

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS ON PERSONAL FASHION EXPENSES AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of social media trends on personal fashion expenditure and the willingness of youth to adopt sustainable consumption practices. With the growing dominance of platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest and short-form content apps, trend dissemination has become faster, shaping consumer preferences and encouraging frequent purchases. A quantitative survey was conducted among 35 respondents using the snowball sampling technique. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire focusing on spending habits, trend-based decision making, and awareness of sustainable fashion. The findings reveal that viral trends, influencer marketing and visually engaging content lead to increased impulsive buying and monthly fashion expenses. While awareness regarding sustainability is present among respondents, the actual adoption of sustainable fashion remains comparatively low due to cost factors, brand availability and peer influence. The study suggests the need for enhanced awareness programs, influencer-led sustainability campaigns and affordable, eco-friendly fashion options to promote responsible consumption among young consumers.

Keywords: Social media trends, fashion expenses, sustainable consumption, consumer behaviour, quantitative research

INTRODUCTION

Social media has fundamentally transformed fashion consumption by enabling real-time access to global style trends and accelerating their diffusion across audiences. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest operate as visual trend ecosystems where influencers, brands, and everyday users disseminate outfit ideas, styling tutorials, and product promotions. This continuous exposure intensifies the desire for trend-centric apparel, encouraging frequent purchases and increased personal expenditure, particularly among digitally active youth. The immediacy of content circulation and social validation further reinforces trend-driven consumption, often prioritising novelty over durability. Moreover, the interactive features of these platforms—such as likes, shares, comments, and story polls—create a sense of social approval, further motivating users to emulate popular styles. Algorithm-driven feeds ensure personalised exposure to the latest trends, amplifying the psychological effect of perceived social norms and status signalling. As a result, consumers are not only influenced by what is trending globally but also by the fashion choices of peers and micro-influencers within their own networks. This phenomenon has intensified impulse buying, reduced the lifespan of clothing in wardrobes, and contributed to the dominance of fast-fashion culture. Additionally, while users increasingly express interest in sustainable alternatives, the pressure to remain visually relevant online often supersedes environmental considerations, highlighting a growing tension between trend adoption and responsible consumption. Overall, social media has not only redefined how fashion is discovered and purchased but has also reshaped consumer priorities, creating a complex landscape where digital trends strongly dictate spending patterns and lifestyle choices.

Importance of the Study

Understanding the influence of social media trends on fashion consumption is of paramount importance for multiple stakeholders, including fashion marketers, brand managers, policymakers, and sustainability advocates. For marketers, insights into how trends drive personal expenditure can inform targeted digital campaigns and influencer collaborations. For sustainability advocates, recognising the barriers that prevent consumers from adopting eco-friendly alternatives despite growing awareness is crucial for developing effective strategies. The study contributes to bridging the gap between

trend engagement and responsible consumption, offering guidance on how sustainability can be effectively promoted in the context of fast-paced, visually driven fashion cultures. Moreover, it provides empirical evidence on the relationship between digital exposure and real-world behaviour, which is critical for designing interventions that encourage consumers to make conscious and informed fashion choices.

Problem Statement

Although social media enhances access to fashion inspiration, it also encourages fast-fashion consumption that can conflict with sustainability goals. Many consumers demonstrate awareness of eco-friendly fashion but fail to incorporate it into their purchasing behaviour consistently. This gap between knowledge and practice highlights a pressing challenge in promoting sustainable fashion within a culture dominated by rapid trend cycles.

Research Gap

Previous research has explored social media's role in trend diffusion and online consumer engagement, yet few studies have focused on its influence on personal fashion expenditure and sustainable fashion adoption. Investigating this relationship provides a nuanced understanding of how digital trends affect both financial behaviour and sustainability decisions, particularly among young adults.

Aim/Purpose

This study aims to examine the impact of viral social media trends on personal fashion spending and assess consumers' willingness to adopt sustainable fashion practices. It also explores how sustainability awareness translates into actual purchasing behaviour.

Research Questions

1. How do social media trends influence personal fashion spending?
2. What is the relationship between social media exposure and interest in sustainable fashion?
3. What factors prevent consumers from adopting sustainable fashion despite awareness?

HYPOTHESES

- **H₁:** social media trends significantly influence personal fashion expenditure.
- **H₂:** Awareness of sustainable fashion does not consistently lead to adoption.

Scope and Limitations

Scope: This study focuses on social media users aged 18–36, examining how viral fashion trends influence their personal fashion spending and interest in sustainable fashion alternatives. It considers digital engagement, trend adoption, and sustainability awareness, providing insights into the interplay between online exposure and consumer behaviour.

Limitations:

The research is limited by a small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Data collection relies on self-reported responses, which could be influenced by social desirability bias. Additionally, the study excludes offline factors such as in-store promotions, peer recommendations, and traditional media influences, focusing solely on digital platforms. Temporal factors, such as changing trends over time, are also not considered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media development has brought about a major shift in consumer behaviour, especially in the fashion industry. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest, among others, have caused a shift in the fashion media communication process from a company-led advertising approach to an “influencer-led” or “user-generated” approach. This has resulted in an intensified diffusion of trends, consumption through visuals, as well as impulse purchases among young consumers.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as “interactive platforms that support the creation and sharing of user-generated content,” such that consumers become active participants in the consumer-brand relationship instead of passive recipients of information. In the fashion industry, social media interactivity speeds up the spread of trends, improving the visibility of the brands.

