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The Fashion Influencer–Reality Gap: How Differences Between Promotional Content and Actual Clothing Affect Brand Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Social media has changed the way people discover fashion, compare products, and decide what to buy. Instagram reels, YouTube videos, short reviews, and creator recommendations often bring clothing brands directly into consumers' daily lives. Influencers can make products easier to notice because they show how garments look when styled and worn, rather than presenting them only through a catalogue photograph. At the same time, the influence of these promotions raises an important question: do the clothes customers receive live up to the expectations created online? This proposed study explores that question by focusing on the relationship between promotional presentation, post-purchase experience, and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Fashion influencer marketing, reality gap, promotional content, actual clothing, brand loyalty, consumer trust, product satisfaction, influencer authenticity, repurchase intention, social media marketing.

1. Introduction

Social media is now a major communication channel for fashion businesses. Through platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, brands can introduce new collections, explain product features, and interact with potential customers. Fashion influencers add a personal element to this communication by sharing outfit ideas, styling advice, reviews, and shopping experiences. Because followers may see these creators regularly, their recommendations can become part of the way consumers discover brands and make purchase decisions.

To attract attention, fashion content is often carefully planned. Lighting, camera angles, backgrounds, styling, filters, editing, and the choice of model can all affect how a garment appears on screen. These techniques are common in digital promotion and do not automatically mean that a product is misleadingly presented. However, when the final image creates an impression that is substantially different from the item customers receive, the promotion can lead to unrealistic expectations about colour, fit, texture, or quality.

The product received by a customer may differ from the online presentation in several ways. A colour may look brighter on screen, the fabric may feel thinner than expected, stitching may appear less neat, or the fit may not match the look shown by the influencer. For example, a kurti or dress may appear structured and premium in a reel but feel lighter or fit differently when delivered. Such an experience can leave the customer disappointed, particularly when the promotional content did not clearly communicate the garment's limitations.

In this paper, the fashion influencer–reality gap means the difference a consumer perceives between clothing shown in influencer promotional content and the clothing experienced after purchase. The gap may relate to colour, fabric, fit, size, stitching, design, comfort, or overall finish. It can arise from image editing and selective presentation, but it may also result from unclear product descriptions, differences between batches, manufacturing issues, or expectations formed by the viewer. The study therefore treats the gap as a consumer perception to be measured, not as proof that every influencer or brand intentionally misleads buyers.

Influencer marketing can also create positive experiences when creators explain products clearly and share genuine opinions. A realistic demonstration, a clear description of fabric and fit, and an honest explanation of sponsored partnerships can help followers make informed choices. The concern arises when promotional claims appear more convincing than the actual product experience. In such cases, consumers may question the influencer's credibility, the brand's reliability, or both. How responsibility is assigned may depend on what was promised and who was responsible for the product information.

Brand loyalty matters because fashion companies need more than one-time purchases to build lasting customer relationships. Loyal customers may return to a brand, recommend it to friends, and continue considering it even when other options are available. However, loyalty is shaped by more than one experience. A customer may forgive a single mismatch if the brand handles the complaint well, while repeated differences between advertising and reality may gradually reduce confidence. This makes post-purchase experience an important part of evaluating influencer campaigns.

Against this background, the study proposes to examine the relationship between the influencer–reality gap and brand loyalty. It gives particular attention to consumer satisfaction, brand trust, perceived authenticity, and intention to buy again. Rather than assuming that every mismatch causes a customer to leave a brand, the study considers how the size and nature of the mismatch, together with transparency and previous experience, may shape the consumer’s response.

1.1 Problem Identification

Fashion brands increasingly collaborate with influencers to reach audiences and present products in a relatable way. Promotional posts can show clothing in its most appealing setting, but the consumer usually evaluates the actual garment only after delivery. This creates a potential difference between what was expected and what was experienced. If that difference is large, the customer may feel that the purchase did not provide the value or appearance anticipated from the promotion.

The central problem addressed in this study is whether a perceived mismatch between influencer content and delivered clothing is associated with lower satisfaction, weaker trust, and reduced loyalty. It also considers whether accurate descriptions and transparent promotional practices can help limit these negative responses. These questions are especially relevant to online fashion shopping, where customers often cannot touch the fabric or try on the garment before paying.

