

Navigating the Digital Landscape

Understanding Customer Behaviour in the Online World



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Chapter 1

Influence of Fashion Bloggers on Setting Trends and Purchase Decision of Young Indian Metropolitan Women

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Abstract

Blogs are websites that contain posts about a wide range of topics, often written by fashion enthusiasts referred to as bloggers. With the increasing prevalence and popularity of digital media and social media, fashion bloggers help to attract business and influence and engage various stakeholders, especially customers. The present exploratory study provided valuable insights regarding fashion consumption, preference, and buying behavior of young women consumers of metropolitan cities of India like Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune, and Mumbai. The study was conducted under the domain of exploratory study. Snowball and Purposive random sampling techniques were employed to identify and reach respondents of both categories – women consumers and bloggers. A conscious attempt was made to include women from different demographics such as age, marital status, income, area of residence, employment status, etc. Primary data were collected with the help of questionnaires. The findings of the research revealed bloggers through their blogs are the new trendsetters and influence fashion adoption, especially by the young social media savvy consumers. Their blogs impact public perceptions of fashion and sometimes are precursors of new fashion trends. The findings of the study interestingly brought forth the fact that millennial women buying decision is significantly influenced by fashion blogs for the purchase of clothing and accessories. The findings also clearly indicated that blogs significantly influenced respondents' attitude toward the purchase of branded merchandise. Fashion bloggers besides providing information and inspiration to the blog readers, also at times assist and/or give consultation to their followers.

Keywords: Purchase behavior; digital marketing; fashion bloggers; social media; retail; merchandise

Introduction

According to the famous designer and singer Pharrell Williams, fashion is not something that exists in the dresses only, but it also influences the individual's personality, their perspective of the world, their destination and contributes to shaping one's social and cultural background (Leitch, 2023). Fashion is one of the most visible and therefore prominent facets of our day-to-day life. Fashion communicates, that is why it is said clothes have a 'Silent language'. Clothing exhibits the characteristics of the wearer, their personality, lifestyle, attitude, values, and status in the society and reflects individuality of a person. Clothes also add a dimension to a person's self-image and self-identity.

Since the 20th century, a revolution has been happening in the world of fashion due to the influence of electronic and print media in the fashion industry. Earlier, people got fashion information from television, radio, telephone, books, magazines, newspaper, etc. However, in the last 10 years, a new media, *social media*, is influencing the fashion purchases of the young women. Fashion trends are now being shared with the help of different social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. These platforms are being employed to showcase new trends and styles to audience. These social media platforms offer them a wardrobe of looks and fashions that will ultimately aid them in accomplishing their goals. A social media influencer (SMI) can be defined as a digital celebrity who is seen as an opinion leader in the digital market, who is involved in engaging and communicating to a mass audience that is unknown to the influencer (Abidin, 2016; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

The latest entrant in the fashion space on these platforms is 'Fashion Blog' and 'Fashion Blogger', which is gaining popularity among the fashion-conscious young women. Fashion blogs are online journals that provide information about the fashion industry, clothing and personal style. Presently, 'Fashion Bloggers' or 'Fashion Influencers' are playing a vital role in the fashion consumption of the young women. They are one of the most effective ways to persuade the purchase decision/s among the young women of different backgrounds, occupation, status etc. One must follow the most recent fashion trends in order to stay current with the rapidly changing fashion industry, and for this reason, customers follow fashion bloggers. Fashion bloggers have the ability to influence the opinions or buying decisions of a brand's target audience largely due to their social media following and they help fill the gap between the company and their consumers. Bloggers share their experience and give recommendation/s; they are an effective way of 'Internet marketing' of products directly to the target customers. Bloggers generally share videos and posts about the style tips, fashion care tips and outfit ideas with their followers. They create awareness about latest styles and popularize selective trends (Lim et al., 2017).

Regardless of their age, caste, community, color, or religion, the majority of young ladies want to look unique every day. By dressing in distinctive fashion trends, people want to appear stylish and attractive every day of their life. To stay informed, young women follow fashion bloggers on social media. Young ladies who care about fashion typically seek for relevant content on social media before purchasing any fashion item. The first action, therefore, by young fashion consumer is to explore a good fashion blog or a fashion blogger. Consumers are influenced by the content of the blog and this ultimately guides their purchase action. Demographic factors such as age, income, education, nature of employment, marital status, city of residence, cultural background, etc., also influences their buying behavior and purchase actions.

Digital or Online Marketing

The process of promoting and selling goods and services online, also known as digital marketing or online marketing, involves the use of internet marketing tools including social media marketing, search engine marketing, and email marketing. It is a type of marketing that promotes products and services using the internet and digital technology that is based online, including desktop computers, mobile phones, and other digital media and platforms. This includes email, social media, and web-based advertising as marketing channels, as well as text and multimedia messaging. The way brands and businesses utilize technology to sell themselves has changed as a result of its evolution in the 1990s and 2000s. Digital media has become more integrated into marketing strategies as people now use digital devices instead of going to physical stores, and therefore digital marketing campaigns are becoming more popular. Effective blogging is an essential part of an overall digital marketing strategy. Brands have a good reason to include online marketing in their marketing plans.