Their definition focuses on the social media effect that alters the consumer-brand relationship to make purchase decisions more emotionally driven. This is an important implication of social media for the fashion industry. It means that social media alters the purchase

McCormick & Livett (2012) studied the influence of fashion blogs, or online consumer content, on consumer behaviour, observing that consumer opinions or online fashion storytelling contribute significantly to purchase intentions. This highlights that what matters more to the consumer is consumer-friendly or relatable online content, as is clearly evident in the influence of Instagram or YouTube on consumer behaviour with fashion reels or hauls.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) emphasised the role of influence, credibility and authenticity, especially for young female consumers. Their results indicate that authentic-looking influencers are more effective persuasion instruments for consumers than celebrity endorsement. This emphasises that influence marketing is effective not only by popularity but by trust and identification, especially for fashion-related choices.

A study by **Phua, Jin, & Kim (2017)** on emotional engagement with social networking sites found that more engagement resulted in more affinity for the brand and impulsive purchasing behaviour. This study emphasises that image-based platforms trigger impulsive purchasing by developing an aspirational lifestyle, which is in line with the current trend of impulsive purchases triggered by viral trends in the fashion world.

Contrary to consumption driven by trends, some research works have examined the issue of sustainability awareness in the context of fashion consumption. A study by **Joy et al. (2012)** looked into the paradox of fast fashion and sustainability, finding that despite consumers' expressions of consumerist ethics, affordability and trends are preferred in purchase decisions.

A further look into the role of influencers for sustainable fashion by **Mukherjee & Roy (2021)** revealed that sustainability through influencers' advocacy helps influence positive eco-conscious behaviour. It was, however, observed that sustainable fashion trends receive less promotion on social media platforms relative to trends for young people. In conclusion, the current literature suggests that social media is a significant driving force for fashion consumption in terms

of trends, endorsements by influencers, and the aesthetics of the products. Despite the more recent recognition of sustainable trends, few alternatives to sustainable fashion have gained influence from social media platforms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **quantitative research approach** to investigate the impact of social media trends on personal fashion expenditure and the willingness of youth to adopt sustainable consumption practices. Quantitative research was chosen as it enables the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analysed, providing objective and measurable insights into consumer behaviour, spending patterns, and trend-following habits. A **descriptive survey research design** was employed to systematically gather information on participants' fashion spending, frequency of trend-driven purchases, influence of online content, and awareness of sustainable fashion practices. The study focused on youth who actively engage with social media platforms and follow fashion-related content. Data was collected using a **structured questionnaire**, pre-tested to ensure clarity and reliability. Collected responses were analysed using **descriptive statistics**, including frequency distributions, percentages, and graphical representation, allowing for clear interpretation of patterns, relationships, and trends between social media influence, expenditure, and sustainable consumption behaviour.

Research Design

A **descriptive survey research design** was adopted to systematically collect information regarding participants' fashion consumption habits, their engagement with social media content, and their awareness and adoption of sustainable fashion practices. The descriptive design enables the identification of patterns and trends in consumer behaviour, helping to establish relationships between exposure to social media trends and their impact on fashion spending and sustainability decisions.

Population and Sampling

The study targeted young individuals who actively use social media and follow fashion-related content, as they are most influenced by online trends and influencer promotions. A **snowball sampling technique** was used, where initial participants referred other eligible respondents within their networks. This method is effective for accessing socially connected and digitally active participants who may be difficult to reach through traditional sampling. Snowball sampling ensured that respondents had relevant exposure to fashion trends, allowing the study to collect authentic insights into how social media impacts fashion expenditure and the adoption of sustainable consumption practices among youth.

Data Collection Tools

Data was collected using a **structured questionnaire** designed to capture participants' fashion spending, trend-following behaviour, and sustainable consumption practices. The survey included sections on monthly expenditure, frequency of trend-driven purchases, the influence of social media and online influencers, and awareness and adoption of sustainable fashion. The questionnaire was **pre-tested** to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability, minimising bias and ensuring consistent responses. This method provided measurable, comparable data, allowing for a clear understanding of the relationship between social media trends, consumer spending, and sustainable fashion adoption.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Data was analysed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify trends in spending behaviour and sustainability awareness among youth. The responses were organised, coded, and interpreted to determine how social media influences purchase intent. Patterns were observed by comparing trend-driven buying behaviour with actual interest in sustainable fashion. The results indicate a strong inclination toward trend adoption, with higher engagement recorded for influencer content and viral fashion styles. Cross-comparisons further revealed that even though sustainability awareness exists,

purchasing decisions still lean heavily toward fast fashion trends, reflecting a behavioural gap between awareness and practice.

