



A Monthly e Magazine  
ISSN:2583-2212

January, 2026 Vol.6(1), 326-333

Popular Article

## The Digital Wardrobe: The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Gen Z's Fashion Trends in India

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[doi.org/10.5281/ScienceWorld.20459214](https://doi.org/10.5281/ScienceWorld.20459214)

### *Abstract*

This article explores the pervasive influence of **social media influencers (SMIs)** on **Generation Z's (Gen Z)** fashion trends and purchasing intentions within the Indian market. Gen Z, defined as those born roughly between 1997 and 2012, is the first truly digital-native generation, heavily reliant on platforms like TikTok and Instagram for fashion discovery and consumption. The research synthesizes existing academic findings and industry reports to identify the key psychological mechanisms; specifically trustworthiness, parasocial interaction, similarity, and consumer attitudes; through which influencers drive fashion-related purchase intentions in this demographic. Findings consistently show a significant positive impact of social media and influencer marketing on Gen Z's fashion discovery and brand loyalty in India. Authenticity and relatability are paramount for Indian Gen Z consumers, leading them to view influencers as trusted peers rather than just models. Furthermore, influencer-driven 'micro-trends' accelerate the fashion cycle, increasing purchasing frequency, which presents a challenge to the rising global emphasis on sustainable consumption. The paper concludes that for fashion brands to effectively engage with the powerful Gen Z market in India, strategies must prioritize genuine, visually compelling content that fosters an emotional and social connection, rather than overtly commercial messaging.

### **1. Introduction: The Digital Revolution in Indian Fashion**

The fashion landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation in the digital age, with social media platforms becoming central to trend emergence, product discovery, and consumer decision-making. At the forefront of this revolution is **Generation Z**; individuals born roughly between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019); a demographic that is reshaping global consumerism.



In India, Gen Z represents a significant and rapidly growing consumer base, characterized by a deep familiarity with digital technology and a primary reliance on social media for information and inspiration (Kaur et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2023; Zaka & Al-Juboori, 2023). This generation actively uses platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to engage with content that influences their style (IJSDR, 2023; Kaur et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2023; Zaka & Al-Juboori, 2023). The symbiotic relationship between social media platforms, content creators (or influencers), and fashion consumption forms the core of this investigation.

The core research question addressed is: **"What is the impact of social media influencers on Generation Z's fashion trends and purchase intentions in India?"** By synthesizing existing academic literature and recent industry data, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive model for understanding the psychological and behavioral mechanisms that link influencer content to fashion purchasing decisions among Indian Gen Z consumers.

## 2. Literature Review and Mechanisms of Influence

### 2.1. Gen Z as a Digital-First Consumer Group

Gen Z's consumer behavior is fundamentally distinct from previous generations, largely because they are digital natives (Dimock, 2019).

- **Digital Adoption:** They utilize smartphones and social media as primary tools for shopping, entertainment, and information acquisition (Grigoreva, 2021; Widyanto & Agusti, 2020).
- **Trust Dynamics:** Unlike older consumers, Gen Z often expresses lower trust in traditional corporate marketing and celebrity endorsements, instead seeking recommendations from relatable peers and trusted influencers (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Nugroho et al., 2022).
- **Online Shopping Preference:** This cohort significantly favors online shopping for fashion products, contrasting with older groups who may still prefer physical stores (Grigoreva, 2021).

### 2.2. Core Psychological Drivers of Purchase Intention

The power of social media influencers (SMIs) over Gen Z's purchase intention (Y) is mediated by several key psychological constructs, primarily credibility and relationship-building factors<sup>1111</sup>.

Psychological Construct	Definition/ Mechanism	Influence on Purchase Intention (Y)	Supporting Evidence



<p><b>Trustworthiness</b></p>	<p>The perception of the influencer as honest, believable, and sincere.</p>	<p><b>Direct Positive Effect:</b> Higher trust leads to higher purchasing likelihood.</p>	<p>Yang et al., 2021; Lou &amp; Yuan, 2019; Rudaina, 2009</p>
<p><b>Parasocial Interaction</b></p>	<p>The psychological illusion of a face-to-face relationship or friendship with the influencer.</p>	<p><b>Strong Positive Effect:</b> Fosters emotional connection, making advice feel personal and compelling.</p>	<p>Sokolova &amp; Kefi, 2020; Lee &amp; Watkins, 2016</p>
<p><b>Similarity/Relatability</b></p>	<p>The degree to which the follower sees shared demographics, values, or life stages with the influencer.</p>	<p><b>Strong Positive Effect:</b> Enhances credibility and reduces perceived risk of purchase.</p>	<p>Hur &amp; Cassidy, 2019; Widyanto &amp; Agusti, 2020</p>
<p><b>Perceived Expertise</b></p>	<p>The perceived knowledge or skill of the influencer in a specific domain.</p>	<p><b>Inconsistent/Non-Significant:</b> Authenticity often overrides technical skill for Gen Z.</p>	<p>Ao et al., 2023; Gomes et al., 2022; Nugroho et al., 2022</p>



### 2.3. The Impact of Content Format

Influencers must be masters of content format to capture Gen Z's attention, particularly given the short, fast-paced nature of dominant platforms like TikTok (Fissgerald, 2023). The "Get Ready With Me" (GRWM) format is a prime example of effective content.

