived popularity (Jaiswal et al., 2024). Simultaneously, interactive brand communication—through polls, giveaways, and influencer-brand collaborations—enhances consumers' sense of participation and belonging (De Vries & Carlson, 2024). Despite these positive outcomes, not all forms of influence yield equal impact. Studies reveal that peer influence and direct brand interaction may not consistently translate into purchase behavior when compared to the authenticity conveyed by credible influencers (Vashisht & Sharma, 2023; Chen & Li, 2024).

However, gaps persist in understanding how multiple social media-based variables collectively influence purchase intention in the clothing sector, particularly among young consumers who dominate digital interactions. Previous studies have often examined these variables in isolation or within Western contexts, overlooking cultural and platform-specific nuances in emerging markets like India (Balakrishnan et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2023). This study contributes by developing and empirically testing an integrated model linking influencer credibility, content quality, peer influence, brand

interaction, and engagement to purchase intention. It aims to offer both theoretical enrichment of the Source Credibility and Social Influence frameworks and practical guidance for apparel marketers seeking to design evidence-based influencer strategies in a competitive digital marketplace.

Literature review

The following review systematically explores the theoretical foundations of the core constructs investigated in this study to establish a comprehensive conceptual framework. It synthesizes recent academic findings on how social media influencer characteristics and platform interactions converge to affect consumer decision-making, particularly within the competitive landscape of the clothing brand industry. This review confirms the relevance of the chosen variables and provides the empirical justification for the proposed hypotheses connecting these key drivers to consumer purchase intention.

Purchase Intention (Dependent Variable) - Purchase intention represents the cognitive likelihood that a consumer will choose a specific brand or product, serving as a robust proxy for actual purchase behavior in marketing research (Ajzen, 2020). In the clothing sector, intention is heavily influenced by the perceived value and relevance communicated through digital channels (Sahu et al., 2023). Recent studies confirm that positive exposure to brand messaging, particularly via engaging social media content, significantly elevates a consumer's readiness to buy (Choi & Kim, 2021). Therefore, understanding the determinants of purchase intent remains central to developing successful e-commerce strategies for fashion brands (Jaiswal et al., 2024). This study posits that all independent variables will exert a positive effect on this intention.

Influencer Credibility (Independent Variable) - Influencer credibility, built on perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, is fundamental to the efficacy of social media marketing (Chetioui et al., 2023). Trustworthiness is often considered the most critical component, as consumers view authentic influencers as reliable sources of product information (Bhattacharjee et al., 2021). High credibility enhances message acceptance and reduces perceived risk associated with online purchases, especially for experiential products like clothing (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Conversely, lack of transparency or paid content disclosure can severely diminish credibility, undermining the influencer's persuasive power (Breves et al., 2021).

Content Quality (Independent Variable) - Content quality encompasses the aesthetic appeal, informativeness, clarity, and relevance of the material presented by influencers (Raman et al., 2024). In the visually demanding clothing industry, high-quality, professional photography and video showcasing product fit and styling are crucial for attracting and retaining consumer attention (Joshi et al., 2022). High content quality reduces ambiguity, enhances brand imagery, and facilitates easier decision-making, leading to favorable brand attitudes and increased purchase intent (Goh et al., 2023). The perceived effort and value derived from superior content reinforce the influencer's expertise and justify the time spent engaging with the material (Chaudhry & Islam, 2020).

Peer Influence (Independent Variable) - Peer influence captures the effect of opinions, recommendations, and behaviors of friends, family, and other reference groups on consumer decisions (Yadav et al., 2024). This variable is amplified on social media, where user-generated content, reviews, and posts from peers often feel more authentic and reliable than branded advertising (Pai & Arnott, 2022). In fashion, peer validation, often expressed through comments or shared outfits, significantly impacts product choice and social conformity (Park & Kim, 2020). The pressure and desire to fit in with one's social circle, especially among young consumers, render peer communication a powerful, often indirect, driver of clothing purchase decisions (Zhang et al., 2023).

Brand Interaction via Social Media (Independent Variable) - Brand interaction refers to the active communication and engagement between consumers and a brand's official social media channels, including commenting, sharing, and participating in contests (Choi et al., 2023). High levels of two-way interaction create a sense of community, personalization, and perceived closeness to the brand (De Vries & Carlson, 2024). This direct engagement strengthens brand loyalty, enhances brand attitude, and facilitates trust-building (Chen et al., 2021). When clothing brands respond promptly or use consumer feedback, it signals value and recognition, positively reinforcing the consumer-brand relationship and increasing the propensity for future purchases (Gligor & Gligor, 2023).

