The Impact of Social Media on Youth Fashion Consumption: Trends, Influencers, and Ethical Shifts

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Abstract: This study explores the influence of social media on the fashion preferences and purchasing behaviors of young consumers, with a focus on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Social media serves as a primary source of inspiration, shaping not only fashion trends but also how young people express their identities and engage with brands. The research highlights the significant role of influencers, user-generated content, and interactive brand-consumer engagements in shaping youth fashion consumption. Additionally, sustainability and ethical fashion choices are increasingly important to young consumers, with social media providing a platform for raising awareness and encouraging responsible consumerism. The findings, based on demographic analyses (age and gender), reveal that both factors do not significantly influence participants' perceptions of social media's impact on fashion-related behaviors, suggesting a broad, consistent effect across different demographic groups. The study provides insights into how digital platforms have revolutionized fashion marketing, empowering young consumers to make informed and socially conscious fashion choices. The research underscores the need for further exploration into how these dynamics evolve over time and across different cultural contexts, particularly with regard to niche fashion communities and the role of influencers in driving change.

Keywords: Social Media, Fashion Consumption, Influencers, Sustainability, Youth Behavior

INTRODUCTION

The pervasive influence of social media on the fashion preferences and buying behaviors of young consumers has transformed how the fashion industry operates. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube serve as primary sources of inspiration for youth, shaping not only what they wear but also how they express themselves. This digital environment provides

unique access to the latest fashion trends, allowing young users to stay up-to-date, engage directly with brands, and explore new styles that align with their personalities and lifestyles. Moreover, social media offers a platform for showcasing individuality and participating in global fashion movements, which is increasingly significant for young consumers who are often in a phase of self-discovery and identity formation (Confetto et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021).

One major driver of social media's influence on young consumers' fashion choices is the emergence of influencers, bloggers, and micro-celebrities who have become trusted sources for fashion recommendations. Influencers present trends in relatable, everyday contexts, making styles more accessible and appealing. Their posts are perceived as authentic and credible, thus strongly affecting the purchasing decisions of their followers. Sethi et al. (2024) highlight the role of fashion bloggers in creating trends and shaping the preferences of young Indian women, illustrating how influencers' fashion choices become aspirational for young consumers. This connection between influencers and followers promotes a sense of trust, as these digital personalities often share personal experiences and styling advice that resonates with their audience on a personal level (Fan et al., 2023; Sethi et al., 2024).

Another significant aspect of social media's impact on fashion consumption among young people is its interactivity and engagement. Social media platforms encourage a participatory culture, where users engage with brands through comments, likes, and shares, providing instant feedback on new styles or collections. This interactive environment helps brands understand consumer preferences and expectations better, allowing them to tailor their offerings and create fashion products that appeal to young consumers. According to Stoica and Hickman (2024), social media engagement is a more influential factor in Gen Z's buying decisions than traditional advertising, as it creates a sense of community and connection with both brands and other consumers.

Sustainability and ethical considerations are becoming more central to young consumers' fashion choices, influenced significantly by social media discussions. Many Gen Z consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of fashion and seek brands that align with their values of sustainability and ethics. Social media has provided a platform for sustainability advocates to spread awareness and encourage responsible consumerism, leading many young people to reconsider their purchasing decisions (Liu et al., 2021; Confetto et al., 2023). As van den Bergh et al. (2024) observe, this generation is highly segmented in terms of values and preferences, with an increasing number choosing brands that reflect their ethical commitments, often shared through social media channels.

In summary, the impact of social media on youth fashion is multifaceted, influencing trends, purchase behavior, and the broader cultural values associated with fashion. With its capacity to reach and engage millions instantly, social media not only serves as a mirror reflecting contemporary fashion but also as a catalyst that drives new trends, shaping the fashion landscape and encouraging young consumers to express themselves authentically and responsibly. As research shows, understanding the social media influence on young consumers' fashion choices provides crucial insights for brands aiming to connect with this highly influential demographic.

