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Impact of Instagram Influencers on Shoppers' Purchase Intentions: The Fashion Industry

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ABSTRACT
Despite the growing trend of following fashion influencers on Instagram, a remarkable gap persists in understanding the impact of information generated by Instagrammers on the buying intentions of fashion shoppers. By employing Ajzen's theory of planned behavior framework, the study aims to fill this knowledge gap by obtaining first-hand information in shopping malls. The researchers observed the buying behavior of fashion shoppers. Further, they were asked to fill out the questionnaires to gain real-life insights into how they shop and make style-related choices.236 respondents were selected as they visited shopping malls to buy fashion goods. These shopping malls were located in three major cities (Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana) in Punjab. Simple random sampling methods were employed, and structural equation modelling through SmartPLS-4 was used for data analysis. The results confirmed that social norms, perceived behavioral norms, and trustworthiness strongly build positive attitudes towards fashion influencers. In addition, consumer's purchase intention is highly dependent on their positive attitude towards fashion influencers.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behavior, Instagram Fashion influencer

INTRODUCTION

The new world of technological revolution touches every part of our lives. Suggestions from friends, relatives, and celebrities are considered as a credible source that can influence customers' choices (Chen and Shen, 2015; Lopes and Goulart, 2021). Presently, marketing by influencers on Instagram has steadily grown into a strategy that they use to spread a message through social media personalities, especially considering the past decade. Consequently, influencer marketing is developing as a strategy involving online networking through the status of budding celebrities/influencers to market final products (Conick, 2018; Varsamis, 2018). It is also the most successful online consumer acquisition strategy, which has been growing at the fastest rate since 2017 (Weismueller et al., 2020). The origin of this type of novel marketing goes back to celebrity endorsement. In 2008, the term influencer marketing was first coined by Brown and Hayes in their annals. Promotion through social media platforms is the newest and hottest craze in the market. It has already been established that primitive/traditional marketing techniques, including TVs, National/State dailies, and magazine advertisements, prove to be dearer and raise awareness among a relatively smaller audience (Lee et al.,2021). Thus, social awareness in modern times is garnering more attention than ever.

The networks that connect people socially online are specifically designed to connect individuals and share content produced by influencers to reap better economic gains. The social network, which mainly consists of Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, is a mechanism through which people share their materials and where information relating to the services that can be offered to the customers is provided (Hernando and Martn, 2022; Bawack and Bonhoure, 2021). Influencer Marketing Hub Benchmark (2020) conducted a study between 2017 and 2019. It was found that there was an immense increase of 1500 percent in terms of searches pertaining to the buzzword Influencer Marketing solely on the Google platform. According to many studies, customers make purchasing decisions based on the environment they live in and their direct surroundings rather than on attitudes towards conventional marketing methods (Brown and Vasantha, 2019; Brown and Hayes, 2008; Sudha and Sheena, 2017). Dolan et al. (2019) argues that word-of-mouth sharing leads to consumer sales of more than 13 percent. Word-of-mouth is not a new phenomenon that emerged during the online social

networking era. Word-of-mouth is an informal way of communicating with one another about the experience with certain services, products, or the features of the people providing them.

Influencer marketing is tremendously significant to consumers. It refers to the activity of information dissemination in a society whereby a new style is employed by specific consumer groups. Instagram Fashion Influencers (IFIs) can have an astonishing effect on consumers. They have a significant economic and social impact and provide people with a medium for expressing and creating a personality. IFIs can be described as third-party endorsements that tie the effort of developing an audience through the use of social media networks (Gomes et al., 2022). Recently, influencer marketing has been of much interest, particularly within the fashion business (Lee et al., 2017). The sensitivity of buyers to the latest fashion trends has increased significantly, and it is becoming the biggest challenge to meet the ever-growing fashion demands of buyers by fashion houses. An influencer is someone with power, expertise, stance, or familiarity with their consumers and can impact the buying behavior of others (Farivar et al., 2022). Source authenticity such as reliability and credibility influence the decision made at the consumer level to purchase fashion products. The authenticity of celebrities makes people associate themselves with the offering of a brand, making them purchase the product on the spur of the moment (Chetioui et al., 2020). A survey was conducted in the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, France, and the United States. It was revealed that over 43 percent of respondents track the fashion style of influencers to make their purchases (Sulthana et al., 2021). Most of digital clients are generally dependent on them and they prefer to investigate digital platforms (Delbaere et al., 2021). People follow professionals; therefore, brands employ an influencer marketing approach in targeting their audiences. Brands do not specifically market their offerings on social media; rather, they build life-like narratives to appeal to the emotional side of the consumer (Mohd et al., 2021).