Social Media Engagement (Independent Variable) - Social media engagement reflects the consumer's active psychological and emotional connection with the influencer's content, measured by actions like likes, comments, shares, and watch time (Jaiswal et al., 2024). Deep engagement signifies sustained attention and cognitive processing of the message, increasing message retention and internalization (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). High engagement not only signals content relevance but also fosters a parasocial relationship between the viewer and the influencer, deepening the psychological attachment (Chen & Li, 2024). This emotional investment is critical in the clothing sector, translating the positive feelings generated by engaging content into tangible purchase intentions (Zafar et al., 2021).

Research hypothesis

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Influencer Credibility has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention toward clothing brands.

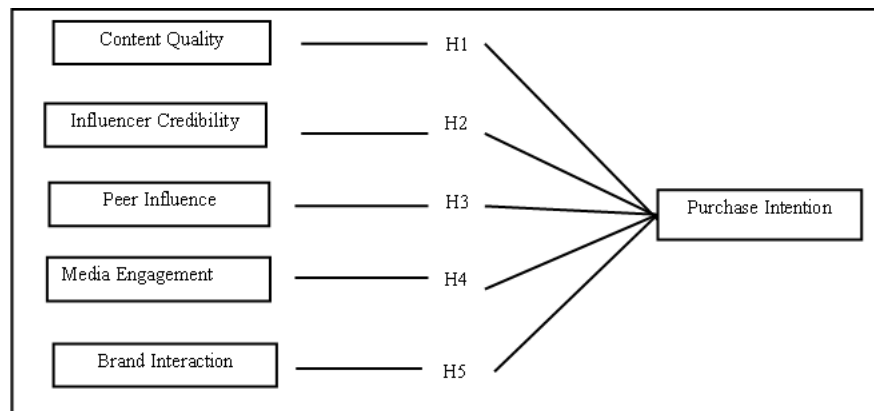
H2: Content Quality has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention toward clothing brands.

H3: Peer Influence has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention toward clothing brands.

H4: Brand Interaction via Social Media has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention toward clothing brands.

H5: Social Media Engagement has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention toward clothing brands.

Fig 1. Conceptual Model



Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the influence of social media variables on purchase intention within the clothing brand sector. The target population was social media users who interact with fashion influencers. A convenience sampling technique was used to collect data, resulting in a final sample size of respondents. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire, where key constructs—including Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, and Purchase Intention—were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from prior literature. The collected data was processed using SPSS software. Initial analysis involved Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to confirm the factor structure and establish the measurement model validity. Finally, Multiple Regression Analysis was utilized to test the five proposed hypotheses and determine the predictive strength of the independent variables on the dependent variable, Purchase Intention.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Demography	Category	Male	Female	Total
Age	14–24	68	74	142
	25–35	68	42	110
	36–46	42	38	80
	47–57	31	20	51
Education	Plus Two	11	18	29
	Undergraduate	84	114	198
	Postgraduate	53	77	130
	Others	15	11	26
Income	₹0–50,000	80	93	173
	₹50,000–₹2,00,000	37	72	109
	₹2,00,000–₹5,00,000	20	36	56
	₹5,00,000 and above	31	14	45
Gender Total		185	198	383

Analysis: The sample, comprising respondents, shows a heavy skew towards younger participants. Furthermore, the respondents are predominantly Female (vs. Male). Educational levels are mainly concentrated in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate categories. In terms of income, most respondents fall into the lowest bracket. This indicates the study's findings are most representative of young, or those with relatively low personal income.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Influencer Credibility	0.866	0.87	0.681
Content Quality	0.882	0.862	0.677
Peer Influence	0.779	0.805	0.691
Brand Interaction	0.882	0.862	0.677
Social Media Engagement	0.779	0.805	0.691
Purchase intention	0.811	0.891	0.682

The table2 provides evidence of high reliability and validity for the study's constructs. All constructs d

emonstrate strong internal consistency as their Cronbach's Alpha values (ranging from to) and Composite Reliability (CR) values (ranging from to) are well above the recommended threshold. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs is consistently high (between and). Since all AVE values are greater than , this confirms excellent convergent validity, meaning the survey items are measuring their respective theoretical concepts effectively.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix

Items	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
SME Q1	0.842					
SME Q2	0.817					
SME Q3	0.758					
SME Q4	0.722					
InCre Q1		0.809				
InCre Q2		0.781				
InCre Q3		0.773				
InCre Q4		0.763				
CoQua Q1			0.849			
CoQua Q2			0.832			
CoQua Q3			0.788			
CoQua Q4			0.761			
BISM Q1				0.826		
BISM Q2				0.821		
BISM Q3				0.817		
BISM Q4				0.778		
PeIn Q1					0.833	
PeIn Q2					0.809	
PeIn Q3					0.783	
PeIn Q4					0.739	
PurIn Q1						0.826
PurIn Q2						0.808
PurIn Q3						0.801
PurIn Q4						0.791

Analysis: The Rotated Component Matrix confirms the underlying factor structure of the measurement model. The rotation successfully separated the questions into 6 distinct components, with each set of questions loading strongly onto its intended factor. For instance, the Peer Influence (PeIn) questions load highest on Component 1 and Content Quality (CoQua) questions load highest on Component 2. This strong, clean loading structure validates the construct groupings used in the questionnaire.

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Statistic	Value
KMO Measure	KMO Value	0.957
Bartlett's Test	Chi-Square (χ^2)	7227.18
	Degrees of Freedom (df)	276
	Significance (p-value)	0.000**

The results from the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicate that the data is highly suitable for Factor Analysis (PCA). The KMO value is . Since this is very close to (and far exceeds the threshold), it suggests that the proportion of variance among the variables caused by underlying factors is high, meaning the sample is marvelously adequate for PCA. Furthermore, Bartlett's Test is highly significant (;). This significance confirms that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that sufficient correlation exists among the variables to proceed with the factorization.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Variable	B (Unstd. Coef.)	Std. Error	Sig. (p)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig. (ANOVA)
(Constant)	0.162	0.147	0.271	0.753	0.567	0.552	38.002	0.000
Influencer Credibility	0.203	0.071	0.03					
Content Quality	0.196	0.109	0.007					
Peer Influence	0.109	0.093	0.002					
Brand Interaction	0.143	0.077	0.001					
Social Media Engagement	0.212	0.096	0.000					
NotesR^2 > 0.60? NoAdj R^2 > 0.60? NoDiff <10%? YesANOVA Sig <0.05? Yes								

Notes R² > 0.60? No Adj R² > 0.60? No Diff <10%? Yes ANOVA Sig <0.05? Yes

Dependent Variable ; Purchase Intention

Discussion of Results

The regression analysis aimed to identify how five key social media factors—Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Peer Influence, Brand Interaction via Social Media (BISM), and Social Media Engagement (SME)—predict consumer Purchase Intention (PI) within the clothing brand sector. The overall regression model demonstrated a strong and statistically significant fit ($F = 38.002$, $p < 0.001$), with an R value of 0.753 and an R^2 of 0.567. This indicates that approximately 56.7% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by the independent variables included in the model. Although the adjusted R^2 value (0.552) falls slightly below the ideal 0.60 threshold, it remains acceptable in behavioral research, signifying a robust predictive capacity of the model. The significant ANOVA ($p < 0.05$) further confirms that the model collectively predicts purchase intention effectively. The results of the hypothesis testing provide strong support for the overall conceptual model, with all five predictors emerging as statistically significant determinants of purchase intention.

H1: Influencer Credibility $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.203$, $p = 0.03$) was supported. This suggests that consumers' trust in influencers' expertise and authenticity significantly enhances their intention to purchase clothing brands. Credibility fosters confidence in both the influencer and the endorsed brand, confirming the foundational premise of the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

H2: Content Quality $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.196$, $p = 0.007$) was also supported. High-quality, visually appealing, and informative content stimulates consumer engagement and positively influences brand perception. These results align with Raman et al. (2024) and Bhatt & Sharma (2022), who emphasized that superior visual and narrative quality in influencer posts enhances consumer persuasion and emotional connection.

H3: Peer Influence $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.109$, $p = 0.002$) was found significant, indicating that peers still exert measurable influence on fashion purchase behavior. This aligns with Vashisht & Sharma (2023) and Yadav et al. (2024), who found that social proof and peer validation, particularly among younger audiences, act as psychological reinforcements in online fashion communities.

H4: Brand Interaction via Social Media $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.143$, $p = 0.001$) was also significant. This finding implies that direct engagement between brands and consumers—through likes, replies, or online events—enhances perceived brand closeness and positively affects purchasing decisions. Similar results were observed by De Vries & Carlson (2024), who noted that two-way brand communication fosters consumer trust and advocacy in digital contexts.

