

Influencer Marketing and Copycat Fashion Consumption: Examining Gen Z Purchase Intentions in the Digital Era - An Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Fashion discovery, aspiration and purchase intention of Gen Z consumers is now heavily influenced by influencer marketing. At the same time, a new “dupe culture” and “copycat” fashion consumption has redefined the meaning of affordability, social identity and belonging to fashion. This systematic literature review analyses how the relationship between influencer marketing and the purchase intentions of Generation Z in the digital market in India is perceived. This review brings together the literature on consumer behaviour, fashion marketing, social media research, credibility of the influencers, parasocial interaction, impulse buying, sustainability, and counterfeit consumption, especially from the urban and semi-urban youth in India. This is particularly significant in India due to the rapid growth of the internet, Instagram's dominance in social media, the rise of influencers, price-conscious buying habits in fashion, and the emergence of affordable options on platforms like Instagram shopping, Meesho, Myntra, YouTube, and social commerce vendors. The review identifies that there are many drivers that affect Gen Z purchase intent, including influencer credibility, attractiveness, expertise, authenticity, parasocial relationships, emotional attachment, trend-driven behaviour, FOMO, perceived value, and impulse buying. It also emphasises the moderating effect of sustainability awareness and ethical fashion concerns, especially the attitude-behaviour gap among the Indian youth. The paper offers a conceptual framework that integrates these and suggests implications for brands, influencers, regulators and researchers.

Keywords: Influencer marketing; copycat fashion; purchase intention; parasocial relationships; impulse buying; AI influencers.

INTRODUCTION

Digital fashion consumption has changed the discovery, appraisal, emulation and buying process of young consumers. In previous years of fashion marketing, the fashion trends were largely determined by the designers, celebrities, fashion magazines and the retail stores, as well as the seasonal collections. Today, however, with digital, fashion influence is spreading all over the place. When it comes to fashion trends, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, influencer haul videos, outfit-of-the-day videos, styling tutorials, shopping links, affiliate codes and algorithmically recommended “dupe” videos have all made the trend more visual, more trendy, more imitative, faster, cheaper and more. So, influencer marketing has become more than a marketing opportunity; it has become a cultural mechanism for youth to create identity, aspiration and belonging.

India is a very fertile ground to study this phenomenon. The nation has one of the world's biggest and youngest digital populations. According to the Data Report, the number of internet users in India was 806 million by the beginning of 2025, while the internet user identities for social media were 491 million, and IAMA-Kantar-based data showed that the country's internet users increased to 886 million in 2024 and would touch 900 million in 2025. The social media ones are also not to be ignored: According to Data Report's Digital 2026 India report, YouTube's user base was estimated at 500 million in India as of the end of 2025, while Instagram had 481 million users, and Instagram's potential ad reach grew significantly from October 2024 to October 2025. It is not only a technological shift; these figures reflect the shift in the way Indian youth interact with brands, influencers, trends, comparison with others and the desire to aspire to them.

This digital expansion has come along with influencer marketing. While EY projected that India's influencer marketing industry will grow to INR 3,375 crore by 2026 with an 18% CAGR, The Goat Agency and Kantar Media's India Influencer Marketing Report 2025 estimated the size of the Indian influencer marketing industry at ₹3,600 crore in 2024 and projected a CAGR of 25% for the years ahead. As per the same report, the influencers impact the Indian

consumer journey in various phases – product discovery, information search and action. Unlike in other fields, this is particularly evident in fashion, as clothing has a strong visual component, personal significance, a social performative element, and is often eaten in bite-sized videos.

Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, the individuals born between the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, have had smartphones, creator culture, digital payments, e-commerce and a system of social validation from the beginning of their lives. While older generations may have access to fashion through retail outlets or TV commercials, Indian Gen Z users are more likely to start their fashion exploration online. For a college student residing in Noida, Greater Noida, Delhi, Gurugram, Lucknow, Jaipur, Indore or Chandigarh, the luxury-inspired fashion might be discovered on Instagram, a lower price option searched on Meesho, Myntra, Ajio, Flipkart or on an Instagram seller, peer reviews checked on YouTube and then a low-risk purchase made on UPI. This trip is not entirely logical; it's not entirely emotional. It's influenced by price sensitivity, the visibility of peers, aspiration, algorithms that repeat content, creator trust, scarcity, and the desire to stay in on a trend without paying the price of the original designer fashion.