The research focuses on two principal questions:

1. How do differences between influencer-promoted clothing and actual clothing influence consumer satisfaction and brand trust?
2. To what extent do these differences affect consumers' repurchase intentions and loyalty toward fashion brands?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Influencer Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

Influencer marketing involves using people with an established audience to communicate product-related messages. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) explored how influencer characteristics, including follower numbers and product fit, can shape brand attitudes. Their work helps explain why audiences may respond differently to promotional content depending on how they perceive the influencer and the recommendation. For fashion brands, visibility alone may not be enough; the quality and credibility of the message can also matter.

Lou and Yuan (2019) studied how the value and credibility of branded influencer content relate to trust and purchase intention. Their work highlights the importance of providing content that audiences consider useful and believable. When a post gives clear information instead of relying only on attractive visuals, consumers may find it easier to judge whether a product suits their needs. This is relevant to clothing because details such as material, fit, and care requirements can affect satisfaction after delivery.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) examined how online celebrities on Instagram influence young women's purchasing decisions. Their research highlights the importance of perceived credibility and relatability in social media-based consumer behaviour.

Taken together, these studies show that influencers can play a meaningful role in consumer decisions. However, campaign performance should not be judged only by likes, views, comments, or immediate purchase intention. These measures show how audiences respond to content before or during a purchase decision, but they do not fully explain whether customers remain satisfied once the product arrives. Examining the post-purchase stage can therefore provide a broader picture of influencer marketing effectiveness.

2.2 Influencer Credibility and Authenticity

Ohanian (1990) developed a source credibility scale based on expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. These characteristics provide a useful framework for examining how consumers evaluate influencers.

Sokolova and Kefi (2020) investigated the relationship between influencer credibility, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention. Their study demonstrates the relevance of the relationship consumers develop with influencers when responding to promotional messages.

Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard (2020) explored authenticity in influencer marketing and the challenges influencers face when balancing commercial partnerships with genuine self-presentation. Their research is particularly relevant because consumers may perceive promotional content as less authentic when it appears excessively commercial or unrealistic.

For fashion brands, authenticity is not limited to an influencer seeming friendly or relatable. It also concerns whether product claims are consistent with the garment that customers eventually receive. An influencer may be perceived as more dependable when they explain fit and fabric clearly, use realistic demonstrations, and distinguish personal opinion from verified product information. When content appears overly polished or makes claims that customers cannot confirm after purchase, perceived authenticity may weaken.

2.3 Online Clothing Expectations and Actual Product Performance

Online clothing shopping involves uncertainty because customers generally cannot touch the material, check stitching closely, or try on the item before ordering. Instead, they rely on product photographs, videos, size charts, written descriptions, reviews, and influencer demonstrations. Each source provides useful information, but none may fully reproduce the experience of examining a garment in person. This uncertainty makes accurate presentation and clear product details particularly important.

Chen-Yu, Kim, and Lin (2017) examined product satisfaction and brand satisfaction after consumers received clothing ordered online. Their study considered differences between expected and experienced product attributes, including visible characteristics such as style and colour and less visible characteristics such as fabric, fit, and workmanship. The findings indicate that discrepancies between online expectations and actual product attributes are relevant to satisfaction and brand evaluation.

Lee and colleagues (2011) examined consumer satisfaction with internet apparel shopping using expectation–disconfirmation theory. Their research supports the importance of perceived performance and the extent to which an online shopping experience meets or fails to meet expectations.

These studies establish that product presentation and actual product experience are important in online apparel shopping. The present research extends this discussion by focusing specifically on clothing promoted through fashion influencers.

2.4 Expectation–Disconfirmation and Consumer Satisfaction

Expectation–disconfirmation theory, associated with Oliver (1980), explains satisfaction as a judgement formed by comparing prior expectations with perceived performance. Expectations may be met, exceeded, or fall short after a consumer uses or receives a product. The comparison is important because customers do not evaluate a product in isolation; they also consider what they thought they were going to receive.