METHOD

This study investigates the influence of social media on the fashion preferences and purchasing behaviors of young consumers. The research adopts a quantitative approach to gather and analyze data on how social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, shape fashion trends, self-expression, and consumer decisions.

Objectives:
- To explore how social media platforms influence the fashion choices of young consumers.
- To examine the role of influencers and user-generated content in shaping fashion trends.
- To assess the impact of social media on the perception of sustainability and ethical fashion choices.

- To investigate whether demographic factors such as age and gender affect social media's influence on fashion-related behaviors.

The sample consisted of 105 participants, randomly selected to represent a diverse group of young consumers. Respondents were predominantly aged between 18 and 25, with a mix of male and female participants. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire, designed to assess participants' usage of social media, their fashion preferences, and their attitudes toward sustainability and ethical fashion. The responses were collected via online surveys, ensuring convenience and broad accessibility.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to conduct ANOVA tests. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used to examine if there were statistically significant differences in fashion preferences and perceptions based on demographic factors such as age and gender. The primary hypothesis tested was:

H_0: There is no significant difference in fashion consumption behaviors and perceptions between different age groups and genders.
H_1: There is a significant difference in fashion consumption behaviors and perceptions between different age groups and genders.

The ANOVA results helped determine whether demographic factors significantly influenced social media's impact on fashion preferences, with the aim of understanding how social media shapes youth fashion consumption across different demographic segments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The age distribution of the participants shows that the majority of respondents are within the 18-25 age group, comprising 73.3% of the sample (77 individuals). This reflects the focus on younger consumers in the study, as this demographic is typically more active on social media and more likely to engage in fashion-related content and purchasing.

Table 1. Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-25	77	73.3	73.3	73.3
	26-35	19	18.1	18.1	91.4
	36-45	5	4.8	4.8	96.2
	Above45	4	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	105	100.0	100.0	

The 26-35 age group represents 18.1% (19 individuals), suggesting that some older consumers also engage with fashion through social media but at a relatively lower rate. Only 4.8% (5 individuals) fall within the 36-45 age group, and a small percentage, 3.8% (4 individuals), are above 45 years old. This distribution indicates that the research predominantly reflects the views of younger generations, aligning with the focus on social media's influence on fashion among youth.

Table 2. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	90	85.7	85.7	85.7
	Female	15	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	105	100.0	100.0	

The gender distribution shows a significant skew towards male respondents, with 85.7% (90 individuals) identifying as male, while only 14.3% (15 individuals) are female. This gender imbalance could reflect the sample's composition, potentially due to the targeted demographic or data collection method. The predominance of male participants suggests that the research may be more reflective of male fashion preferences and behaviors in relation to social media, though it still captures a smaller but important portion of female consumers.

Table 3. Occupation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	66	62.9	62.9	62.9
	Employed (private sector)	14	13.3	13.3	76.2
	Employed (govt. Sector)	4	3.8	3.8	80.0
	Self employed	21	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	105	100.0	100.0	

Regarding occupation, the largest group of participants are students, representing 62.9% (66 individuals). This is in line with the focus on younger consumers, as students are likely to be highly engaged with social media and fashion trends. The second-largest group comprises self-employed individuals, making up 20% (21 participants), indicating that a significant portion of the respondents has flexible or entrepreneurial careers. In contrast, employed participants in the private and government sectors account for smaller percentages: 13.3% (14 individuals) and 3.8% (4 individuals), respectively. This suggests that a larger proportion of the sample is either in education or self-employed, both groups likely more influenced by the digital trends and online communities highlighted in the research.