“Dupe culture” is key to this transition. “Dupe” is a product that replicates the style, look, silhouette, colour scheme, design code or functional effect of a high-quality or luxury product, typically at a reduced cost. There are three similar & different types to distinguish, and they are counterfeit fashion, copycat fashion and inspired/dupe fashion. Fake products mimic brands, trademarks, logos, or packaging in order to mislead the consumer into thinking that it's authentic. Copycat fashion could be a fashion that replicates the design elements of a fashion, but not necessarily with the brand's logo. Dupe fashion is often marketed as more affordable, with a similar look, and sometimes openly marketed as such. However, consumers in India might not always make a clear distinction between these categories, especially when it comes to social media sellers who employ phrases like “first copy,” “inspired by,” “premium replica,” “same look,” “celebrity style,” or “designer dupe.”

It's easy to see that dupe culture has taken off to a great extent on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, worldwide. The ban of TikTok in India led to a lot of the short-form video use on Instagram reels, YouTube shorts, Moj, Josh and other platforms; however, the insatiable need to copy what's going on in the videos was there. Indian Gen Z consumers aren't just after clothes; they're after looks that come with the celebrity, influencers, Korean fashion, Bollywood fashion, airport outfit, festive look, luxury streetwear, gym look, quiet luxury, old money look, and Instagrammable fashion.

This is exacerbated by economic considerations. The expectations of the youth in urban and semi-urban areas in India are increasing, while incomes are not. However, aspirations are soaring in urban and semi-urban areas of India, whereas income distribution is fairly uneven. Many young consumers are students, young workers, freelancers, creators or job seekers. As India's secondhand clothing industry expands, and its access to simple social commerce channels grows, they are looking for unique, budget-friendly fashion. According to the 2024 annual review of Meesho, Gen Z represented approximately a third of its users, highlighting the significance of an affordable platform for young consumers. The trends indicate that the practice of copycat and low-cost consumption of fashion in India is not just an unethical imitation, but it can be viewed as a reaction to the constraints of affordability, social aspiration, and digital acceleration of trends.

Meanwhile, fashion plagiarism presents ethical, management and regulatory issues. Falsified drugs are a big problem in India. A recent report on counterfeits in India highlights that apparel is part of the affected categories and that social media ads are a significant medium for apparel counterfeits. The evidence indicates that imitation of fashion by influencers might lie on a continuum from relatively harmless style inspiration to illegal and ethically dubious promotion of counterfeit products.

Hence, this review paper is needed for three reasons. First, while there have been extensive studies on influencer marketing, the relationship between influencer marketing and the intention to buy a copycat fashion in the context of Indian Gen Z is an under-researched topic. Secondly, Indian markets are distinct from the markets in the West because of the nature of price sensitivity, informal retail networks, social commerce, fast adoption of digital and luxury aspiration amidst low affordability. Thirdly, AI influencers, virtual influencers, awareness of sustainability, ethical fashion, and impulse buying are all new topics that need to be placed within a consistent conceptualisation.

The aims of this review are:

- To collate and synthesise the literature to date on 'fashion copycat/dupe' consumption, 'fashion behaviour amongst Gen Z' and 'fashion by influencers' in an Indian context.

- To explore the psychological, social, technological and economic factors that influence the purchase intention of Gen-Z towards copycat fashion.
- To explore the influence of Parasocial relationships, emotional attachment, trend-driven behaviour, FOMO, impulse buying, sustainability awareness, ethical concern, virtual influencers and AI influencer marketing.
- To suggest a conceptual model for future empirical studies in India, particularly in the urban and semi-urban youth market of Delhi-NCR and Gautam Buddha Nagar.