Existing research on the fashion business and buying intentions has provided valuable insights. However, there are still considerable lacunae necessitating more in-depth exploration. While earlier investigations have carried out detailed assessments, they have not thoroughly investigated on-the-spot choice-making processes of buyers while making real purchases. Furthermore, there is a dearth of studies based on detailed cross-sectional analyses that identify key factors among different categories of the fashion industry. Additionally, the ever-changing characteristics of the fashion sector and swiftly developing customer inclinations call for sustained studies to remain abreast of the aforementioned shifts. Subsequent research might emphasize bridging these chasms by conducting an in-depth analysis of shoppers in a real-world environment while making actual purchases to present a holistic image of buyer psychology in the fashion business.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESES

This study derives its conceptual framework from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen in 1991. The theory explains behavioral intentions in terms of subjective norms, perceived behavior control and attitude. As stipulated in the model, subjective norms, behavioral beliefs are expected to have an impact on attitude.

TPB posits that a person's behavioral reaction to norms, self-efficacy, and attitudes determines their behavior. The initial factors incorporated in the model included Attitude (ATT), Subjective Norms (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). This was later prolonged to incorporate other variables, such as self-reported past conduct, ethical norms, social approvals, and previous behavior (Ajzen, 2001). ATT refers to positive or negative appraisals of participation in a given behavior. These judgments depend on the ideas that one has arbitrated about the probable consequences or punitive actions associated with a behavior. A positive attitude towards a behavior leads to a stronger desire to accomplish the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). SN refers to the perceived societal gravity of social groups, including peers, family or societal expectations which exerts pressure on the performance or non-performance of the act. TPB is grounded on the Theory of Reasoned Action and practices. There is an addition of an important factor namely perceived behavioral control which adds explanatory strength to it (Ajzen, 1991). PBC refers to a person's conviction regarding the simplicity or difficulty of a specific task performance. TPB points to the importance of an individual's outlook, societal norms, and self-efficacy in influencing a person's intention towards a behavioral issue (Ajzen, 2002).

An additional variable i.e. trust was added to the model to enhance predictive accuracy. It also provides a better understanding of buying intentions within the framework. Trust plays an important role in forming positive attitudes towards fashion influencers, particularly where face-to-face contact is not possible (Gomes et al., 2022). By adding trust to the model, it can provide a better understanding of the specific intricacies of the relationships between fashion influencers and their followers. This will enhance its capability to elaborate and estimate shopper buying intentions in the fashion industry.

PBC refers to the level at which an individual performs a certain type of work (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The intent to accomplish a given behavior that is perceived as easy or difficult (Ajzen,1991). The TPB states that PBC directly influences an individual's outlook and buying intentions positively (Aydin & Aydin, 2022). On the other hand, online shopping intention is poorly related to perceived behavioral control (Lim et al.,2016). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1: PBC positively influences attitudes towards IFIs.

SN refers to faith regarding how the majority of people either approve or disapprove of certain conduct (Lee et

al., 2021). Social pressure on an individual subject himself or herself to act in a particular manner. It is associated with thoughts about what others, particularly peers and individuals considered significant to a person, believe that he/she should or should not do a particular behavior. Lim et al. (2016) found that subjective norms have a positive influence on purchase intentions. These findings suggest that an individual's purchase plan is influenced by their family, friends, and media perception. In contrast, Lee et al. 2017 discovered that SN has no significant impact on buying intention. Building upon the preceding analysis, we formulate the following hypothesis

H_2: SN positively influences attitudes towards IFIs.