Influence on Purchasing & Fashion Behaviour

Statement	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Click to purchase after seeing the item?	Always + Often + Sometimes	26	70.2%
Frequency of trend-based buying	1-2 times	22	59.5%
Style recreation using the wardrobe	Yes + Maybe	30	81%
Buy directly from social media brands?	Yes	24	64.9%
Visit the ads/pages of garments seen online	Always/Sometimes	26	70.2%

Table 01

Interpretation:

A large section of purchasers or considers buying clothing after online exposure. Many try to recreate looks and even buy from new social media brands, showing trust in digital fashion influence.

Awareness & Adoption of Sustainable Fashion

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Awareness of sustainability	Yes	27	73%
Consider sustainability in purchase	Sometimes + Always	13	54.1%
Influencers promoting sustainability	No	24	66.7%
Awareness of sustainable brands	Maybe + No	17	72.2%

Table 02

Interpretation:

Awareness about sustainability is high, but practical adoption is moderate. Most influencers people follow are not promoting sustainability, which may limit eco-friendly fashion adoption.

Findings and Results

Key Outcomes Based on Collected Data

The study revealed that the majority of respondents belong to the youth segment, indicating high digital engagement and receptiveness to fashion trends. Female participants demonstrated higher involvement and engagement with fashion trends compared to male respondents. Instagram emerged as the most preferred platform for fashion updates, suggesting that visual content plays a significant role in trend exposure.

A considerable number of respondents reported following fashion influencers or styling pages, highlighting the strong impact of digital personalities on fashion choices. Users primarily follow influencers for personal styling inspiration and to explore new fashion ideas or products. A notable portion of respondents indicated that they click on product links and browse websites after viewing trends, underscoring the influence of social media on purchase intention.

In terms of fashion expenditure, most respondents reported annual spending in the range of ₹3,000–₹10,000+, reflecting active and regular consumer engagement. Purchase frequency data suggest that trend-driven buying behaviour is common among the surveyed users. Awareness of sustainable fashion was observed among many respondents; however, its translation into purchase behaviour was inconsistent. Only a small proportion consistently considers sustainability while making purchases, indicating a gap between awareness and actual practice.

Key Trends

1. Higher social media exposure increases the likelihood of impulse buying.
2. Following multiple influencers correlates with a broader range of fashion experimentation.
3. Visual platforms like Instagram encourage frequent discovery of new styles and products.
4. Despite awareness, sustainability adoption is occasional and influenced by trend appeal.
5. Fashion spending is strongly linked to trend frequency rather than income level.
6. Influencer-driven campaigns have significant potential to convert awareness into sustainable purchasing behaviour.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study highlights how social media has transformed fashion consumption, particularly among youth. The influence of platforms like Instagram and of digital personalities goes beyond mere awareness—it actively shapes preferences, experimentation with styles, and purchasing decisions. This suggests that fashion choices are increasingly mediated by visual trends and peer-like influencer guidance, rather than solely by personal taste or necessity.

Despite widespread awareness of sustainable fashion, adoption remains limited, reflecting broader challenges in changing consumer behaviour. Fast fashion's affordability, convenience, and trend appeal continue to outweigh sustainable considerations, pointing to a tension between ethical awareness and actual practices. However, the study also reveals opportunities: influencers and digital campaigns can serve as powerful tools to bridge this gap, promoting conscious consumption while maintaining engagement with trends.

In conclusion, social media is both a significant driver of trend-driven fashion and a potential lever for sustainability. Fashion brands, marketers, and sustainability advocates can strategically leverage influencer collaborations, targeted campaigns, and creative digital storytelling to shape consumer perceptions, encourage responsible consumption, and integrate sustainability into the fast-paced world of fashion trends. By aligning trend engagement with ethical practices, it is possible to cultivate a fashion ecosystem that is not only stylish and appealing but also environmentally conscious and socially responsible. Future research can explore long-term behavioural changes and the effectiveness of specific influencer-led sustainability interventions, offering deeper insights into bridging the awareness-action gap in fashion consumption.

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APPENDICES

Variable	Response	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	37.8
	Female	62.2
Age (years)	18–25	45.9
	26–35	40.5
	35+	13.5
Occupation	Student	25.7
	Professional	21.6
	Others	52.7
Preferred Social Media	Instagram	77.8
	YouTube	11.1
	Others	11.1
Follow Influencers	Yes	83.8
	No	16.2
Click Links to Buy	Always/Often	29.7
	Sometimes	40.5
	Rarely/Never	29.7

Buy After Trend	1–2 times	59.5
	3–4 times	21.6
	Always/Never	18.9
Sustainable Fashion Awareness	Yes	73
	No/Maybe	27
Consider Sustainability	Yes/Always	35.1
	Sometimes	54.1
	No	10.8
Influencers Promote Sustainability	Yes	33.3
	No	66.7
Yearly Spending	≤₹6,000	43.2
	₹6,001–9,000	13.5
	>₹10,000	43.2
Items Bought/Year	≤10	51.3
	11–15	40.5
	15+	8.1
Buy From New Brands	Yes	64.9
	No	35.1
Visit Ads/Pages	≤6	29.7
	7–9	21.6
	Always/Never	48.6

Table 03