Review Approach: This paper uses a systematic style narrative review approach. The paper introduces a thematic approach with explicit themes, inclusion priorities and synthesis categories, which is not an official PRISMA count, but a systematic approach. The review is based on peer-reviewed journal articles, Indian market studies, consumer behaviour theory, literature review on influencer marketing, literature review on fashion marketing and regulatory documents and market reports. Only literature published during the last 7 years (between 2019 and 2025) was given priority, and classic theoretical sources were considered only when needed to explain fundamental constructs.

The review was conducted on the studies and reports related to influencer marketing, social media influencers, fashion consumption, purchase intention of Gen Z, counterfeit and copycat fashion, social commerce, impulse buying, parasocial relationships, sustainability and ethical fashion, virtual influencers, and Indian digital behaviour. Where possible, research related to India and South Asia was emphasised, but no studies were found on “dupe culture” in India and studies on “counterfeit consumption” in other parts of the world and Southeast Asia were included to enrich the concept.

LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *EVOLUTION AND IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON FASHION CONSUMPTION IN INDIA*

Influencer marketing is no longer about celebrity endorsement, but more about the relationship and participation-driven approach to digital persuasion. The old-fashioned model of celebrity endorsement was based on fame, visibility, and the distance to be crossed. However, influencer marketing is more about what people think they can relate to, authenticity, a sense of being in the same position, niche expertise and more consistent interaction with the audience. In fashion, influencers don't simply just hawk clothes; they style, compare, review, wear clothes in their daily lives and fit them into lifestyle stories. Fashion is a personal and social category, and hence, the consumption of it has been heavily affected by social media in India. Instagram Reels, YouTube hauls, styling videos, festival lookbooks, college outfit ideas, office wear reels, wedding guest looks and “under ₹999” fashion content are all specific instances that change the equation of fashion aspiration to shopping cues. According to the EY report “India's Influencer Marketing Revolution”, the leading platforms for consuming influencer content in India are Instagram and YouTube and lifestyle, fashion, and beauty are likely to drive the growth of influencer marketing, as it is seen as a highly personal platform.

The Indian academic literature also confirms the relationship between social media marketing and intention to purchase fashion. The study conducted by Singh and Dagur revealed that social media marketing of an affordable luxury fashion brand has a significant impact on brand equity and purchase intention of Generation Z female consumers, and brand equity partially mediated the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. The findings showed that the intention to purchase was positively correlated with the expertise, authenticity, and disclosure of ads by influencers for the luxury market. The results revealed a positive association between the intention to purchase and the expertise, authenticity and disclosure of the ads by the influencers in the luxury market. The above studies suggest that Indian customers (youth consumers) do not just respond to the presence of influencers but also to their perceived expertise, authenticity, and disclosure.

There are several levels of fashion influencers in India. The first is that the celebrity influencers, Bollywood celebrities, actors, cricketers, and big fashion creators who have millions of followers are at the top. The macro-influencers, micro-influencers, nano-influencers, campus creators, styling pages, thrift sellers, boutique owners and local fashion reviewers are all below them. As per the WPP-Kantar India Influencer Marketing Report 2025, Indian brands are moving beyond the “follower count” metric and focusing more on other metrics as they seek to prioritise content quality, creator relevance, engagement levels and the length of relationships. This is significant since Gen Z consumers tend to think that micro- and niche influencers are more relatable than celebrity influencers. Copycat

fashion consumption is when someone is trying to replicate what they see someone else wear. Copycat fashion consumption is when someone tries to imitate what they see someone else wearing. While an opulent look might be impractical for many Indian students, the celebrity's "get the look for less" video can make it a possibility. That's where influencer marketing meets the front and centre of the dupe culture. The influencer serves as a translator between high fashion and low fashion availability.

➤ ***COPYCAT, DUPLICATE, AND DUPE FASHION PHENOMENON IN INDIA***

The copycat fashion trend is by no means new. Imitation, diffusion and adaptation have always been a part of fashion. The new factor – and one that is particularly significant – is the normalization, visibility, and speed of emulation on digital platforms. Consumers had earlier used to buy the imitations as and when they wanted, from the local marketplaces like Sarojini Nagar, Lajpat Nagar, Janpath, Linking Road, Commercial Street or street-side fashion markets. These days, all that behaviour is brazenly called "smart shopping," "budget styling," "thrift discovery" or "dupe hunting."

