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From Social Media Influencers to Sustainable Buying Preferences: The Roles of Consumer Engagement, Sustainable Consumer Awareness, and Brand Attitude in Ethnic Wear

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ABSTRACT
Social media has evolved as one of the major sources of information on fashion, providing avenues for social media influencers to influence consumers' awareness, engagement and preference towards sustainable ethnic wear. The study explores the influence of social media influencers on consumer awareness, consumer engagement, attitude towards brands and preference towards sustainable purchase among the ethnic wear segment of Indian consumers. A quantitative research approach was used and primary data collection was done with the help of structured, self-administered questionnaires from consumers in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), India. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS was used to analyse the proposed research framework. The measurement model showed good reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The overall results of the structural model showed that social media influencers have a positive effect on sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement. Sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement both have a positive effect on brand attitude and brand attitude has a positive effect on sustainable buying preferences. All five hypothesised relationships were supported. The results provide insights for sustainable fashion research by integrating the relationship between influencer communication, consumer awareness and engagement with brand evaluation and sustainable buying preferences in the context of ethnic wear. The study also offers practical insights for ethnic-wear marketers seeking to develop social media communication that resonates with sustainability-conscious consumers.
Keywords: Social Media Influencers; Sustainable Consumer Awareness; Consumer Engagement; Brand Attitude; Sustainable Buying Preferences; Ethnic Wear.

1. INTRODUCTION

In fashion, sustainability is a growing concern of consumers, brands and marketers of fashion and clothing as they recognise the environmental, social and economic consequences of fashion consumption. Consumers can now influence fashion choices based on the sustainability attributes and values of products in addition to style, price and quality. But it is difficult to translate consumer awareness about sustainability into buying behaviour, as there are many psychological, social and market-related factors at play(Busalim et al., 2022; Blas Riesgo et al., 2023; Vladimirova et al., 2024). In the context of ethnic wear, which is often a reflection of one's cultural identity, as well as a personal expression and social tradition to contemporary fashion trends, these factors are especially important.

As social media has evolved, the way consumers are finding fashion products, sharing their views, and judging brands has changed. Placing platforms with visual content, product demonstrations and user interactions gives consumers the chance to have an encounter with information on fashion and sustainability(Vladimirova et al., 2024). In this context, social media influencers have become key sources of recommendations and opinions. By demonstrating how to style, presenting products, and providing personal recommendations, influencers can help consumers to understand the information they are receiving and how they should feel about the brands and products they see. This study on influencer communication emphasizes the importance of opinion leadership in the social media context(Casaló et al., 2020; Johnstone and Lindh, 2022). However, buying preferences from influencers is not a guarantee of lasting preference. How consumers process information on sustainability, how they interact with fashion and how they assess the brands they see can play a role in the impact of such communication(Johnstone and Lindh, 2022; Kaivonen et al., 2024).

Sustainable consumer awareness indicates an important consideration in this process because awareness of environmental and social issues may influence how consumers interpret clothing choices and sustainability-related claims. For fashion, there is consumer concern about the environmental impact of what they are buying, social responsibility and the overall value of sustainable options. But just knowing could not be enough to influence brand perception or purchase decisions. The consumer has to also read and understand the information provided and decide if it is relevant to their needs and expectations for consumption. Consumer-related factors

are revealed as important in studying responses to sustainable clothing in research on sustainable fashion consumption(Busalim et al., 2022; Blas Riesgo et al., 2023; Vladimirova et al., 2024). Therefore, analysing sustainable consumer awareness together with consumer engagement can help to understand consumer response to the fashion communication of the influencers more comprehensively.

Fashion consumption is another factor that is relevant in the context of social media is consumer engagement. Through activities such as paying attention to content, seeking additional information, interacting with posts and discussing products with others, consumers can become more actively involved with fashion-related communication. Customer engagement research emphasises the importance of consumers' interactions and experiences in their relationships with brands (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). In the social media context, engagement can present consumers with the chance to construct attitudes toward brands and appraise the information connected with their products. The research into consumers' participation in content on sustainable fashion also emphasises the role of communication through social media in stimulating consumers' participation (Testa et al., 2021). Both engagement and awareness can relate to brand evaluation differently; thus, it is necessary to investigate these relationships with brand attitude.