When a product performs as expected or better, the consumer may feel satisfied. When the experience falls below expectations, negative disconfirmation can occur and dissatisfaction may follow. The size of the difference and the importance of the product feature can influence the response. For example, a small shade difference may be acceptable to one customer, while an inaccurate fit or noticeably poor fabric may be more serious for another.

In influencer-led fashion purchases, expectations may be shaped by styling videos, close-up shots, creator reviews, promotional captions, and statements about quality. If the delivered clothing looks or feels substantially different, customers may judge the experience negatively. This theory offers a useful basis for testing whether the perceived influencer–reality gap is related to satisfaction and, indirectly, to later brand choices.

The theory therefore provides a suitable foundation for examining the relationship between the influencer–reality gap and brand loyalty.

2.5 Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty

Brand trust is the consumer's confidence that a brand is dependable and will deliver what it communicates. Brand loyalty refers to a continuing preference for a brand, including the intention to buy from it again and recommend it to others. These concepts are connected but not identical: a customer may trust a brand's quality while occasionally buying elsewhere, or may continue buying out of convenience even when trust is limited.

Research on influencer credibility and fast-fashion brand loyalty has examined how the perceived credibility of an influencer can contribute to brand trust and loyalty. For example, research published in the *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* in 2025 examined the relationship between influencer source credibility, brand trust, and fast-fashion brand loyalty.

When promotional content gives an accurate picture of a garment, the customer's experience may reinforce confidence in the brand. By contrast, repeated mismatches can create doubt about whether future product claims should be believed. The outcome may vary according to the seriousness of the problem, the consumer's previous experiences, the availability of alternatives, and the brand's response to feedback. Prompt exchanges, fair refunds, and helpful customer service may soften dissatisfaction, although they may not completely remove the effect of inaccurate promotion.

2.6 Research Synthesis

The literature indicates that influencer credibility, authenticity, product expectations, perceived performance, satisfaction, and brand trust are important elements of online fashion purchasing. Nevertheless, the relationship between the specific discrepancy in influencer-promoted clothing and consumers' long-term brand loyalty requires further focused investigation.

This study integrates influencer marketing and online apparel shopping research to examine the fashion influencer–reality gap as a potential determinant of brand loyalty.

3. Research Gap

Prior research has considered influencer credibility, authenticity, purchase intention, satisfaction with online clothing, and brand loyalty. These subjects provide a useful foundation, but they are often examined as separate questions. There is room for a more connected investigation of how the difference between influencer-promoted clothing and the actual item received may shape a customer's continuing relationship with a fashion brand.

First, influencer marketing research often emphasizes reach, engagement, purchase intention, and initial brand attitudes rather than post-purchase product evaluation.

Second, online apparel research has examined differences between expected and actual clothing characteristics, but the specific role of influencer-created expectations requires additional investigation.

Third, limited attention may be given to the combined relationships among the influencer–reality gap, consumer satisfaction, brand trust, perceived authenticity, and repurchase intention within a single research framework.

Fourth, consumers may respond differently depending on whether the mismatch concerns colour, fitting, fabric quality, stitching, design, or comfort. The relative importance of these differences deserves examination.

Fifth, consumers may distinguish between an influencer's responsibility for presenting a product and a brand's responsibility for manufacturing and delivering it. This distinction may influence whether dissatisfaction damages loyalty toward the influencer, the brand, or both.

Finally, further context-specific research among young consumers and social media users in India could help explain how influencer-promoted fashion purchases affect loyalty in a rapidly developing digital retail environment.

This study responds to the identified gap by bringing these elements into one proposed framework. It examines the perceived promotional–reality gap alongside satisfaction, brand trust, influencer authenticity, and loyalty. The framework is intended to guide data collection and hypothesis testing; it does not claim that the relationships have already been confirmed.

4. Objectives of the Study

The main objective is to examine the influence of differences between fashion influencer promotional content and actual clothing on brand loyalty.

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the major differences consumers experience between influencer-promoted clothing and actual clothing received.
2. To examine the relationship between the influencer–reality gap and consumer satisfaction.
3. To analyse the influence of product mismatch on brand trust and perceived influencer authenticity.
4. To investigate the relationship between consumer satisfaction, brand trust, and brand loyalty.
5. To assess how the influencer–reality gap influences repurchase intention and recommendation behaviour.
6. To suggest strategies for fashion brands and influencers to improve transparency and maintain consumer loyalty.