Copycat fashion in India is based on price sensitivity, ease of access, aspiration and social media visibility. It is often the case where the Indian youth consumer desires to acquire an identity that they cannot afford. To this end, there are copycat fashions that enable involvement in trends without a significant monetary investment. For instance, a Gen Z student might not be able to purchase a traditional designer handbag, designer sneaker or designer co-ord set, but may opt to purchase a "similar" item and obtain the same social media appearance.

This has been exacerbated by social commerce sites. Low-cost fashion is easily available, thanks to the likes of Meesho, Instagram shops, WhatsApp sellers, local boutiques, Telegram groups, YouTube description links, and small D2C brands. As per Meesho's annual review, around one-third of the users on the platform are Gen Z, and targeted influencer marketing goes a long way in influencing the purchase decisions of a large portion of Gen Z. This implies that there is no separation between affordability-led sites and influencer culture – it's all part of it. One end is legally inspired designs or low-cost alternatives. Copying elements without trademark infringement: Close imitations are in the middle, which could copy design elements without violating trademark. On the opposite side are "counterfeit" goods bearing fake brands, brand names, labels, logos and packaging. More recent evidence of counterfeiting indicates that apparel is one of the affected product areas, and social media ads have become a new primary source of exposure to apparel counterfeiting. That's why the social sellers and influencers are ethically relevant.

The Indian consumer is confused by the fake/copycat products. There are consumers who make a conscious choice to buy "first copy" fashion, as it offers prestige symbolism at a low price. Others purchase cheap replicas, but they are not aware that they are counterfeiting. Some find dupes to be a way to convey style while not going on a spending spree. This separation is very important. There is no always an original versus fake element to dupe culture among Gen Z; it is often a performative and open culture. India's informal retail, local manufacturing, social commerce and regional fashion clusters further enhance the 'look for less' logic. Thus, copycat consumption is not only a matter of consumer ethics but also an issue of the structural conditions of the fashion market.

➤ ***GEN Z CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA: DIGITAL NATIVITY, ASPIRATION, AND FASHION CONSUMPTION***

Indian Gen Z consumers are digital natives, but not uniform. The way they consume fashion is different based on income level, city type, sex, level of education, family status, cultural background and digital exposure. The urban youth of Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Kolkata can be more prone to global fashion trends, whereas Tier-2 and Tier-3 youth have the potential of blending the local fashion with global digital aesthetics. But with the proliferation of low-cost data and smartphones, the difference in terms of exposure to fashion between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas has diminished.

Gen Z shoppers are visual shoppers. Images and videos are social signals. Clothing is a medium of expression that conveys style, confidence, class aspirations, cultural identity, campus identity, professional preparation, festival involvement and personality online. That's why Gen Z consumers are more likely to be swayed by the influencers who show them fashion in real life, as opposed to in catalogues.

Social aspiration plays a major role in the fashion behaviour of the Indian Gen Z. Young consumers want to look fashionable, modern, self-assured and trendy. Comparing on social media is made worse by the fact that influencers are only showing us their curated lifestyle, aesthetic houses, branded accessories, travel photos, fitness routines, and fashion, which is the opposite of what we're seeing. According to Social Comparison Theory, people compare themselves against other people, particularly when the people to be compared are attractive, successful, and likeable.

Influencer culture is heightened in a way by the practice of comparison; influencers are inspirational and relatable at the same time.

The affordability is also a significant factor. Copycat fashion enables young Indian consumers to find the balance between aspirations and budget. A student can make a case for a dupe purchase because it contains high perceived value, meaning it can be bought for a low price, it is trendy, the risk of purchase is low, and it is immediately socially usable. Therefore, perceived value is an important construct in order to analyse the intent to purchase copycat fashion.

➤ ***PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT WITH INFLUENCERS***

Parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships that viewers develop with media figures. Parasocial interaction was first theorised by Horton and Wohl, and it became a very contemporary phenomenon in influencer marketing due to the nature of social media, which gives the impression of intimacy, access and friendship. Influencers post to their followers, tell tales about their daily lives, reply to comments, go live, reveal their problems, and make audiences feel like they are in a private space.