Such connections are especially significant for the Indian ethnic-wear industry. Ethnic wear, such as Sarees, Kurtas, Lehengas and Salwar suits, plays a significant part in Indian clothing consumption and it is linked with the expression of culture, social events and fashion changes. Ethnic-wear products can be judged by consumers on style, quality, cultural significance and perceived value, and sustainability attributes can also play a role in consumer preferences. Research on sustainable fashion and ethnic-garment consumption provides a foundation for examining how consumers evaluate fashion products and the values associated with them (Chakrabarti and Baisya, 2009; Busalim et al., 2022).

Although existing research has examined social media influencers, consumer engagement, sustainable fashion consumption and brand evaluation, these areas are often considered through different relationships and contexts. Further investigation is needed into how influencer-related communication is associated with sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement, and how these factors relate to brand attitude and sustainable buying preferences in ethnic wear (Vladimirova et al., 2024). In particular, examining these constructs within a single framework can help clarify the relationships connecting social media communication with consumers' evaluations and preferences. Social Influence Theory provides a relevant theoretical perspective because it explains how individuals' judgements and responses may be shaped by information and opinions communicated by others (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955).

Against this background, the present study examines the relationships between social media influencers, sustainable consumer awareness, consumer engagement, brand attitude and sustainable buying preferences towards ethnic wear. Specifically, it investigates whether social media influencers positively influence sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement, whether these two constructs positively influence brand attitude, and whether brand attitude positively influences sustainable buying preferences. The study reports the following research questions:

RQ1: How do social media influencers influence sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement towards ethnic wear?

RQ2: How do sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement influence brand attitude towards ethnic wear?

RQ3: How does brand attitude influence sustainable buying preferences towards ethnic wear?

To address these questions, the study employs a quantitative research approach and analyses survey data collected from consumers in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), India. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), conducted using SmartPLS, is employed to assess the measurement model and examine the hypothesised relationships among the constructs.

This study contributes to sustainable fashion research by bringing together influencer communication, sustainable consumer awareness, consumer engagement and brand attitude within a framework focused on ethnic-wear consumption. Its findings can also inform ethnic-wear marketers seeking to develop relevant social media communication, encourage meaningful consumer engagement and strengthen favourable brand evaluations in the context of sustainable consumption. Research on fashion influencers and consumer purchase intentions further underscores the relevance of understanding the connections between influencer-related communication and consumers' evaluations (Tiwari et al., 2023). By examining these connected relationships, the study advances understanding of how social media-related consumer responses are associated with sustainable buying preferences in the Indian ethnic-wear market.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Relationship between Social Media Influencers and Sustainable Consumer Awareness

Social media influencers can also influence consumers' awareness of sustainability through communicating information about fashion products and responsible consumption practices. Their recommendations, product presentations and discussions can help consumers to identify sustainability-related issues and to think about the relevance of these to clothing choices. Studies on sustainable fashion show the importance of consumer-related factors to understand consumers response to sustainability in clothing consumption (Busalim, Fox and Lynn, 2022; Blas Riesgo, Lavanga and Codina, 2023). Influencers may facilitate this process by providing fashion-related information in accessible formats that link sustainability considerations to consumers' everyday interests. Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020) analyse influencers as opinion leaders on Instagram, highlighting their role in social media communication. Also, Social Influence Theory proposes that people's

judgments may be influenced by information and opinions received from others (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). For ethnic wear, influencer content can draw consumers' attention to sustainability-related product attributes and encourage them to consider the wider implications of their clothing choices. But more exposure to influencer content doesn't automatically mean accurate awareness, and consumers can interpret information differently.

H1: Social media influencers significantly influence sustainable consumer awareness towards ethnic wear.

2.2 Relationship between Social Media Influencers and Consumer Engagement

Social media influencers can encourage consumer engagement by posting fashion-related content that catches consumers' attention and encourages interaction. Consumer engagement refers to consumers' involvement with content or brands through their interest, attention and participation (Brodie et al., 2011). In social media environments, such engagement may be reflected in consumers' responses to posts, interactions with product presentations and continued interest in fashion-related information. Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020) highlight the role of influencers as opinion leaders on Instagram, demonstrating their relevance within digital social environments. When consumers find influencer content relevant to their fashion interests, they may be more inclined to interact with the content and explore the brands being presented. In the ethnic-wear context, styling demonstrations, garment presentations and fashion recommendations may provide opportunities for consumers to engage with related content. Social Influence Theory further suggests that individuals' responses can be shaped by information and opinions communicated by others (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Therefore, influencer-generated content may encourage consumers to participate more actively in fashion-related interactions.

