

**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON
CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION.
(REFERENCE TO YOUTH FASHION IN WESTERN PROVINCE)**

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INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has a long history and has evolved significantly with technological advancements and creative minds (Brydges & M, 2018). As technology and consumer behavior changed, the fashion industry embraced online platforms for marketing (Kim & Ko, 2012). Social media emerged as a powerful tool for advertising, with influencers playing a vital role in promoting fashion brands (Crewe, 2017). Social media influencers are individuals with a significant following who can sway consumers' purchase decisions. The fashion industry, being an early adopter of influencer marketing, heavily relies on it, especially to attract the younger generation (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016).

This study addresses the research problem by investigating the impact of social media influencer marketing on the purchase intention of youth towards fashion brands in Sri Lanka, considering gender as a moderating factor. The study is conducted in the western province due to its high social media engagement among youth. It proposes a research question and objectives to explore this.

This study contributes to international research on social media influencer marketing's impact on purchase intention, providing a comprehensive framework for future quantitative studies and offering evidence for researchers exploring related fields. The fashion industry's dynamic nature requires effective marketing strategies. Social media influencer marketing has emerged as a successful method. This study is beneficial for marketers seeking to leverage influencer marketing in the local context, providing insights for better ROI than traditional marketing.

The study's limitations include a small sample size (384 respondents) from three districts, which may not fully represent the population. Challenges in data collection due to customer reluctance and industry-specific focus affect generalizability. Further research is encouraged to improve understanding of social media influencer marketing's effectiveness as a marketing tool.

The literature review explores the impact of social media influencer marketing and consumers' purchase intention, drawing from theories like the theory of reasoned action, word-of-mouth marketing, opinion leadership, and the Theory of Trust Transfer. It emphasizes that consumers base their choices on perceived results rather than direct influencer posts.

Consumers' intent to buy things is known as their purchasing intention Ayun Xiao defines purchase intention as being accountable for assessing if a product satisfies a customer's expectations and needs to further investigate their opinion on products and services (Xiaio, Yang, & Iqbal, 2018). The study emphasizes consumers' purchasing intention, examining various factors like attitudes, perceived value, and the influence of social media influencer marketing.

Social media influencer marketing highlights its increasing significance in digital marketing campaigns (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). It explores the role of influencers in shaping consumers' purchase intentions, emphasizing factors like trustworthiness, likability, information quality, expertise, and entertainment value. The study further discusses the moderating effect of gender on youth consumer responses to influencer marketing. With a focus on the fashion industry, it showcases the effectiveness of influencer marketing in engaging with consumers and enhancing brand awareness.

The study proposes several hypotheses, including the positive impact of social media influencer marketing on consumers' purchase intention. It hypothesizes that gender moderates this relationship.

In summary, the literature review provides a comprehensive overview of past research related to the variables of interest and their relationships in the context of the fashion industry in Sri Lanka. The review sets the foundation for the research and lays the groundwork for future investigation.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is intended to ensure that the appropriate research procedures are being followed to gain a better understanding and evaluate the research findings to assess the impact of social media influencer marketing on consumers' purchase intention of youth towards fashion brands with the moderating effect of gender with the special reference to Western Province in Sri Lanka. The methodology used in the study involves a quantitative approach with a survey method for data collection.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

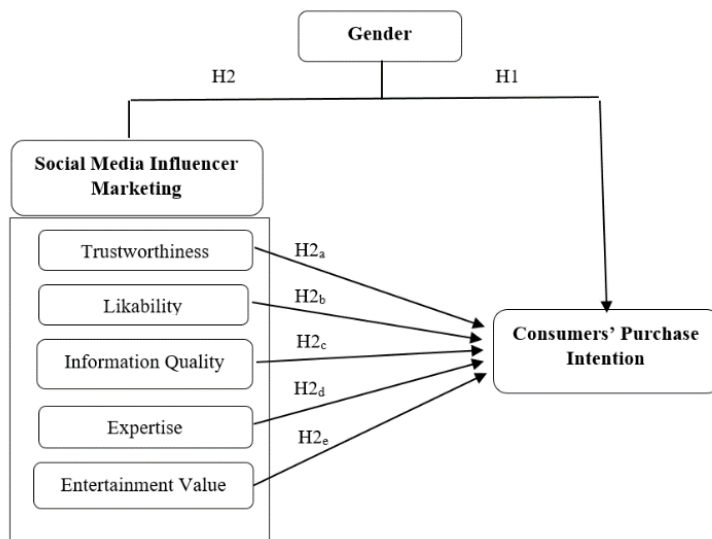


Figure 1 facilitated to development of the following hypotheses.

Main Hypotheses

H₁: Gender moderates the impact between social media influencer marketing and consumers' purchase intention of youth towards fashion brands.

*H*₂: Influencer marketing has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions of youth toward fashion brands.

Sub Hypotheses

*H*_{2a}: The trustworthiness of the influencer positively impacts consumers' purchase intention of youth toward fashion brands.

*H*_{2b}: The likability of the influencer positively impacts consumers' purchase intention of youth toward fashion brands.

*H*_{2c}: The information quality of the influencer positively impacts consumers' purchase intention of youth toward fashion brands.