The parasocial relationship with influencers could be particularly powerful for Indian Gen Z consumers, as influencers may play the part of elder siblings, college seniors, style mentors, friends or 'relatable role models. Whether a fashion blogger is telling you to buy something or offering a recommendation, "I found this on sale for you" is likely to be interpreted as an offer, not a suggestion. This trust can help reduce scepticism and boost purchase intent.

Parasocial bonds also form emotional attachments. Emotional Attachment is when followers feel attached to the influencer, their decisions, opinions, and lifestyle. If followers like the style of an influencer, they will follow not only the product but the influencer as well. In a copycat way, this isn't simply an inferior version of the shirt, dress, sneaker, or bag; it's an invitation to experience a part of the influencer's style.

The more robust the parasocial relationship, the more subconsciously a follower might take the influencer's recommendations without fully scrutinising. This is especially true for impulse purchases and copycat fashion due to the lower risk associated with purchasing at a lower price. When an influencer suggests a product that is "designer-inspired" and priced under ₹799, the follower might make a hasty buying decision as the emotional trust and low price create a frictionless decision.

➤ ***SOCIAL MEDIA TREND-DRIVEN BEHAVIOUR AND FOMO***

A key aspect of Gen Z's fashion consumption is being trend-driven. Fashion is now in micro cycles, which is a range of days for a colour, silhouette, accessory, fabric, or celebrity trend to come into vogue. Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts increase the repetition, and the algorithms keep showing the user the same fashion content after he or she engages with fashion posts, making it seem popular.

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a prominent factor in this. Consumers might feel compelled to purchase items before a trend goes out of style, just before a product sells out, or just before other people catch the look to buy it too. Words that create urgency are: viral, must-have, limited stock, everyone is wearing it, Pinterest-inspired, Korean-style, wedding season essential, and under budget.

Trends come to the fore during festivals, college events, fresher parties, farewells, weddings, vacations, joining an office, social events, etc., in India. Copycat fashion is appealing because it allows quick participation in trends for a short period. Unlike Gen X and Y users, Gen Z users do not need to invest in expensive originals but can buy the cheaper copy to use socially right away.

➤ ***IMPULSE BUYING TRIGGERED BY INFLUENCER CONTENT***

The term impulse buying is used to describe purchases that are made without prior planning, and are a result of an emotional impulse. Social media platforms are designed to encourage impulse shopping, as they all together offer entertainment, social proof, algorithmic targeting, seamless links, digital payments and instant gratification. Fashion content is particularly impulse-worthy because it snares with visual appeal can really make people feel they want.

There are a number of ways through which influencer content drives impulse sales. Firstly, influencers offer demonstration, which helps minimize uncertainty over fit, styling and use. Secondly, they generate social proof by displaying comments, likes, shares, and social interactions from others. Thirdly, discount codes and affiliate links generate urgency. Fourth, copycat products appear low risk, because they are cheap. Fifth, emotional attachment to influencers lessens the resistance.

In India, other factors such as UPI payments, delivery of cash on delivery, low consumers' expectations of shipping and easy returns, also contribute to impulse buying. An interested Gen Z consumer scrolling through a reel can go

straight from wanting to buying in a matter of minutes. This is especially important for copycat fashion as if the price is low and there is an emotional pull for the trend, the consumer may not do a thorough quality check.

➤ ***EMERGING TRENDS: VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS AND AI INFLUENCER MARKETING IN INDIA***

The world of virtual influencers and AI-generated creators is an exciting new landscape for influencer marketing. Unlike human influencers, virtual influencers are fabricated, computer-generated figures that exist as a personality, with human-like appearance, personality and social media usage. According to ASCI's guidelines, virtual influencers are computer-generated characters or avatars with realistic human traits and must make it clear to consumers that they are not engaging with real humans.