H2: Social media influencers positively influence consumer engagement with ethnic-wear content.

2.3 Relationship between Sustainable Consumer Awareness and Consumer Engagement

Sustainable consumer awareness may encourage consumers to engage more actively with sustainability-related fashion content by increasing their interest in responsible clothing consumption. Consumers who recognise the environmental and social implications of fashion may be more inclined to seek information and interact with relevant content (Busalim, Fox and Lynn, 2022; Blas Riesgo, Lavanga and Codina, 2023). Consumer engagement involves consumers' active involvement with content and brands through interactive experiences and participation (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014). As consumers become more aware of sustainability issues, they may be more interested in conversations on responsible fashion and get into information shared by ethnic wear brands. This awareness might make them more receptive to relevant social media posts and more attentive to product information related to sustainability. Research into sustainable fashion also points to the role of consumer knowledge and other consumer-related factors in shaping responses to sustainable clothing choices (Busalim, Fox and Lynn, 2022). Thus, consumers who recognise sustainability-related aspects within ethnic wear may be more likely to engage with content that discusses responsible clothing consumption. Nevertheless, awareness does not automatically result in engagement, as participation may depend on consumers' interests and the relevance of the content.

H3: Sustainable consumer awareness significantly influences consumer engagement with ethnic-wear content.

2.4 Relationship between Sustainable Consumer Awareness and Brand Attitude

Sustainable consumer awareness may influence how consumers evaluate brands by increasing their understanding of sustainability-related product attributes and responsible consumption. Consumers who are knowledgeable about sustainability issues may be more sensitive to the degree to which a brand's products and communications fulfil their sustainability-related expectations. Behre and Cauberghe (2024) investigate the relationship between sustainability cues, fashion styles and consumers' brand attitudes, emphasising the relevance of sustainability-related information for brand evaluation. When consumers recognise the importance of sustainability in clothing consumption, they may incorporate these considerations into their assessment of ethnic-wear brands. This may lead to a more favourable brand attitude when consumers perceive the brand as consistent with their expectations. However, awareness alone does not guarantee a positive evaluation, as consumers may also consider product quality, style and the credibility of sustainability claims.

H4: Sustainable consumer awareness significantly influences brand attitude towards ethnic wear.

2.5 Relationship between Consumer Engagement and Brand Attitude

Consumer engagement may influence brand attitude by shaping consumers' evaluations through their interactions with brand-related content. Active engagement can provide opportunities for consumers to develop impressions of a brand based on the information and experiences they encounter (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014). Research on fashion brand social media also highlights the importance of interactive experiences in fostering consumer engagement (Park and Ha, 2021). When consumers engage with ethnic-wear brands, their interactions may help them evaluate the brand's appeal, relevance and suitability to their preferences. Such evaluations can contribute to brand attitude, which reflects consumers' overall favourable or unfavourable assessment of a brand (Spears and Singh, 2004). However, engagement does not always produce a positive evaluation; the outcome may depend on the quality of the interaction and consumers' interpretation of the brand's communication. Therefore, meaningful engagement is expected to contribute to more favourable brand attitudes towards ethnic-wear brands.

H5: Consumer engagement positively influences brand

attitude towards ethnic wear.

2.6 Relationship between Brand Attitude and Sustainable Buying Preferences

Brand attitude is crucial for shaping consumer preferences because brand attitude reflects a consumer's judgement of a brand and its products. A favourable brand attitude makes consumers more willing to consider that brand when they look at options and decide on purchases (Spears and Singh, 2004). In the world of fashion consumers' brand attitude can also be affected by the sustainability features and values that consumers link to the products (Behre and Cauberghe 2024). When consumers build a brand attitude toward an ethnic-wear brand those consumers are more likely to choose that brand's products especially if the brand meets their expectations for style and responsible buying. Studies on fashion consumption show that consumer brand attitude and product details are key to understanding why people pick sustainable clothes (Busalim, Fox and Lynn 2022; Blas Riesgo, Lavanga and Codina 2023). Therefore a favourable brand attitude toward a brand is expected to intensify consumer preferences, for that brand's products in the context of sustainable buying. Yet consumer preferences do not always turn into purchases because consumers may face practical or financial limits. Accordingly a favourable attitude towards a brand is expected to strengthen consumers' preferences, for its products in the context of sustainable consumption. However preferences do not necessarily translate into purchases as consumers may also face practical or economic constraints.