The fashion and lifestyle products, social media has proved to be effective tool for communication as it enables a large number of people to become engaged in a variety of fashion events. In the fashion industry, a digital environment helps keep track of what's famous and what's valued. People are more engaged in the purchasing process because of the proliferation of various fashion trends in the digital world, and many people are inspired by a wide variety of domestic and international fashion brands. As a result, the fashion industry is now focusing on the digital channels, which integrate technology with the latest fashion trends. With the use of digital technology, co-creation and brand co-creation between fashion bloggers and consumers have become a new way to create value.

Fashion Blog, Bloggers and Their Influence on Consumer

Fashion blogs are a relatively new and yet, a powerful marketing tool. Blogs allow readers to be up to date on the current content, deals, and tips. Free and unpaid blogs of bloggers benefit companies as it increases their marketing value without spending a single penny. Blogs offer a way to connect with a sizable

audience that is geographically dispersed, which in turn raises awareness and promotes sales. Fashion blogging can influence fashion marketing at an unimaginable level. Blogs are asynchronous online venues that provide users with a scope of online interactions and are a useful tool in computer-mediated communication. Blogs are unique online environments that combine news and information with self-expression.

Blogging Is Beneficial in a Number of Ways to Various Stakeholders and Individuals

- With a relatively low operational cost, blogging creates an opportunity to establish and expand one's own business. It is a great career option for educated women who have turned into 'real time fashion journalists'. Blogging empowers young women to create their own individualistic and independent media content, in which they can post photographs of themselves posing in different outfits.
- Blogging has emerged as international subculture that would provide quality content on the latest brands, current society trends, beauty, fashion and life-style products, e-commerce, street style and personal style.
- Fashion blogging can bring revolutionary change in the highly competitive fashion industry as well as fashion conscious youngsters. The existing business can make more profit via blogging by getting more exposure on right channels (Jones, 2017).

The influence of fashion bloggers on setting trends and purchase decisions of young Indian metropolitan women is a topic that has received increasing attention from researchers in recent years. Several studies have examined the impact of social media, including, fashion bloggers on purchase intention and brand loyalty of Indian women (Banerjee & Dey, 2020; Bhatt & Tandon, 2020; Mishra & Sharma, 2019; Singh, 2018; Singh & Jain, 2019). Overall, the literature suggested that fashion bloggers have a significant influence on setting trends and purchase decisions of young Indian metropolitan women. Their influence can be seen through the impact on purchase intention, brand loyalty, purchase behavior, and overall consumer behavior.

When it comes to making choices in fashion buzz, fashion bloggers are of great help! Presently, the most commonly used platforms for influencers marketing are:

Instagram

Using Instagram fashion influencers or fashion bloggers as a marketing channel can be a very efficient and cost-effective way to promote a product or service. When a product or service is recommended by an influencer they trust, audiences are much more likely to purchase it.

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YouTube Videos	YouTubers post a variety of videos about fashion and beauty tips, which are widely circulated around the world. Audiences can watch and do their own make-up when viewing these videos, they are encouraged to try out these tips and techniques.
Facebook	Influencer marketing on Facebook works on the same concepts as influencer marketing on any other online platform. It begins with a brand finding a Facebook user with a medium-to-large (and highly engaged) following, who is similar to the brand’s target demographic. The company then contacts the influential Facebook user to see if they’d be interested in sharing more about the brand’s goods on their page.
Blogs	Fashion Blogs are regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video, they are typically maintained by a person or company. Since 2011, fashion blogs have increased in popularity, with subjects including the industry as a whole, personal style, and reviews of clothing pieces and collections.
Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Other Miscellaneous Applications	There are various applications in short called ‘apps’ that are currently being used by bloggers to connect with their target audience such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, etc. These apps are widely used today to influence how people perceive and capture fashion. These photo apps are aimed at a younger demographic. Their ease and instantaneous qualities are the reason for their success.

Successful fashion bloggers reach and influence millions of followers in real time. While keeping in mind what consumers desire, bloggers create a platform for companies to understand what people want next.

- *Fashion Bloggers Act as a Trendsetter*
Followers are inspired by the *brand-new trends* shown by fashion bloggers. By displaying an uncommon sense of style, bloggers have the ability to start new

trends. They create awareness about latest styles and popularize selective trends. Fashion bloggers try to create new ideas and trigger the purchase of these items by young women.

- *Fashion Bloggers as Self-confidence Booster*
Fashion-oriented followers consider bloggers as their guiding light who help them in making the right buying choices that ultimately these clothes/fashion items give their self-confidence a big boost! These fashion bloggers are regarded as role models or fashion idols by their followers. The content of fashion blogs generally is motivational, inspiring and about self-confidence.
- *Fashion Bloggers As 'Authentic' Content Creator*
Fashion bloggers differentiate themselves from professional mainstream fashion platforms by creating authentic and personal content that they produce and share with their audiences (Bruns, 2005). Representing oneself online as a fashion celebrity takes place within a commercial context of branding and advertising practices. Bloggers are 'authentic' people. They're average people, just like you and me. They aren't size zero models, and they dress in a 'normal manner'. They will show their readers what they are wearing and the brands they prefer.