Already, AI and virtual influencers like Kyra, India's first virtual influencer, and newer AI-driven regional influencers have become a reality in India. The virtual influencers' presence in ASCI's disclosure rules highlights the regulatory understanding of the power and moral quandary of AI-driven influence.

Copycat fashion may be further spread by AI influencers, as they can be styled to infinity and beyond, localised in language, customised for body type or region, and styled by brands that don't have unpredictable humans. They can also be misleading in terms of authenticity, as people can connect with characters that are carefully created. According to the global research on virtual influencers, the quality of the virtual influencers and their social presence can impact Gen Z's purchase decisions. Additional Indian research can explore if there is a difference in trustworthiness between virtual influencers and human influencers in fashion recommendations that include affordable alternatives or dupes for that matter.

➤ ***THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS***

TPB is a model that includes three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in explaining purchase intention. Attitude can include items such as perceived stylishness and affordability, subjective norms can include items such as peer acceptance and influencer endorsement, and perceived behavioural control can include items such as availability and price and ease of purchase.

According to Social Learning Theory, the consumer learns behaviours from the models. Influencers serve as role models for others, indicating how to dress, style it, buy it, and rationalize it. Because it seems like a form of praise (likes, admiration, social recognition), Gen Z followers might copy the fashion behaviour of their influencers. According to Parasocial Interaction Theory, the one-sided relationship with influencers leads to heightening of emotional involvement and trust. The ability to make recommendations can appear personal, leading to boosted purchase intention.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model provides an explanation of persuasion in terms of central and peripheral routes. Consumers compare the quality of a product, price, fabric, reviews, and durability, which is accomplished through central processing. When they use peripheral cues, they use attractiveness, popularity, aesthetics, or emotional connection as indicated by the influencers. Both perceived value and influencer appeal can be a part of copycat fashion.

Social Comparison Theory describes what persons think about when they look at influencers and peers and make comparison with themselves. Copycat fashion serves to minimise the difference between the perceived and actual self-image.

➤ ***INFLUENCER CHARACTERISTICS AND PURCHASE INTENTION***

Credibility, attractiveness, knowledge, authenticity and trustworthiness of influencers are consistently considered as key factors for purchase intention. For the Indian fashion market, credibility can rely on the influencer's reputation regarding quality, price, fit, and sponsorship. Attractiveness is important since fashion is visual and aspirational. Knowledge is important when the influences give style tips, know-how about fabrics, sizing advice and occasion suggestions. Gen Z consumers are sensitive to hokey promotions and thus authenticity is important.

Agrawal et al. concluded that luxury purchase intention was positively affected by the knowledge, authenticity, and disclosure of advertisement. This aspect is important for copycat fashion as authenticity has the power to either make the recommendation appear to be true budget advice or be seen as a sales tactic. Because influencer marketing requires advertisements to have disclosure labels, it is especially important that this is communicated in an ad that is clearly, prominently, and easily understood by the average consumer, ASCI states.

4.12 Gaps in Existing Indian Literature

Research on influencer marketing and Gen Z purchase intention has been expanding in India, however, there are a few gaps. First, most studies focus on purchase intention, beauty products, luxury items or attitudes toward brands, and hardly any studies focus directly on copycat or dupe fashion. Second, research tends to overlook parasocial relationships as well as emotional attachment, FOMO and impulse buying as embedded processes. Thirdly, the role of sustainability and ethical fashion issues as moderators is not commonly explored in copycat fashion contexts. Fourth, AI influencer marketing in India is still in its infancy, with research on virtual influencers in the country just beginning. Fifth, Indian digital consumption is regionally diverse, but there is limited regional research comparing Tier-1, Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual model proposed explains the purchasing intention of Gen Z for copycat fashion with the Indian context in a three-stage process of stimuli from influencers, psychological mediators, ethical moderators and behavioural outcome.

However, the model proposes that the purchase intention is not only influenced by the influencer marketing factors. They work through emotional attachment, impulse buying and perceived value. An honest influencer, for example, can build an emotional connection, which can build trust, which can help decrease hesitation, which can help increase impulse purchasing of a budget-friendly dupe. Likewise, indulging in trendy behaviour can lead to FOMO and in turn, reinforce impulse purchase. Copycat fashion is justified by its affordability and similarity to style; therefore, perceived value is central.