H6: Brand attitude significantly influences sustainable buying preferences towards ethnic wear

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is developed based on Social Influence Theory to examine how social media-related influences shape consumers' evaluations and sustainable buying preferences towards ethnic wear. It provides a theoretical basis for formulating the research hypotheses and empirically testing the proposed relationships within the Indian ethnic-wear market. The framework also shows how the proposed relationships connect to the study's research objectives. By testing these connections, the study aims to improve our understanding of fashion preferences, especially when it comes to buying ethnic wear.

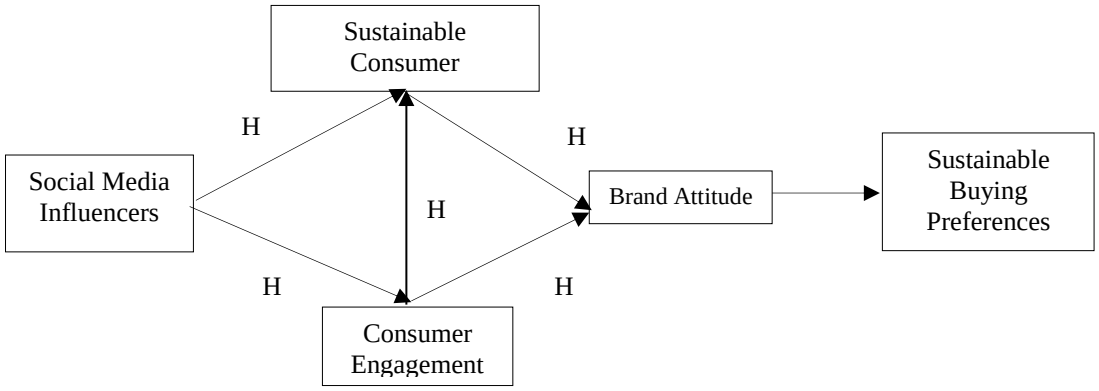


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample and Data Design

This study uses a number-based method to look at how social media influencers affect consumer engagement, sustainable consumer awareness, brand attitude and sustainable buying preferences in the world of ethnic-wear. The research focuses on people living in Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) India. Asks how the posts, from social media influencers help people become aware engage and judge ethnic-wear brands.

The questionnaire is a set of questions that people fill out by themselves. It measures five ideas: social media influencers, sustainable consumer awareness, consumer engagement, brand attitude and sustainable buying preferences. Responders rate each statement on a five-point scale from 1 (disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The study invites anyone who wants to help without choosing participants from a list. The study examines consumers' responses within the specified geographical context to understand the proposed relationships among the research constructs.

The collected data are analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. The analysis assesses the reliability and validity of the measurement model and evaluates the hypothesised structural relationships. Specifically, the research framework examines whether social media influencers positively influence sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement, whether these two constructs positively influence brand attitude, and whether brand attitude positively influences sustainable buying preferences towards ethnic wear.

The research design provides a systematic approach to examining the proposed relationships using survey data. As the study relies on cross-sectional responses, the findings are interpreted in terms of the hypothesised relationships rather than definitive proof of causation.

3.2 Measurement Instruments

Drawing on relevant literature and theoretical foundations, the conceptual framework explains the proposed relationships between social media influencers,

sustainable consumer awareness, consumer engagement, brand attitude and sustainable buying preferences. The measurement scales were selected based on relevant previous studies and contextualised for ethnic-wear consumption. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1, which means Strongly Disagree, to 5, which means Strongly Agree. This was done to capture how people felt about the research constructs that were suggested. This enabled respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each statement based on their perceptions and experiences of ethnic-wear consumption. Social Media Influencers items were adapted from Ryu and Han (2021), Sustainable Consumer Awareness and Sustainable Buying Preferences items from Park and Lee (2021), Consumer Engagement items from Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014), and Brand Attitude items from Spears and Singh (2004). Each person rated every statement using a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1, which means Strongly Disagree, to 5, which means Strongly Agree. The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity before testing the proposed relationships.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The research model was analysed using SmartPLS through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The analysis involved assessing the measurement model and evaluating the structural model. The measurement model was examined using construct reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity criteria. The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, coefficients of determination ((R^2)), effect sizes ((f^2)) and collinearity statistics (VIF). The significance of the hypothesised relationships was assessed using the relevant model-testing results. The findings are presented in relation to the proposed research hypotheses.