4.1 Research Questions

- What types of differences between promotional content and actual clothing are most commonly perceived by consumers?
- Does a larger influencer–reality gap correspond to lower consumer satisfaction?
- How does perceived product mismatch relate to brand trust and influencer credibility?
- Does consumer satisfaction help explain the relationship between product mismatch and brand loyalty?
- Can transparent promotional practices reduce the negative relationship between product mismatch and loyalty?

4.2 Proposed Hypotheses

H1: A larger perceived gap between influencer-promoted clothing and actual clothing is negatively associated with consumer satisfaction.

H2: A larger perceived influencer–reality gap is negatively associated with brand trust.

H3: Consumer satisfaction is positively associated with brand loyalty.

H4: Brand trust is positively associated with brand loyalty.

H5: Consumer satisfaction and brand trust help explain the relationship between the influencer–reality gap and brand loyalty.

H6: Perceived transparency in influencer promotional content weakens the negative association between the influencer–reality gap and brand trust.

These are proposed hypotheses and should be tested using collected data rather than presented as established findings.

5.0 Operational Definitions

To keep the questionnaire consistent, the main concepts should be defined in terms that respondents can understand. The influencer–reality gap refers to the perceived difference between the clothing shown in promotional content and the garment received. Consumer satisfaction refers to the respondent's overall evaluation of the purchase in relation to expectations. Brand trust refers to confidence that the brand provides reliable information and products.

Perceived influencer authenticity refers to the extent to which the influencer's presentation is considered genuine, transparent, and believable. Brand loyalty is considered through stated willingness to purchase from the same brand again, maintain a preference for it, and recommend it to others. These are proposed self-reported measures; they should not be treated as direct evidence of actual future purchasing behaviour.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

A descriptive and quantitative research design is proposed to study the relationship between the fashion influencer–reality gap and brand loyalty. The descriptive part will summarise the types of differences consumers report, such as colour, fit, fabric, stitching, and overall quality. The quantitative part will examine whether these perceptions are associated with satisfaction, brand trust, perceived authenticity, and loyalty-related intentions. A cross-sectional survey will collect responses at one point in time, making it suitable for exploring relationships but not for proving cause and effect.

5.2 Research Approach

The study will follow a deductive research approach. The proposed relationships are developed from existing theories and research on influencer credibility, consumer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. Primary data will then be collected to examine whether the proposed relationships are supported by the responses of fashion consumers.

5.3 Population and Sampling Design

The target population consists of people who follow fashion influencers on social media and have bought clothing after seeing influencer-related promotional content. The study is intended to focus mainly on young social media users, including those who use Instagram and YouTube to discover fashion products. Convenience sampling may be used to contact accessible participants, while screening questions will check that respondents have relevant purchase experience. Vijayawada and other accessible locations may be considered depending on recruitment opportunities.

5.4 Sample Size

A target of 150 respondents is proposed as an initial working sample for this student research project. The final number will depend on access to eligible participants, the quality of completed questionnaires, and the requirements of the selected analysis. This figure is a target rather than a completed sample count. Responses should only be analysed after collection and basic checks for missing, duplicate, or invalid entries.

5.5 Data Collection Methods

The study proposes to use both primary and secondary information. Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire shared online or administered in person. Secondary information will be drawn from relevant academic articles, books, and credible publications on influencer marketing, online apparel shopping, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Published studies will help shape the research questions and interpret the findings, while the questionnaire will provide the consumer responses needed to test the hypotheses.

5.6 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is expected to contain around 20–25 items organised into five sections. The first section will collect basic demographic and shopping information. The second will ask about social media use and exposure to fashion influencers. The third will measure perceived differences between promotional content and the received garment. The fourth will assess satisfaction, trust, and authenticity, and the final section will measure repurchase intention, continued preference, and willingness to recommend the brand. Questions should be clear, neutral, and easy for respondents to answer.

1. **Demographic information:** Age group, gender (optional), education, and general shopping behaviour.
2. **Social media and influencer exposure:** Platforms used, frequency of viewing fashion content, and exposure to sponsored promotions.
3. **Influencer–reality gap:** Perceived differences in colour, fit, fabric, stitching, quality, and overall appearance.