The six main types of impacts of fashion bloggers on young women's pre-purchasing decisions on social media platforms are: opinion leader endorsement, celebrity endorsement, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), online group engagement, support of conversation, and opinion democratization.

(1) *Opinion Leader Support*

Opinion leaders are able to influence and change the perception and behavior of their audience. Opinion leader endorsement holds utmost significance as it leaves a powerful impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. They have detailed knowledge about issues they are writing/commenting on. They are not only subject matter experts who share their experience with their target audience but they also influence consumers to get involved with the current fashion trends. They can be considered contemporary opinion leaders, people who are considered knowledgeable and trustworthy by others, 'creating a "two-step" flow' interpersonal influence within trusted social networks.

(2) *Celebrity Support*

Celebrity support or endorsement is the act of well-known persons utilizing their fame and notoriety to support businesses, their goods, or services that directly affect their fans or followers. As a result, celebrity endorsers have the potential to sway audiences and influence their buying decisions.

- (3) *Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)*
eWOM is an interaction among digital users which proliferates information on multiple online platforms. The network of blogs is performing an important role in creating trends, sharing news and opinion, and spreading information via word-of-mouth.
- (4) *Online Consumer Engagement*
Consumers share their views, thoughts, and experiences with companies by engaging in the interaction on Web 2.0 channels, for example, social media. Web 2.0 is the term used to describe a variety of web sites and applications that allow anyone to create and share online information or material they have created. A key element of the technology is that it allows people to create, share, collaborate and communicate. This bidirectional interaction has the potential to impact and enhance buying behavior and customer purchase decisions.
- (5) *Dialogic Co-creation Value*
Consumers and merchants engage in dialogic co-creation of value in which consumers evaluate the experience of the items as a contextual value and retailers work to satisfy that value by supplying goods or developing technology in response to the consumers' evaluations.
- (6) *Democratization of Opinion*
Ordinary consumers' opinions can be heard on the internet due to democratization of opinion, which allows them to share and communicate their experiences with goods, which helps marketers create brand strategies and affects consumers' buying decisions.

Earlier social media channels such as TV and magazines transformed the choices of young women, but with the advancement of technology, new generation is shifting toward the extensive use of the internet which is impacting the choices made by young women. The present generation is more conscious about their appearance and likes to stay updated about fashion, for which they rely on social media, magazines and fashion bloggers. Fashion bloggers create new dressing ideas, trigger fashion purchases and influence clothing choices of young women. Blogs were the most popular medium being utilized by the influencers to stay connected within their digital social circle (Tanwar et al., 2021). Thus, the study was conceptualized and undertaken to understand the influence of fashion blogger in driving the fashion choices of young women. The study also aimed to comprehend the buying behavior of young women from metropolitan cities of India like Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune, and Mumbai and how it is affected by both internal and external influencers (internal influencers include family, friends, age, culture and external influencer include fashion bloggers). An attempt was also made to understand various strategies used or planned by the bloggers to influence the fashion purchases of women during COVID-19.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective: To understand the influence of fashion bloggers on the fashion consumption of young women (age: 18–35 years).

Specific Objectives:

- To analyze how fashion blogs influence women consumer's purchase actions and in turn impact their purchasing decisions.
- To identify the strategies being planned by fashion bloggers to influence the purchase of the young women during COVID-19.
- To study the impact of demographic and other lifestyle variables on the fashion consumption of young women.

Methodology

The study was carried out under the domain of Exploratory Study as there was no predefined problem.

Sample Selection

Respondent sample included 90 women consumers and 9 fashion bloggers. Snowball and purposive random sampling techniques were employed to identify and reach respondents of both categories – women consumers and bloggers for the study. A conscious attempt was made to include women from different demographics such as age, marital status, income, area (states), employment status, etc. Different demographics were chosen as they reflect different persuasive and buying behavior. Respondents from metropolitan cities from India (Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad) were purposively chosen for carrying out the research. Further, education was a prerequisite as only educated women would have access and knowledge of the internet, they are more likely to be aware of social media and mostly likely users/followers of popular social media platforms including fashion blogs. A sample size of 90 women consumers was taken under the various age groups, viz., 18–24 years, 25–29 years and 30–35 years.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were collected with the help of simple questionnaires. The questionnaire for 'bloggers', contained questions that focused on the strategies employed by them to influence their followers and the second questionnaire developed for 'young women consumers', focused on their clothing preferences and the influence of fashion blogs on their purchase behavior. The questionnaire was administered online to the selected samples of consumer and bloggers on the various social media platform such as Instagram, Facebook, and Email.