Awareness of sustainability and ethical fashion issues are suggested as moderators. If awareness of sustainability is high, then the connection between impulse buying practices and the purchase intention might become less pronounced, particularly if the consumer connects it to the copycat fashion and fast fashion waste. Sustainability awareness may not decrease purchase intention, however, if consumers view a dupe as a "thrifed" "reused" or "budget-conscious" alternative instead of "wasteful over-consumption. Buyer's concern for ethical fashion can decrease the likelihood of buying a counterfeit product but may have less impact on the likelihood of buying a generic copycat product (i.e., non-fake logo).

The model also acknowledges the virtual and AI influencers as new independent variables. While it's possible that AI influencers can influence purchase intent by their novelty, their visual perfection, and their brand-controlled consistency, it may also rely on disclosure transparency and perceived authenticity.

Table 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework for Gen Z Purchase Intention toward Copycat Fashion in India

Construct Category	Variables	Role in the Model
Independent Variables	Influencer marketing factors; parasocial relationships; trend-driven behaviour; virtual/AI influencers	Stimulate awareness, aspiration, trust, trend participation, and digital persuasion.
Mediating Variables	Emotional attachment; impulse buying; perceived value	Explain the psychological and behavioural pathway from influencer exposure to purchase intention.
Moderating Variables	Sustainability awareness; ethical fashion concerns	Shape the strength and direction of the relationship between persuasive triggers and copycat purchase intention.
Dependent Variable	Gen Z purchase intention for copycat fashion in India	Represents likelihood of buying inspired, dupe, duplicate, or copycat fashion products.

DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS

The literature indicates that the two factors can be connected to each other in the following aspects: aspiration, affordability, trust, and speed. Indian consumers from the Generation Z (Gen Z) generation are in a unique position in the international fashion market. They live in a local economy and are subject to global fashion trends. They like being unique, but they are affected by virals. Sustainability concerns are voiced, but fashionable choices are made at the low price. While they believe in the authenticity of creators, they can be swayed by sponsored content when it seems relevant, relatable, and affordable.

One universal opinion in the literature is that credibility is important with influencers. The Indian studies indicate that knowledge, authenticity, disclosure, and social media marketing get influence on intention to purchase. Indian brands also seem to be valuing creator relevance, content quality, long-term creator relationships, and trust as industry evidence indicates. But there are other contradictions in the review. Gen Z consumers say they care about authenticity and ethical consumption, but they do engage in trendy, fast fashion and dupe culture. Gen Z consumers say they care about authenticity and ethical consumption, but they still dabble in trendy, fast fashion and dupe culture. It's not just hypocrisy; it's the conflict between ethical values and practical expense.

This contradiction is further accentuated in the Indian realities. People who aspire for luxury goods may fall short of them in terms of purchasing power or economic status. E.g. The same global fashion trends a fashion-conscious student of Greater Noida can follow as a consumer in Mumbai or London, but their budget may lead them to choose from a range of options such as Meesho, Sarojini Nagar, local boutiques, Instagram sellers or thrift pages. Therefore, copycat fashion is not merely a choice of style, it's also an adaptation of the market. Copycat fashion products are not necessarily produced by the big, well-known brands; they are created by smaller stores, local manufacturers, street markets, resellers, and social commerce business owners. This renders regulation challenging. There could be legitimate small businesses, thrifters, inspired fashion, dubious replicas, and even counterfeits on the same Instagram feed. This is echoed in evidence of the influence of social media advertising on exposure to counterfeit goods, in particular fashion.