4. **Consumer satisfaction and trust:** Satisfaction with purchased clothing, confidence in promotional claims, and perceived authenticity.
5. **Brand loyalty:** Repurchase intention, willingness to recommend the brand, and willingness to continue purchasing from it.

5.7 Measurement Scale

A five-point Likert scale will be used for the main attitudinal statements:

Score Response

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly disagree |
| 2 | Disagree |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree |
| 4 | Agree |
| 5 | Strongly agree |

For analysis, higher scores on mismatch statements will represent a stronger perceived difference between the promoted garment and the item received. Satisfaction, trust, and loyalty items will be coded so that higher scores consistently represent more positive evaluations. Any negatively worded items will be checked carefully and reverse-coded where necessary before composite scores are calculated. Consistent coding will reduce the risk of interpreting the results in the wrong direction.

5.8 Variables of the Study

- **Independent variable:** Perceived influencer–reality gap.
- **Dependent variable:** Brand loyalty.
- **Potential mediating variables:** Consumer satisfaction and brand trust.
- **Potential moderating variable:** Transparency of promotional content.
- **Additional explanatory variables:** Influencer credibility, purchase frequency, prior brand experience, and perceived clothing quality.

5.9 Statistical Tools

The collected data may be analysed using Microsoft Excel, SPSS, or another suitable statistical package. The proposed techniques are:

- **Percentage analysis:** To describe respondent characteristics and shopping behaviour.
- **Mean and standard deviation:** To summarize responses to the main research constructs.
- **Cronbach's alpha:** To examine the internal consistency of multi-item scales.
- **Pearson correlation:** To examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables, where the assumptions are appropriate.
- **Regression analysis:** To assess whether the perceived influencer–reality gap predicts brand loyalty and whether satisfaction or trust adds explanatory value.
- **Mediation or moderation analysis:** If the final sample size and data quality are adequate, to investigate the proposed indirect and conditional relationships.

The final choice of statistical methods will depend on the completed questionnaire, measurement quality, sample size, and distribution of responses. Results should be reported transparently, including the direction and size of relationships as well as statistical significance where applicable. Because the design is cross-sectional and the sampling approach may be non-random, conclusions should be framed as associations rather than definite proof that one variable causes another.

5.10 Scope and Limitations

The study is limited to clothing promoted by fashion influencers and does not cover every form of influencer marketing. It focuses on consumers' reported perceptions, which may be influenced by memory, personal preferences, and the time elapsed since a purchase. Convenience sampling may also limit how widely the results can be generalised. Since the proposed survey measures responses at one point in time, it cannot establish causation with certainty, and stated intentions may not always match actual future purchases.

6. Conceptual Background

The conceptual foundation of this study combines three perspectives: expectation–disconfirmation theory, source credibility theory, and the stimulus–organism–response framework.

6.1 Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory

Expectation–disconfirmation theory explains how consumers evaluate products by comparing expected performance with actual experience. When the product meets or exceeds expectations, consumers may experience satisfaction. When the product falls below expectations, negative disconfirmation may lead to dissatisfaction.

In the context of fashion influencer marketing, promotional content can shape expectations before a consumer purchases clothing. If the delivered product differs substantially from the promotional presentation, the resulting negative disconfirmation may reduce satisfaction and weaken the consumer's relationship with the brand.

6.2 Source Credibility Theory

Source credibility theory emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness in evaluating a communicator. Ohanian's (1990) framework is particularly useful for understanding how consumers evaluate influencers.

An influencer who provides realistic demonstrations, acknowledges product limitations, and communicates honestly may maintain credibility even when a product has imperfections. Conversely, consistently exaggerated promotional claims may reduce perceived trustworthiness and influence consumers' willingness to rely on future recommendations.

6.3 Stimulus–Organism–Response Framework

The stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) framework explains how external stimuli influence internal evaluations and subsequent behavioural responses.

In this study:

- **Stimulus:** The perceived difference between influencer-promoted clothing and the actual product received.
- **Organism:** Consumer satisfaction, brand trust, and perceived authenticity.
- **Response:** Brand loyalty, repurchase intention, and recommendation behaviour.