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

4.1 Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed using SmartPLS to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A and composite reliability, while convergent validity was assessed through indicator loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). As reported in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.831 to 0.874, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Similarly, rho_A values ranged from 0.841 to 0.881, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.881 to 0.909, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability across all five constructs. The indicator loadings ranged from 0.726 to 0.869, exceeding the commonly recommended minimum of 0.70. Furthermore, AVE values ranged from 0.599 to 0.666, surpassing the threshold of 0.50 and supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). The square roots of the AVE values, shown on the diagonal of the Fornell–Larcker matrix, were higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. In addition, all HTMT values ranged from 0.244 to 0.603, remaining below the commonly used threshold of 0.85. Overall, these results support the reliability and validity of the measurement model and indicate that the constructs are empirically distinguishable.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct & Items	Factor Loading	Alpha	CR	AVE
Social Media Influencers(SMI)		0.846	0.890	0.619
SMI1	0.803			
SMI2	0.748			
SMI3	0.832			
SMI4	0.811			
SMI5	0.735			
Sustainable Consumer Awareness(SCA)		0.874	0.909	0.666
SCA1	0.743			
SCA2	0.787			
SCA3	0.848			
SCA4	0.846			
SCA5	0.852			
Consumer Engagement(CE)		0.857	0.897	0.636
CE1	0.806			
CE2	0.843			
CE3	0.775			
CE4	0.773			
CE5	0.789			
Brand Attitude(BA)		0.831	0.881	0.599
BA1	0.869			
BA2	0.770			
BA3	0.749			

BA4	0.747			
BA5	0.726			
Sustainable Buying Preferences(SBP)		0.865	0.903	0.650
SBP1	0.823			
SBP2	0.783			
SBP3	0.828			
SBP4	0.821			
SBP5	0.774			

Note: SBP is labelled "Latent Variable 1" in the SmartPLS output; its indicators, SBP1–SBP5, identify it as Sustainable Buying Preferences.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	Brand Attitude	Consumer Engagement	Social Media Influencers	Sustainable Buying Preferences	Sustainable Consumer Awareness
Brand Attitude	0.774				
Consumer Engagement	0.392	0.798			
Social Media Influencers	0.340	0.486	0.787		
Sustainable Buying Preferences	0.515	0.219	0.21	0.806	
Sustainable Consumer Awareness	0.432	0.281	0.493	0.285	0.816

Note: Fornell-Larcker criterion

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity among the constructs. As shown in Table 2 the numbers along the diagonal, which stand for the roots of the average variance extracted were greater than the related correlations, between different constructs. Specifically, the diagonal values ranged from 0.774 for Brand Attitude to 0.816 for Sustainable Consumer Awareness, exceeding the respective correlations with the other constructs. These findings indicate that each construct shares greater variance with its own indicators than with the other constructs in the model. Therefore, the Fornell–Larcker criterion supports the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

4.2 Structural Model Assessment

Following the assessment of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated using SmartPLS to examine the hypothesised relationships among the study constructs. The bootstrapping results show that all five hypothesised relationships are positive and statistically significant. As presented in Table 3, Brand Attitude positively influences Sustainable Buying Preferences ($\beta = 0.515$, $t = 13.156$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the proposed relationship. Consumer Engagement also has a positive and significant effect on Brand Attitude ($\beta = 0.294$, $t = 6.324$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, Social Media Influencers positively influence Consumer Engagement ($\beta = 0.486$, $t = 13.028$, $p < 0.001$) and Sustainable Consumer Awareness ($\beta = 0.493$, $t = 12.896$, $p < 0.001$). Finally Sustainable Consumer Awareness has a significant effect on Brand Attitude. This means that when people are more aware of practices, they tend to feel better about a brand. Being aware of sustainability helps people form an opinion of a brand. ($\beta = 0.349$, $t = 8.419$, $p < 0.001$). These findings provide empirical support for all five hypothesised relationships, highlighting the roles of social media influencers, consumer engagement and sustainable consumer awareness in shaping brand attitudes and sustainable buying preferences towards ethnic wear.