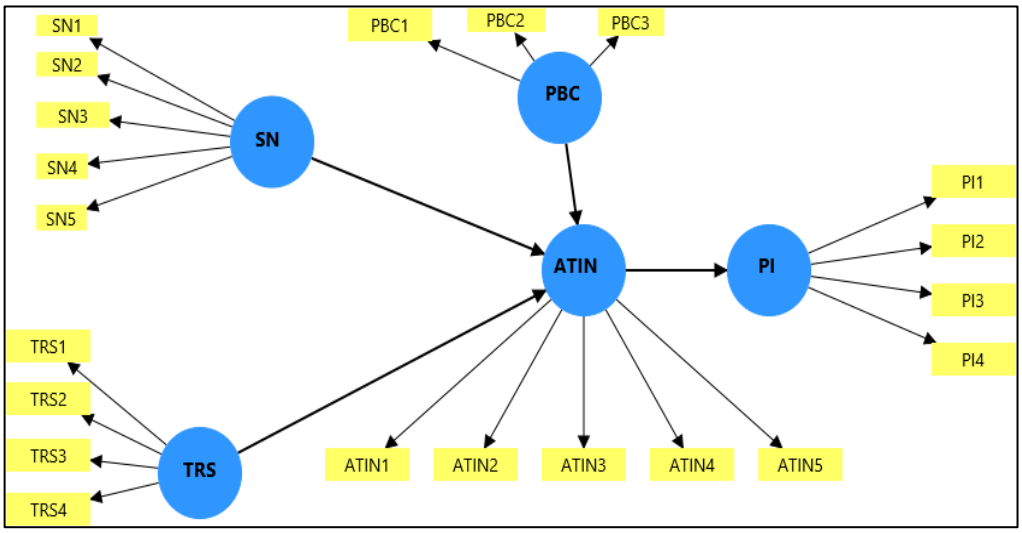

Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

Trust plays a crucial role in shaping buyer's mindsets towards IFIs. When a person has faith in the credibility, competence, and uprightness of IFIs (Gomes et al., 2022). They tend to have a positive outlook on the contents and endorsements made by IFIs. This positive outlook is exhibited in different ways, such as elevated involvement with IFIs posts, increased numbers of followers, and sharing of post content, followers openly accepting the suggestions of IFIs (Tiwari, 2024). Consequently, attitudes towards IFIs are greatly influenced by trust, which in turn impacts the choices made by fashion shoppers and their aggregate involvement with IFIs. This leads to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

H_3: Trust positively influences attitudes towards IFIs.

The positive or negative assessment of a specific behaviour by a person is called their attitude (Ajzen, 1991). Some articles presented in this regard have displayed empirical evidence of positive associations between a person's attitude towards an online influencer and their intention to purchase. When intention is positive, there is an improvement in the likelihood of behaviour. The research done by Bataineh (2015) concluded that purchase intention is positively influenced by quality, useful and accurate information, credibility, and quantity. Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) identified that electronic word-of-mouth marketing plays a vital role in determining brand image and brand buying intention in consumer markets. On the other hand, some investigators found no relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention. Lim et al. (2016) investigated and found that there was no correlation between the positive attitude of buyers and their buying intent. Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following hypothesis is developed:

H_4: Attitude towards IFIs positively influences the impact on purchase intention.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaire was developed by adapting questions from the extant literature and following expert opinions, which ensured the content validity and relevance of the questions (Cebi Karaaslan, 2021). Initially, suitable respondents posed challenges due to the absence of a suitable sampling frame, and very few responses were obtained by sending a web-based survey to relevant hashtags and followers of Instagram Fashion Influencers (IFIs) (Hashim et al., 2018). Finally, it was decided to select the respondents who were shopping for fashion goods at shopping malls in three major cities of Punjab, namely Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana. Pretesting was done on the twenty-five respondents following the IFIs. Two filter questions were asked to select suitable participants for the research. The first question confirmed that the respondent was actively and honestly following IFIs. The second question ensured that the participants had a new and updated fashion shopping experience. A total of 236 respondents answered the two filter questions correctly. This was done to check the clarity and functionality of the survey design before it was finalized. This study focused on respondents with recent buying experiences and uncovered various unapparent factors that impact consumers' buying decisions when buying fashion goods. The shopping mall also provided a diversified

demographic background covering different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and varied shopping stimulants. This diversity increased the selection of the cross-sectional population and helped to generalize the results (Amin et al., 2020). It assisted the researchers in concluding to decide the key factors that impact the buying behavior of fashion shoppers.

Measuring Instrument

A 5-item evolved by Tiwari (2024) and Leong et al. (2023) was used to quantify SN. A five-item scale was used to measure PBC, adapted from Tiwari (2024). Five items were derived from the works of Belanche et al. (2023) and Chopra et al. (2021) to assess attitudes towards influencers. Purchase Intention was assessed using a 6-item scale developed by Weismueller et al. (2020) and Leong et al. (2022). Responses were documented using a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 represented strong disagreement and 7 represented strong agreement.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender			
Male	126	53.39	53.39
Female	110	47.61	100
Age Group			
18-25 years	56	23.72	23.72
26-40 years	77	32.63	56.35
41-55 years	69	29.24	85.59
Above 55 years	34	14.41	100
Income			
Below 5 Lacs	89	37.72	37.72
5-10 Lacs	76	32.20	69.92
Above 10 Lacs	71	30.08	100

Source: Primary Data

The respondents included both men (53.39%) and women (47.61%). In terms of age, 23.72% of the respondents fell within the 18-25 years age range, 32.63% within the 26-40 years age range, 29.24% within the 41-55 years age range, and the remaining respondents were above 55 years of age. Regarding income level, 37.72% and 32.20% were respectively had their incomes below Rs 5 lacs and 5 to 10 Lacs, while 30.08 % of the respondents had their incomes above 10 lacs.