The framework suggests that consumers do not necessarily move directly from a product mismatch to disloyalty. Their reactions may depend on how they interpret the mismatch, whether they trust the brand, and how satisfied they are with the purchase.

6.4 Brand Loyalty in Fashion Retail

Brand loyalty can include both attitudinal loyalty and behavioural intentions. Attitudinal loyalty refers to a consumer's preference and emotional commitment to a brand, while behavioural intentions include plans to repurchase and recommend it.

A consumer may be disappointed with one clothing purchase but remain loyal because of previous positive experiences, convenient returns, or a strong preference for the brand. Alternatively, repeated negative experiences may encourage switching to competing brands.

The study therefore treats brand loyalty as an outcome influenced by multiple factors, rather than assuming that every product mismatch automatically results in lost customers.

7. Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework links the perceived gap between influencer promotional content and actual clothing with brand loyalty. It suggests that consumer satisfaction and brand trust may help explain this relationship, while transparency in promotional content may influence how strongly a mismatch affects trust. The framework is a guide for testing relationships using collected data; the arrows represent proposed associations, not established results.

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework: Perceived fashion influencer–reality gap (differences in colour, fit, fabric, design and quality) → consumer satisfaction and brand trust → brand loyalty (repurchase intention, continued preference and recommendation). Promotional transparency is proposed as a moderator that may weaken the negative association between perceived mismatch and brand trust.

Perceived Fashion Influencer–Reality Gap

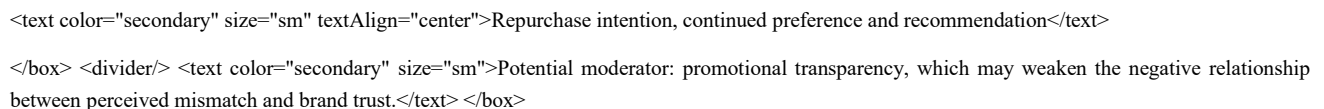


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

The framework proposes that a larger perceived mismatch may be associated with lower satisfaction and trust, and that these evaluations may in turn be associated with weaker loyalty. However, consumers may interpret similar experiences differently. A transparent promotion, a helpful return process, or a history of positive purchases may change how strongly a mismatch affects the relationship. The proposed analysis will examine these possibilities where the data and sample size allow.

8. Practical and Theoretical Implications

8.1 Practical Implications for Fashion Brands

Fashion brands can reduce uncertainty by making promotional content consistent with the product that customers receive. Images and videos should represent colour, fit, fabric, and design as accurately as reasonably possible. Detailed size charts, clear material descriptions, realistic demonstrations, care instructions, and easy-to-understand return policies can help customers make informed decisions. Brands should also make sure that the product information shared with influencers is accurate and up to date.

Customer reviews and complaints can help brands identify recurring problems that advertising alone may not reveal. If buyers repeatedly mention inconsistent sizing, thin fabric, colour differences, or poor stitching, these patterns should be investigated as possible product or quality-control issues. A response that only increases advertising may not solve the underlying problem. Addressing product quality and explaining how complaints are handled can help protect trust over time.

8.2 Implications for Fashion Influencers

Influencers can maintain credibility by combining engaging content with practical and honest information. They can describe how a garment fits, explain what the fabric feels like, show the item in different lighting where practical, and mention limitations that matter to buyers. Paid or gifted partnerships should be disclosed clearly, and claims about quality should reflect genuine experience rather than assumptions. This approach does not mean every review must be negative; it means giving followers a realistic basis for deciding whether to buy.

Transparency does not require every review to be negative. Rather, it involves communicating realistic expectations so that audiences can make informed decisions.

8.3 Implications for Consumers

Consumers can make more informed decisions by checking size charts, fabric details, return conditions, customer reviews, and demonstrations from more than one source. It is useful to remember that styling, lighting, and camera angles can affect how a garment appears in a promotional post. Comparing the advertised details with the written product description may help identify unclear claims before ordering. These steps cannot eliminate all uncertainty, but they can help set more realistic expectations.