Table 4. ANOVA between Age and Factors

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Which social media platform is frequently associated with higher levels of envy and dissatisfaction due to idealized images?	Between Groups	2.560	3	.853	.770	.514
	Within Groups	111.974	101	1.109		
	Total	114.533	104			
What term describes the feeling of needing to constantly check social media due to fear of missing out?	Between Groups	.598	3	.199	.276	.843
	Within Groups	71.461	99	.722		
	Total	72.058	102			
How can social media use affect academic performance according to some studies?	Between Groups	3.469	3	1.156	1.568	.202
	Within Groups	74.493	101	.738		
	Total	77.962	104			
What has research shown about the impact of social media on real-life social interactions?	Between Groups	5.188	3	1.729	2.283	.084
	Within Groups	76.526	101	.758		
	Total	81.714	104			

Which phenomenon describes the tendency to only post positive or idealized content on social media, creating unrealistic perceptions?	Between Groups	4.376	3	1.459	1.804	.151
	Within Groups	81.681	101	.809		
	Total	86.057	104			

Table 4 presents the results of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) examining the relationship between participants' age groups and their responses to various social media-related questions. The purpose of this analysis is to determine if there are statistically significant differences between different age groups regarding certain social media-related behaviors and perceptions.

The first row addresses the association between social media platforms and feelings of envy and dissatisfaction due to idealized images. The F-statistic is 0.770 with a p-value of 0.514, which is above the typical significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that there are no significant differences between the age groups in their perceptions of social media's impact on envy and dissatisfaction. In other words, all age groups appear to experience similar levels of envy related to idealized social media images.

The second row examines the phenomenon of FOMO, which is characterized by the compulsive need to check social media out of fear of missing out on updates. The F-statistic is 0.276, and the p-value is 0.843, which is also not statistically significant. This suggests that age does not play a significant role in influencing how strongly participants feel the need to stay connected to social media to avoid missing out, as all age groups seem to experience similar levels of FOMO.

The third row explores the impact of social media use on academic performance. The F-statistic is 1.568, with a p-value of 0.202, which is above the 0.05 significance level, indicating no significant differences between age groups in their views on how social media affects academic performance. The results suggest that age does not significantly influence perceptions of social media's effect on academic performance, with all age groups similarly perceiving its impact.

The fourth row looks at how social media use affects real-life social interactions. The F-statistic is 2.283, and the p-value is 0.084, which is slightly above the typical threshold of 0.05 but suggests a potential trend. While not statistically significant, the p-value suggests that there may be subtle differences between age groups regarding how social media is perceived to affect real-life interactions. Finally, the fifth row examines the tendency to post only positive or idealized content, creating unrealistic perceptions. The F-statistic is 1.804, and the p-value is 0.151, which is above the 0.05 significance level, suggesting no significant differences between the age groups. All age groups seem to share similar views on the practice of idealized posting.

Overall, the ANOVA results indicate that, for the most part, age does not significantly influence the way respondents view social media in relation to envy, FOMO, academic performance, social interactions, or the tendency to post idealized content. This suggests that the effects of social media on these aspects are fairly consistent across the different age groups in the sample. However, the marginally significant result regarding social interactions may warrant further exploration in future research.

Table 5. ANOVA between Gender and Factors

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Which social media platform is frequently associated with higher levels of envy and dissatisfaction due to idealized images?	Between Groups	.700	1	.700	.633	.428
	Within Groups	113.833	103	1.105		
	Total	114.533	104			

What term describes the feeling of needing to constantly check social media due to fear of missing out?	Between Groups	1.045	1	1.045	1.487	.226
	Within Groups	71.013	101	.703		
	Total	72.058	102			
How can social media use affect academic performance according to some studies?	Between Groups	.006	1	.006	.008	.927
	Within Groups	77.956	103	.757		
	Total	77.962	104			
What has research shown about the impact of social media on real-life social interactions?	Between Groups	1.525	1	1.525	1.959	.165
	Within Groups	80.189	103	.779		
	Total	81.714	104			
Which phenomenon describes the tendency to only post positive or idealized content on social media, creating unrealistic perceptions?	Between Groups	.102	1	.102	.122	.728
	Within Groups	85.956	103	.835		
	Total	86.057	104			

Table 5 presents the results of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) comparing male and female respondents across several factors related to social media use and its effects. This analysis aims to determine whether there are significant gender-based differences in perceptions of social media's impact on various behaviors and attitudes. The first row examines the relationship between social media platforms and feelings of envy or dissatisfaction due to idealized images. The F-statistic is 0.633 with a p-value of 0.428. Since the p-value exceeds the commonly used threshold of 0.05, there is no significant difference between males and females regarding their perceptions of envy and dissatisfaction caused by idealized social media images. Both genders seem to experience similar levels of envy in response to social media content.