RESULTS

This study employed PLS-SEM to examine the intricate relationship between IFIs and purchase intentions of shoppers towards fashion goods. Since it is a non-parametric technique, it does not require the assumption of multivariate normality. Therefore, covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) was not suitable for this analysis. One of the primary reasons for opting for PLS-SEM instead of CB-SEM is the superior predictive relevance that PLS-SEM-4 provides as a methodological tool (Hair et al., 2019). The Web-Power analysis tool (Zhang & Yuan, 2018) was used to evaluate the data for multivariate normality and it was found that the minimum sample size found to be 109. The analysis revealed significant results for Mardia's multivariate skewness and kurtosis, indicating deviations from normality. SmartPLS-4 is useful for data set that does not meet the conditions for multivariate normality (Memon et al., 2021).

Since this study used a 7-point Likert scale to measure the variables, complete multicollinearity evaluation was performed to eliminate the existence of CMB within the dataset. According to this technique, the internal variance inflation factor scores of the variables are examined against a random dependent variable, and any value above 3.3 indicates a problem of CMB (Kock & Lynn, 2012). The problem of CMB does not exist (Kock, 2015) as none of the inner VIFs for the variables under study exceeded 3.3.

Model Measurement

Measures of reliability of indicators, reliability of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminatory validity of the latent variables were all used to analyze the measurement model. If the item loadings cross the mark of 0.707, the indicator is deemed reliable (Arora et al.2019; Hair et al., 2019). The inner VIF values were first explored as the initial step of the process of the structural model analysis to eliminate the occurrence of the multicollinearity problem between the variables. The inner values of VIF in all of them were also less than 5, excluding the risk of significant multicollinearity problems (Hair et al., 2019; James et al., 2013).

Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were computed to assess the reliability of the construct. The former measure checked the substantial reliability, whereas the latter was used to check the conventional reliability. The real dependability of a construct between these two, as suggested by Dijkstra and Henseler (2015), is Rho A (ρA). It is recommended to employ the aforementioned measurements to calculate the dependability of the construction (Hair et al., 2022). Hair et al. (2010) indicate that convergent validity in a construct is proven when its average variance extracted

(AVE) does not fall short of 0.5, which implies that the variance explained by the construct is greater than 50 percent of the variance with the measured items.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	ρA	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
ATIN1	0.869	0.899	0.9	0.925	0.712
ATIN2	0.849				
ATIN3	0.826				
ATIN4	0.835				
ATIN5	0.838				
PBC1	0.874	0.857	0.857	0.913	0.778
PBC2	0.895				
PBC3	0.877				
SN1	0.848	0.91	0.912	0.932	0.734
SN2	0.864				
SN3	0.867				
SN4	0.846				
SN5	0.859				
TRS1	0.871	0.891	0.893	0.925	0.754
TRS2	0.857				
TRS3	0.877				
TRS4	0.867				
PI1	0.88	0.861	0.86	0.907	0.709
PI2	0.883				
PI3	0.865				
PI4	0.733				

Sources: Compiled from SmartPls-4

Discriminant validity describes the extent to which a construct is empirically different from other latent variables in the structural model. Dijkstra and Henseler (2015) noted that the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio is a superior method for evaluating discriminant validity across constructs compared to the Fornell-Larcker standards (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3: HTMT Criterion for Discriminant Validity

ATIN	PBC	PI	SN	TRS
PBC	0.782			
PI	0.789	0.755		
SN	0.734	0.635	0.701	
TRS	0.729	0.628	0.696	0.595

Sources: Compiled from SmartPls-4

Table 2 reports the measures of convergent validity and reliability, whereas Table 3 reports the discriminant validity assessed using the HTMT criteria. Table 3 shows that the square root of the AVE for the latent variable was greater than the correlation with the other constructs. This provides strong support for discriminant validity. Therefore, the HTMT was employed in the data analysis. Discriminant validity is obtained when the HTMT value is below 0.85(Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4: Fornell and Larcker Test