8.4 Theoretical Implications

The study brings together expectation–disconfirmation theory and source credibility theory to explain a post-purchase outcome in influencer marketing. It shifts attention from immediate purchase intention to the longer-term relationship between promotional accuracy, consumer satisfaction, trust, and brand loyalty.

The proposed S-O-R framework also offers a way to examine whether satisfaction and trust help explain the relationship between perceived product mismatch and loyalty. Future empirical evidence can determine whether these mechanisms are supported and whether promotional transparency changes their strength.

Several practical steps may help narrow the difference between online expectations and the clothing customers receive. First, brands can standardise product photography and avoid using lighting or editing that materially changes a garment's colour or texture. Second, product pages can include close-up images of the fabric, stitching, lining, and fastenings, together with garment measurements rather than relying only on general size labels. Third, influencer demonstrations can include ordinary movement and multiple angles so viewers can better understand the garment's fit and drape.

Brands can also create a clearer feedback loop between customers, influencers, and product teams. Repeated complaints about the same item should be reviewed and, where appropriate, reflected in updated descriptions or sizing guidance. Influencers should receive reliable product information before posting, while retaining the freedom to describe their own experience honestly. When a problem occurs, clear exchange, refund, and complaint procedures can show customers that the business takes product experience seriously.

These recommendations should be understood as practical implications drawn from the proposed framework, not as interventions already tested by this study. Their effectiveness could be examined in future research by comparing customer responses before and after changes to product descriptions, demonstration styles, or return procedures.

9. Future Research Directions

Future research can expand this study in several ways.

First, researchers could compare different social media platforms to examine whether influencer–reality gaps vary between short-form videos, long-form reviews, live shopping, and static promotional photographs.

Second, future studies could compare different clothing categories, including ethnic wear, casual wear, formal clothing, sportswear, and premium fashion. The importance of fit, fabric, and appearance may vary across these categories.

Third, longitudinal research could follow consumers across multiple purchases to examine whether repeated product mismatches produce lasting changes in brand trust and loyalty.

Fourth, experimental studies could compare edited promotional content with realistic product demonstrations to assess differences in expectations and post-purchase evaluations.

Fifth, researchers could investigate differences across age groups, income levels, shopping experience, and consumer familiarity with influencer marketing.

Sixth, further studies could distinguish between dissatisfaction with the influencer and dissatisfaction with the brand. Consumers may blame the influencer for exaggerated claims, the brand for poor product quality, or both.

Seventh, researchers could examine whether return policies, customer service quality, refunds, and complaint resolution reduce the negative effects of product mismatch.

Finally, studies involving verified purchase records, return rates, or repeat-purchase data could complement self-reported survey responses and provide a stronger understanding of actual consumer behaviour.

10. Conclusion

The fashion influencer–reality gap is worth examining because social media content increasingly shapes how consumers discover and evaluate clothing. Promotional photographs and videos can help people imagine how a garment might look, but the delivered item may differ in colour, fit, fabric, stitching, comfort, or finish. Such differences can matter because customers judge the purchase against the expectations formed before placing the order.

This paper proposes that a larger perceived mismatch may be associated with lower satisfaction, weaker brand trust, and reduced loyalty. These outcomes should not be assumed for every purchase. Previous experiences, the importance of the mismatch, the quality of customer service, return options, influencer credibility, and transparency may all shape a consumer's response. The proposed survey and hypotheses are intended to examine these relationships rather than report results that have not yet been collected.

By combining expectation–disconfirmation theory, source credibility theory, and the stimulus–organism–response framework, the study offers a structured way to investigate how promotional accuracy may relate to post-purchase evaluations and loyalty. Its proposed quantitative method can be used to examine responses from consumers who have purchased clothing after viewing influencer promotions. The usefulness of the framework will ultimately depend on the quality of the collected data and the analysis.

For brands and influencers, the key practical message is that long-term credibility depends on a reasonable match between promotional communication and real product performance. Clear descriptions, realistic demonstrations, dependable product quality, and responsive customer service can help customers form more informed expectations. Influencer marketing should therefore be evaluated not only through views, engagement, or immediate sales, but also through the satisfaction, trust, and willingness to return that follow a purchase.

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