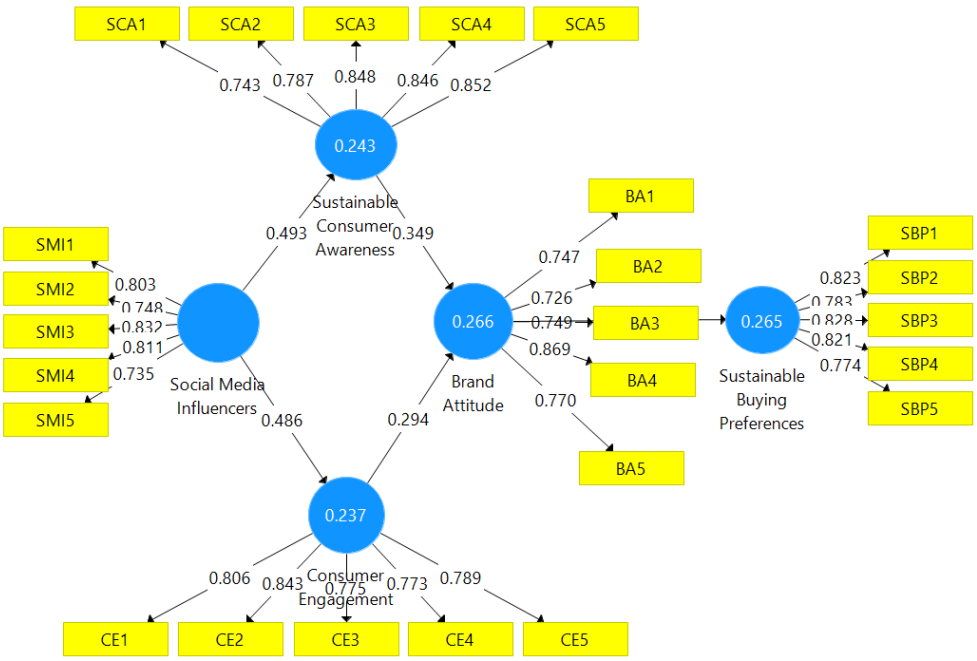
Table 3. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficient (β)	T-statistic	P-value	Result
H1	SMA → SCA	0.493	12.896	***	Supported
H2	SMI → CE	0.486	13.028	***	Supported
H3	SCA → BA	0.349	8.419	***	Supported
H4	CE → BA	0.294	6.324	***	Supported
H5	BA → SBP	0.515	13.156	***	Supported

Note: SMI = Social Media Influencers; SCA = Sustainable Consumer Awareness; CE = Consumer Engagement; BA = Brand Attitude; SBP = Sustainable Buying Preferences. *** indicates $p < 0.001$.

Social Media Influencers have a positive impact on Sustainable Consumer Awareness (β = 0.493 ***) and on Consumer Engagement (β = 0.486 ***) which confirms H1 and H2. This shows that content from influencers can help increase awareness about sustainability and encourage people to engage with ethnic-wear content. Sustainable Consumer Awareness (β = 0.349 ***) and Consumer Engagement (β = 0.294 ***) also have a positive effect on Brand Attitude supporting H3 and H4. These results mean that when people are more aware of sustainability and more engaged they tend to have an opinion of ethnic-wear brands. Brand Attitude also has a positive effect on Sustainable Buying Preferences (β = 0.515 ***) which confirms H5. This means that when people, like a brand they are more likely to choose sustainable options. All five hypotheses are supported by the results of the model

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5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships among social media influencers, sustainable consumer awareness, consumer engagement, brand attitude, and sustainable buying preferences for ethnic wear in the Indian market. The findings provide empirical support for all five hypothesised relationships reported in the structural model and contribute to understanding how influencer-related communication is associated with consumers' awareness, engagement, brand evaluations and buying preferences. These findings are particularly relevant to the ethnic-wear market, where consumers encounter fashion-related information through digital platforms while considering product attributes, personal preferences and sustainability-related concerns. The results indicate that social media influencers positively influence sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement. These findings indicate that influencer-related communication may provide opportunities for consumers to encounter sustainability information and engage with ethnic-wear content. This is consistent with Casaló et al. (2020), who examined influencers as opinion leaders in social media environments. Social Influence Theory also gives an explanation because peoples thoughts and reactions can be affected by what others say and think (Deutsch and Gerard 1955). So when people talk online this can be a part of the social media world where people learn about sustainability and get fashion tips.