Constructs	ATIN	PBC	PI	SN	TRS
ATIN	0.844				
PBC	0.688	0.882			
PI	0.696	0.648	0.842		
SN	0.665	0.562	0.621	0.857	
TRS	0.655	0.55	0.611	0.539	0.868

Sources: Compiled from SmartPls-4

The results of Fornell-Larcker test, as presented in table 4, state the square root of the AVE for each construct on the diagonal. These diagonal values should be greater than the elements of the off-diagonal in the respective rows and columns (Mohd Dzin & Lay, 2021). It shows the mutual relationships between items. This contrast shows that an item shares more variation with its related indicators than with any other item in the model (Swedlow et al. 2020). Thus, Table 4 provides sufficient proof of the existence of discriminant validity.

Table 5: R-square and R-square Adjusted

Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
ATIN	0.641	0.639
PI	0.485	0.484

Sources: Compiled from SmartPls-4

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to estimate the explanatory capacity of the model, and the path coefficients were calculated before the significance tests were performed using a bootstrapping method to test the structural connection. The minimum values for R-squared and adjusted R-squared can be grouped into five levels of fit quality. An outstanding fit is indicated by values greater than 0.90. A good fit value falls within the limits of 0.70 to 0.90. A medium fit is shown when values lie between 0.50 and 0.70. A poor model is depicted by values ranging from 0.30–0.50. Lastly, a very poor fit is indicated by values below 0.30(Arora et al., 2019). Table 6 shows the values of effect size (F^2) of latent predictors in the model. The F^2 value indicates the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variables. Effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered low, medium, and large, respectively, as suggested by Cohen (2013). To determine the model fit in PLS-SEM, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value should also be considered, and a value less than 0.08 indicates a successful model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

Table 6: F-Square

Constructs	ATIN	PI
ATIN		0.94
PBC	0.206	
SN	0.161	
TRS	0.151	

Sources: Compiled from SmartPls-4

Table 6 displays the results regarding the explanatory power of the estimated model. The results indicate that the explanatory power of all endogenous factors is moderately fitted. Model fit of the estimated model shows a strong relationship between the endogenous and exogenous variables. The SRMR value was 0.044. It is substantially lower than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2022); therefore, the model satisfies all the requirements of the measurement model.

Structural Model Assessment

Hypotheses were tested using the reliable PLS approach in the SmartPLS-4 software. Bootstrapping was employed with 5,000 subsamples to assess the statistical significance of coefficients. Table 7 presents the results of the structural model for the direct effects, and Figure 2 displays the model estimation results. All direct path coefficients related to purchase intention were found to be positive and significant. Table 7 indicates that all the proposed hypothesesH_1, H_2, H_3, and H_4, are well supported in the research model. Therefore, it was found that PBC, SN, and TRS significantly and positively impact attitude towards IFIs. Also, there is a significant and positive impact of attitude towards IFIs on purchase intention to buy fashion products among shoppers.

Table 7: Structural Model

Variables	Coefficient	T statistics	P values	Confidence Interval (Bias Corrected)		Inference
				2.50%	97.50%	
PBC -> ATIN	0.352	7.04	0.000	0.259	0.455	H_1 is supported
SN -> ATIN	0.309	7.781	0.000	0.234	0.386	H_2 is supported
TRS -> ATIN	0.296	5.995	0.000	0.203	0.398	H_3 is supported
ATIN -> PI	0.696	20.273	0.000	0.619	0.756	H_4 is supported

Sources: Compiled from SmartPls-4

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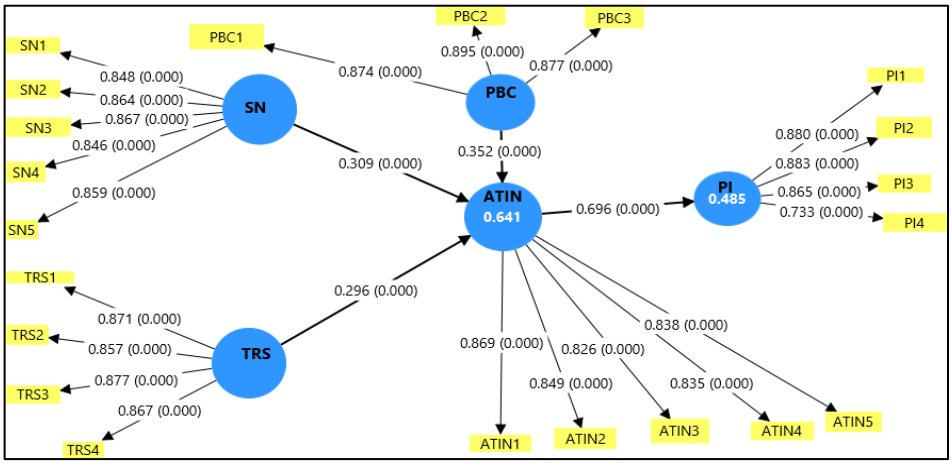