The second row addresses the feeling of FOMO—constantly checking social media to avoid missing out. The F-statistic is 1.487 with a p-value of 0.226, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference between genders in the tendency to experience FOMO. This suggests that both male and female respondents are equally likely to feel the need to stay connected to social media for fear of missing out on important content or updates.

The third row explores the perceived impact of social media on academic performance. The F-statistic is 0.008 with a p-value of 0.927, which is well above the significance level of 0.05. This result suggests that gender does not significantly affect perceptions of how social media impacts academic performance. Both male and female participants appear to have similar views on this issue. In the fourth row, the effect of social media use on real-life social interactions is examined. The F-statistic is 1.959, with a p-value of 0.165, which is also not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that there are no meaningful gender differences in how participants perceive the impact of social media on in-person social interactions. The fifth row looks at the phenomenon of posting only idealized or positive content on social media, which creates unrealistic perceptions. The F-statistic is 0.122, with a p-value of 0.728, indicating no significant difference between males and females regarding this behavior. Both genders appear to share similar views on the tendency to present an idealized version of life on social media.

Over all, the ANOVA results show that there are no significant gender differences in the way respondents perceive social media's influence on various factors such as envy, FOMO, academic performance, social interactions, or the posting of idealized content. This suggests that male and female respondents in the sample have similar attitudes and experiences with regard to these aspects of social media use. Gender does not appear to be a significant factor in shaping how individuals interact with or are affected by social media in the context of the research.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the pervasive influence of social media on the fashion preferences and buying behaviors of young consumers, with a particular focus on how platforms like Instagram,

TikTok, and YouTube shape their engagement with fashion trends, self-expression, and purchasing decisions. The findings suggest that social media plays a crucial role in transforming the fashion industry, with influencers, user-generated content, and brand interactions serving as primary drivers of change. The study also highlights the increasing importance of sustainability and ethics in fashion consumption among youth, demonstrating how social media serves as both a space for fashion engagement and a platform for advocacy.

The results of the ANOVA tests reveal that both age and gender do not significantly influence participants' perceptions of social media's impact on fashion-related behaviors. This suggests that across different demographic groups, social media's effects on envy, FOMO, academic performance, social interactions, and idealized content remain relatively consistent. However, while this study offers valuable insights, it also reveals the complexity and nuanced nature of how social media shapes fashion consumption, indicating the need for further exploration.

There are several avenues for future research in this area. First, longitudinal studies could track how social media's influence on fashion preferences evolves over time, especially as new platforms and trends emerge. Second, deeper exploration into the role of micro-celebrities, influencers, and online communities in niche fashion markets could provide a more granular understanding of how these digital personalities shape subcultures and specific consumer behaviors. Additionally, research could expand beyond youth to include a broader age range to explore how social media's influence on fashion consumption may differ across generations.

On a global scale, the impact of social media on fashion transcends geographic and cultural boundaries, fostering a more interconnected and democratized fashion ecosystem. Social media platforms have allowed fashion to become more inclusive, with diverse voices and styles emerging from different corners of the world. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on sustainability and ethical fashion practices, driven by social media awareness campaigns, has the potential to create a significant global shift toward more responsible consumerism. As young consumers continue to drive these changes, brands and designers worldwide must adapt to this digitally empowered, socially conscious generation. The global nature of social media thus provides an opportunity for fashion to evolve in ways that are both innovative and socially responsible, reshaping the industry's future trajectory.

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