The results also show that awareness of sustainability helps people like a brand. This means that when people know about the social effects of buying clothes they might think about these things when they look at brands and their products. This finding is important for studies about signs of sustainability. How people see brands in fashion (Behre and Cauberghe 2024). It also adds to research that found things about people to be important in how they choose sustainable clothes (Busalim et al. 2022; Blas Riesgo et al. 2023).. Even if people know about sustainability they might not always like a brand. They might also look at the quality of the product how it looks, how much it is worth and if the sustainability claims are true. So the results show that knowing about sustainability matters for how people feel about a brand.. People also look at other things when they decide if they like a brand or not.

The study also finds that when people are more involved with fashion content they tend to like a brand more. This means that when people interact with fashion posts they might learn more about products see messages from brands and get a sense of what the brand is like. This matches with research that says how people interact and experience things online helps shape their feelings, about

brands (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014).The findings also suggest that sustainable consumer awareness has a stronger estimated relationship with brand attitude than consumer engagement in the reported model. Nevertheless, both relationships are positive and statistically significant, indicating that awareness and engagement are distinct considerations in understanding consumers' evaluations of ethnic-wear brands.

Finally, brand attitude positively influences sustainable buying preferences, highlighting its importance within the proposed framework. This finding suggests that consumers' favourable evaluations of ethnic-wear brands are associated with stronger sustainable buying preferences. It is consistent with Spears and Singh (2004), who examined brand attitude in relation to purchase-related intentions, and is relevant to research on sustainability-related information and brand evaluations in fashion (Behre and Cauberghe, 2024). The result highlights the importance of brand attitude in understanding sustainable buying preferences within the proposed framework. However, preferences should not be equated with actual purchasing behaviour, as factors such as price, product availability and perceived quality may influence consumers' final decisions. Overall, the findings support the proposed relationships between influencer communication, consumer awareness, consumer engagement, brand attitude and sustainable buying preferences. They also provide context-specific evidence from ethnic-wear consumers in Delhi NCR, India. Nevertheless, because the study uses cross-sectional survey data, the results establish statistical relationships within the tested model rather than definitive causal effects.

6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The study contributes to sustainable fashion research by explaining how social media influencers, sustainable consumer awareness and consumer engagement relate to brand attitude and sustainable buying preferences in the Indian ethnic-wear market. Drawing on Social Influence Theory (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955), the findings extend the application of the theory to social media-based ethnic-wear consumption by highlighting the positive relationships between influencer communication, consumer awareness and consumer engagement. The study further demonstrates that awareness and engagement are positively associated with brand attitude, while brand attitude is positively associated with sustainable buying preferences. By integrating these constructs within a single framework, the study provides a basis for understanding how social media-related consumer responses relate to brand evaluations and sustainable fashion preferences.

The findings also give ideas for people who sell ethnic wear and for social media influencers. Brands can work with influencers to share useful and trustworthy sustainability information while helping customers to get involved by showing products sharing style ideas and talking interactively. The strong link between brand attitude and sustainable buying shows that it is very important to build a brand view by speaking honestly and by making products that fit customers' needs for style, quality and sustainability. Sustainability claims must be true. Backed by solid proof to keep customers confident. From a social view, careful influencer messages and teaching consumers can help people to look at sustainability messages carefully and choose clothing that matters. These actions can help people to buy responsibly and match Sustainable Development Goal 12 which asks for buying and making.. This study looks at how people feel and choose not at the real environmental or social results.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

The study has some limits. First, the study looks at consumers in Delhi NCR, India and uses non-probability convenience sampling. This means the study's results may not apply to regions or different consumer groups. Second, the study uses a design that records consumer perceptions only at one moment. Because of this, the study cannot prove cause and effect. Third, the study collects data through self-reported questionnaires. It also considers a few ideas about social media influencers and sustainable buying preferences.

For research, I suggest the study include consumers from many parts of India. That way, the study can see if the relationships the study proposes stay the same across consumer groups. In addition, the study could use experimental designs to follow how influencer communication changes consumer awareness, engagement and brand attitude over time. The study could also look at factors. For example, the study could examine influencer credibility, the authenticity of sustainability claims, how sensitive consumers are to price and how easy it is to find products. These additions would give the study a view of sustainable buying preferences for ethnic wear.

Declaration

The authors state that this manuscript is original. It has not been published else. All sources have been properly acknowledged. There are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this manuscript.

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