*H*_{2d}: The expertise of the influencer positively impacts consumers' purchase intention of youth toward fashion brands.

*H*_{2e}: The entertainment value of the influencer positively impacts consumers' purchase intention of youth toward fashion brands.

This research study aims to investigate the impact of social media influencer marketing on consumers' purchase intention of youth toward fashion brands in Sri Lanka's western province, with the moderating effect of gender. It follows a quantitative research design, utilizing a survey approach through a Google form to gather data from the target audience. Adopting a positivist research philosophy, the study aims to establish functional links between variables supported by preconceptions. The sampling technique employed in this research study is trait sampling. Using a deductive research approach, hypotheses are constructed based on existing theories to analyze the relationship between social media influencer marketing and consumers' purchase intention. The study uses a cross-sectional time horizon and convenience sampling to collect data from 384 youth interested in fashion brands. The questionnaire was developed to address the study's research aims, which align with the conceptual framework for the present investigation. Data analysis is conducted using SPSS, and the results are interpreted in conjunction with existing literature to provide valuable insights and justifications. Overall, this explanatory research contributes to understanding consumer behavior and the role of social media influencers in the fashion industry in Sri Lanka.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research study employs various statistical analyses to examine the impact of social media influencer marketing on consumers' purchase intention of youth toward fashion brands in Sri Lanka's western province, with the moderating effect of gender. The reliability analysis confirms the internal consistency of the data, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7 for all constructs, indicating their appropriateness.

The validity analysis, assessed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, indicates adequate sampling for all variables, ensuring the data's suitability for factor analysis. The correlation analysis shows positive and significant relationships between the independent variables (trustworthiness, likability, information quality, expertise, and entertainment value) and the dependent variable (purchase intention), supporting the hypotheses of the study.

Multiple regression analysis reveals that social media influencer marketing has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention, further validating the research hypotheses. However, the moderating effect of gender is found to be non-significant.

Table 1*Multiple Regression Analysis - Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.734 ^a	0.539	0.533	0.362

a. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment value, Trustworthiness, Information Quality, Expertise, Likeability

Table 2*Coefficient results of multiple regression analysis*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coefficients		t	Sig.
	β	Std. Error	β			
(Constant)	0.301	0.196			1.532	0.126
Trustworthiness_f	0.081	0.037	0.101		2.225	0.027
Likeability_f	0.121	0.057	0.119		2.130	0.034
InformationQuality_f	0.154	0.039	0.185		3.982	0.000
Expertise_f	0.182	0.066	0.149		2.734	0.007
Entertainmentvalue_f	0.390	0.054	0.356		7.289	0.000

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

The moderating effect analysis explored the impact of social media influencer marketing and gender on consumers' purchase intention. The results indicated that the moderation effect was not significant, as the p-values were above 0.05, suggesting that gender did not influence the relationship between the variables.

Table 3*Model Table of Moderating Effect Analysis*

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.201	0.634	1.893	0.059	-0.046	2.449
F_SMIM	0.747	0.149	5.015	0.000	0.454	1.040
Gender_f	-0.335	0.378	-0.885	0.376	-1.079	0.409
Int_1	0.069	0.089	0.774	0.439	-0.106	0.245

Table 4*Test of highest order unconditional interaction(s) of Moderating Effect Analysis*

	R ² -chng	F	df1	df2	P
X*W	0.001	0.599	1.000	380.000	0.439

Overall, the study confirms the importance of social media influencer marketing in influencing consumers' purchase intentions, highlighting the significance of factors like trustworthiness, likability, information quality, expertise, and entertainment Value 0. However, the moderation effect is not significant in this model. The research contributes valuable insights into the fashion industry in Sri Lanka, aiding marketers in understanding consumer behavior and optimizing influencer marketing strategies.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study focused on examining the impact of social media influencer marketing on consumers' purchase intention of youth towards fashion brands in Sri Lanka with the moderating effect of gender (special reference to the western province). The research used a sample of 384 real estate buyers and collected data through a self-administered questionnaire. The study's second hypothesis (H₂) was social media influencer marketing has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions of youth toward fashion brands. Thus, the impact between the dependent variable and the independent variable is considered in this model which is a significant model according to the P-value. Additionally, the study found that the trustworthiness, likability, information quality, expertise, and entertainment value of the influencer have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention. Thus, the impact between the dependent variable and those independent variables is considered in this model which is a significant model according to the P-value. However, the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between social media influencer marketing and consumers' purchase intention (H₁) was not significant.

Influencers are advised to exercise caution in their collaborations and maintain key traits to build long-term successful relationships with consumers and brands. The study recommends conducting comprehensive literature reviews, employing mixed-methods approaches, and conducting longitudinal studies for future research to gain deeper insights into the effects of social media influencer marketing on diverse gender groups in the fashion industry. Practical recommendations are provided for fashion brands and marketers to effectively leverage influencer marketing to target young consumers with different gender identities. In a nutshell, this research contributes to understanding the dynamics of influencer marketing and its impact on consumer behavior in the fashion industry.

Keywords: Fashion brands, influencer marketing, purchase intention, social media

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