Figure 2: Model Estimation Results

DISCUSSION

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive empirical investigation into the key factors that shape consumers' intentions while purchasing fashion items. By employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) software, the research seeks to uncover the complex relationships that exist between various variables that influence consumer decision-making in the fashion retail sector. The use of PLS-SEM methodology allows for a sophisticated analysis of the complex relationships that exist among selected key constructs simultaneously. This study addresses a significant gap in the literature by conducting a comprehensive empirical investigation into the key factors influencing consumer intentions in fashion purchasing. This approach enables researchers to model latent variables and their indicators, accounting for measurement error and providing a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between factors such as consumer attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and trust are the key determinants of purchase intention of fashion shoppers. By identifying and quantifying these relationships, the study aims to provide valuable insights for fashion retailers, marketers, and researchers, potentially informing strategies to enhance consumer engagement and optimize marketing efforts dynamically and competitively industry.

Theoretical Implications

This research identifies two theoretical implications. Firstly, consumers' attitudes toward IFIs are primarily shaped by perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and trust, in alignment with existing research (Aydin & Aydin, 2022; Lim et al., 2016; Gomes et al., 2022; Tiwari, 2024). Among these factors, perceived behavioral control is identified as the most significant in shaping attitudes toward influencers, followed by social norms, with trust having the minimum impact. This proposes that influencers who are perceived as credible in terms of behavioral control are more likely to influence followers' attitudes and purchasing decisions, as supported by previous studies (Chetioui et al., 2020). PBC pertains to individuals' perception of their capacity to engage with or adhere to an influencer's fashion recommendations. When consumers believe that they have autonomy over their choices regarding influencer-endorsed fashion items, they tend to form more favorable attitudes toward the influencer. This perceived behavioral control allows consumers to assess influencer suggestions critically, instills confidence in their ability to accept or reject fashion advice, and supports independent decision-making in purchasing or styling fashion products. Influencers who empower their audience in making fashion-related choices are more likely to build positive attitudes and stronger relationships with their followers.

Secondly, the intentions of consumers to make purchases are notably shaped by the views of fashion influencers (Bataineh, 2015; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). These influencers, esteemed as style experts, exert a significant impact through their active presence on social media platforms. Their influence is largely due to their skill in crafting content that resonates with audiences, presenting products within authentic, everyday settings, and offering thorough product insights. The sense of genuineness and personal rapport that consumers perceive with influencers further strengthens their persuasive influence. In light of this impact, fashion brands and marketers are increasingly forming partnerships with influencers to effectively connect with their target demographics and stimulate their purchase intention.

Practical Implications

The results of this study have important implications for marketing practitioners, especially in the field of fashion. Gaining insight into the drivers of consumer intention and purchase considerations will improve strategic decision-making and communication strategies. Social norms can be effectively leveraged to influence consumer attitudes and intentions when brands align their messages and campaigns with the dominant values and expectations of society. Such alignment nurtures a feeling of belonging and connection among consumers, thereby deepening brand loyalty and trust. Furthermore, the influence of perceived behavioral control on purchase intentions underscores the importance of providing consumers with adequate information and support to facilitate informed choices. By ensuring product transparency, showcasing genuine

customer feedback, and simplifying the buying process, marketers can boost consumer confidence and satisfaction, resulting in improved conversion rates and repeat purchases.

By understanding the mediation dynamics between social norms, perceived behavioral control, and consumption behavior, vendors will be better able to tune their strategies to drive consumer interaction and achieve desired outcomes. Investing in programs that builds a positive image of fashion influencers digitally can translate to positive purchase intent and behavior over time. This study offers three key practical implications. First, it assists marketers and promoters in the fashion industry in identifying the key factors to consider when choosing suitable influencer partners. Second, it contributes valuable insights into the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intentions, particularly within the fashion sector, where empirical research remains scarce. Third, the findings enhance understanding of the factors influencing the purchasing behavior of educated youth in Punjab, providing a foundation for designing targeted marketing strategies that effectively and profitably cater to this growing market segment.

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