H5: Social Media Engagement $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.000$) emerged as the strongest predictor in the model. High levels of likes, shares, and comments signal social approval and content relevance, encouraging purchase behavior. This observation aligns with Cui et al. (2023) and Tafesse (2020), who confirmed that engagement-driven interactions enhance the perceived credibility of messages and translate digital attention into behavioral intention.

Compared with previous literature, this study presents nuanced insights into the relative strength of social media predictors. While prior research (Chetioui et al., 2023; Lee & Koo, 2020) highlighted influencer credibility as the single dominant factor, the current analysis shows that social media engagement ($\beta = 0.212$) has slightly greater predictive power, suggesting a shift toward participatory influence in the social media ecosystem. This shift indicates that consumer interactivity, rather than passive trust alone, now drives decision-making in fashion contexts.

The significance of peer influence and brand interaction also marks a departure from several earlier findings (e.g., Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Schouten et al., 2021), where these factors were often found insignificant. The present results suggest that younger digital consumers (14–24 years) increasingly rely on multi-source cues—not only influencer credibility but also peer validation and brand responsiveness—when evaluating purchase options. This holistic pattern strengthens the Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958), which posits that compliance, identification, and internalization jointly shape consumer behavior in online environments.

Implications and Contributions

Overall, the findings demonstrate that all five constructs meaningfully contribute to predicting purchase intention in the clothing sector, though with varying degrees of strength. Social Media Engagement, Influencer Credibility, and Content Quality emerge as the most influential variables, reinforcing the dominance of interactive and content-centric marketing in digital fashion. For marketers, this implies that strategies integrating influencer authenticity, peer-driven conversations, and brand-led interactivity are more effective than isolated campaigns.

Theoretically, the study advances the integration of the Source Credibility, Social Influence, and Engagement frameworks, showing their joint explanatory power in a modern digital environment. Empirically, it extends recent studies (Bhatt & Sharma, 2022; Cui et al., 2023; Raman et al., 2024) by providing a comparative understanding of variable strength among Indian consumers—a demographic that is digitally active yet underexplored in influencer marketing literature.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that social media-based marketing constructs exert a significant influence on consumer purchase intentions toward clothing brands. The regression model explained over half of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.567$), underscoring the predictive strength of the five variables examined. Social Media Engagement emerged as the most powerful determinant, emphasizing the growing dominance of interactive participation and social proof in consumer decision-making. Influencer Credibility and Content Quality followed closely, revealing that consumers are more likely to act on purchase intentions when content is perceived as authentic, visually appealing, and presented by trusted individuals.

Interestingly, Peer Influence and Brand Interaction also demonstrated significant positive effects—contrary to earlier research where these factors were often found to be insignificant in digital fashion contexts. This finding highlights that young, digitally native consumers in India adopt multi-source evaluation mechanisms, relying simultaneously on influencer recommendations, peer opinions, and responsive brand communication before forming a purchase decision. Theoretically, this research reinforces the Source Credibility and Social Influence frameworks while extending their relevance to interactive digital ecosystems.

From a managerial standpoint, the results advocate for a balanced strategy: brands must collaborate with credible influencers, invest in high-quality creative content, and encourage two-way engagement. Furthermore, campaigns that promote peer sharing and brand responsiveness can amplify message reach and authenticity, thereby improving conversion rates in online fashion retailing.

Future Scope of the Study

Future research can expand upon these findings in several ways. First, comparative studies across industries (e.g., beauty, lifestyle, and technology) could identify whether the strength of these relationships differs by product involvement or perceived risk. Second, platform-specific analysis—such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube—may reveal variations in influencer effectiveness due to differing content formats and audience interaction styles. Third, incorporating mediating and moderating variables such as consumer trust, brand loyalty, or perceived value could provide deeper insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying purchase intentions.

Additionally, a longitudinal research design would help capture how influencer credibility and engagement evolve over time, especially as digital trends and consumer preferences shift. Exploring AI-driven influencer marketing, virtual influencers, and user-generated content dynamics may also offer new directions for understanding authenticity in the era of automation. Expanding the demographic base beyond young consumers to include diverse age groups and geographic regions could enhance the generalizability of results. Ultimately, such future inquiries would contribute to building a more comprehensive theoretical framework for influencer effectiveness and social media-driven consumer behavior in emerging digital markets.

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