Indian fashion consumption is also in the nature of occasions, culturally. There is a constant need for new clothes for festivals, weddings, campus events, religious events, vacations and family functions. Repeat use is potentially socially disapproved of by some youth groups as outfits are frequently pictured and posted online. This boosts the demand for trendy, affordable and aesthetically pleasing fashion. Copycat fashion becomes a way of coping with social visibility. Indian fashion brands and marketers have to take note of this. One, brands should not do dupe culture. Rather they should learn what dupes expose: the consumers want the brand aesthetic, but they might not be able to afford it. The diffusion line can be priced to reach the masses, students can pay lower prices, there are a few drops, fashion rents, resales, and value-based products can turn dupe-seekers into communities of brand. Secondly, brands should partner with influencers who are able to convey more than just style but also quality, durability, fabric, size, and ethical manufacturing processes. Third, brands need to monitor social listening data of "dupe," "first copy," "inspired," and "look for less" discussions to gain insights into the unmet consumer demand.

Influencers need to take responsibility. When choosing an affordable alternative to illegal counterfeits, influencers should keep in mind the following: They will make sponsorships clear, give truthful reviews and do not promote fake branded goods. According to the ASCI guidance, there must be clear disclosure of material connections and more disclosure where virtual influencers are used. India's influencers need to understand that their suggestions cannot just influence buying decisions but additionally influence consumer values.

Copycat fashion poses significant issues for safeguards and policy makers. ASCI has come a long way with respect to social commerce disclosure, yet it is still challenging to enforce this in non-formal social commerce. There is a need for more cooperation among regulators and platforms, payment providers, e-commerce marketplaces and consumer awareness campaigns. Many consumers may not know the difference between dupe, inspired fashion and counterfeit products and education is key.

The aim of consumer education programmes should not be moral policing but informed choice. Consumers under 18 years of age should be aware of the quality of the product, intellectual property rights, labour issues, environmental impact, and counterfeit products. Campaigns must be crafted in Gen Z language, both short videos and partnerships with influencers, workshops on campus, reels, memes, and real examples.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present study is a systematic literature review that discusses the role of influencers in the purchase intention of Gen Z towards copycat fashion in India. The review indicates that influencer marketing has emerged as a significant driver for fashion discovery and aspiration as well as purchasing among the Indian youth. Fashion copycat and dupe behaviour is influenced by influencers' credibility, parasocial relationships, emotional attachment, trendiness, FOMO, impulsive buying, perceived value, affordability, and platform availability.

This is distinct from the Indian context where youth is a significant population, internet is growing rapidly, Instagram and YouTube have extensive reach, social commerce is gaining momentum, the price sensitivity is high, informal retail networks are prevalent, and there is a great desire to create a sense of self through fashion. Copycat fashion is not simply copying but a form of engaging with digital culture within economic means for many of the Indian Gen Z consumers. Yet, the phenomenon also presents ethical issues: copycat consumption coupled with counterfeit products, misleading influencer marketing, low-quality products and rapid fashion are not sustainable.

The paper suggested a conceptual model with the inclusion of the factors of influencer marketing, parasocial relationships, trend-driven behaviour, and virtual/AI influencers as influencers that affect the purchase intention of Gen Z through emotional attachment, impulse buying, and perceived value. Sustainability awareness and ethical fashion concerns were placed as moderators which can reduce or modify copycat fashion purchase intention.

This model needs to be empirically tested in India through quantitative methodology like PLS-SEM or covariance-based SEM in future. Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities including Delhi-NCR, Gautam Budh Nagar, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaipur, Lucknow, Indore and Chandigarh should be compared in terms of studies. More longitudinal studies are required to look at if the purchases made by influencers lead to long term brand aspiration or the drop in original brand loyalty. The impact of disclosure labels, type of influencer, price framing and sustainability messages on purchase intention can be tested in an experimental study. Additionally, future research could investigate the impact of AI influencers in India, including their potential to evoke trust or skepticism among audiences, as compared to human influencers. Lastly, the effectiveness of the ASCI guidelines and consumer awareness campaigns for reducing the incidence of misleading promotions and counterfeiting fashion products should be assessed.

To Indian fashion brands, the message is simple: learn about the 'dupe culture' and don't judge it. The challenge for influencers is to find a way to be both relatable and responsible. The first thing that policymakers have to prioritize is transparency in disclosure, consumer protection and awareness. For researchers, the Indian market is an interesting and pressing environment for examining the intersection of digital influence, aspiration, affordability, ethics and identity as it relates to Gen Z fashion consumption.

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