Content Strategy	Mechanism of Persuasion	Outcome for Fashion Brands
<b>GRWM Videos</b> <sup>10</sup>	<b>Authenticity Boost:</b> Blends personal narrative with product demonstration, making sponsorship feel organic <sup>11</sup> . This content type generally exhibits higher trustworthiness.	Increases the intention to purchase specific beauty/fashion items used in the routine.
<b>Micro-Trends</b> <sup>14</sup>	<b>Social Validation:</b> Trends accelerate through likes and shares, quickly transforming a niche style into a socially validated aesthetic <sup>15</sup> .	Drives high-volume, impulsive purchases (Y) necessary to participate in the trend <sup>16</sup> .
<b>Visual Appeal</b>	<b>AIDA Model Shift:</b> High-quality, engaging visuals immediately capture attention, quickly moving the consumer from <b>Awareness to Action</b> .	Directly impacts consumer emotions and purchasing intentions due to the visual nature of fashion.

### 3. The Dilemma of Fast Fashion and Sustainability

The social media-driven landscape creates a significant ethical and environmental challenge in the fashion industry, particularly in India. The influence of micro-trends directly fuels the engine of fast fashion, creating a cycle of high consumption that contradicts growing environmental awareness.



### 3.1. The Acceleration of the Fashion Cycle

The influencer ecosystem ensures the extremely rapid discovery and mortality of new trends. This accelerates the consumption pattern:

- Trends like Y2K or "Dadcore" become viral sensations via influencers, creating a massive, short-lived demand (Hobo.Video, 2025; Wearepion, 2023).
- This rapid consumption leads to constant overstocking, production, and subsequent waste, exacerbating the environmental impact of the fashion industry (Moon et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2017).

### 3.2. The Attitude-Behavior Gap

While Gen Z is globally recognized for having higher awareness and positive **attitudes** toward environmental and ethical issues, this rarely translates into consistent purchasing behavior when faced with a cheaper, trendier item promoted by a relatable influencer (Brandão & Costa, 2021; Shaw et al., 2015). This is known as the "attitude-behavior gap."

#### Factors that Fuel the Gap in India:

1. **Price Sensitivity:** Despite awareness, Gen Z is highly price sensitive, often preferring low-cost fast fashion options that fit small budgets over more expensive sustainable apparel (López-Fernández, 2020).
2. **Lack of Expertise (Information Barrier):** Consumers often lack the necessary knowledge to differentiate genuine sustainable products, making it difficult to act on their pro-environmental attitudes (Hur & Cassidy, 2019).
3. **Peer Pressure (Subjective Norms):** The constant social visibility and pressure to conform to the latest trends promoted by influencers and peers overrides personal environmental values (Brandão & Costa, 2021).

## 4. Conclusion and Managerial Implications

### 4.1. Conclusion

**Social media influencers** exert a profound and multifaceted impact on Generation Z's fashion trends and purchase intentions in India (Kaur et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2023; Zaka & Al-Juboori, 2023). The influence is primarily rooted in the emotional and interpersonal connections formed between the influencer and follower. **Trustworthiness** and **similarity** are confirmed as the dominant psychological drivers, often overriding traditional factors like perceived expertise. This influence drives a rapid micro-trend cycle that presents significant challenges to sustainable fashion consumption.

### 4.2. Managerial Implications

For fashion brands to effectively capture the significant purchasing power of Gen Z in India, marketing strategies must be hyper-focused on relational and authentic engagement.



### Strategic Imperatives for Marketers:

- **Focus on Relatability over Celebrity:** Prioritize micro- and nano-influencers who share genuine similarities (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).
- **Invest in Authenticity:** Utilize unpolished, narrative-driven content like GRWM videos to boost trustworthiness and avoid overtly commercial messaging (Hobo.Video, 2025).
- **Bridge the Sustainability Gap:** When promoting sustainable lines, use influencers to translate complex ethical information into simple, relatable choices, effectively lowering the consumer's information barrier (Hur & Cassidy, 2019).
- **Embrace the Velocity of Trends:** Maintain flexibility in inventory and marketing to quickly capitalize on emerging micro-trends, understanding that this high-velocity cycle is currently the primary mechanism driving sales (Fissgerald, 2023).

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