

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING CONSUMER
AWARENESS OF SUSTAINABLE APPAREL BRANDS: EVIDENCE FROM NAVI
MUMBAI REGION**

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ABSTRACT

The fast growth of social media platforms has changed marketing communication, predominantly in the fashion industry. Social media Influencer marketing has developed as a powerful digital strategy and it is capable of shaping consumer perceptions and awareness. In the framework of sustainable fashion, influencers play a crucial role in making consumers aware about sustainable alternatives in apparel. The impact of influencer credibility, following intensity, and engagement on consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands in Navi Mumbai is been studied in this study. To accomplish this, Primary data was collected from 144 users of Instagram via a structured questionnaire using validated scales. After the detailed analysis of the data collected, it was discovered that, there is a strong internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.70$) which was confirmed by reliability analysis. It was revealed in the multiple regression analysis that the model significantly predicts consumer awareness ($R^2 = 0.871$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the findings suggests that social media influencers play a significant role in enhancing awareness of sustainable apparel brands. The study also provides suggestions for digital marketers, sustainable fashion brands, and policymakers in improving their strategies of sustainable fashion consumption.

Keywords:

Influencer marketing, influencer credibility, social media engagement, sustainable fashion, consumer awareness, digital marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across industries with the fast expansion of digital technologies, marketing communication strategies has significantly changed. Social media platforms have evolved as powerful online communication tools that helps in interactive engagement between brands and consumers. Progressively, organizations are using social media into their strategic marketing contexts to improve brand development, support customer relationships, and improve business performance (Joshi et al., 2025). Digital media now works as a active link between brands and consumers, swapping the traditional one-way communication model with a participatory and interactive system.

Social media influencers have become influential opinion leaders in this digital Era who shape consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural responses. Influencer marketing applies credibility, authenticity, and relational engagement to support stronger bond between brands and customers. Recent studies suggest that, in the sustainability driven markets, it is influencer credibility that enhances customer trust and brand authenticity proportions (Poulis et al., 2026). Also, research shows that there is a positive relationship between customer trust and sustainable fashion adoption, particularly in developing

economies where awareness of consumption of sustainable products is still evolving (Discover Sustainability, 2025).

The fashion industry, which has great economic contribution, is also known as one of the largest contributors in ruining the environment because of fast fashion practices, production processes which are resource extensive, and textile waste. Sustainable apparel brands have developed as substitutes that encourage eco-friendly materials, ethical labour practices, and responsible consumption by consumers. Still, there is limited environmental consciousness and consumer awareness of sustainable fashion particularly in urban Indian backgrounds.

In the apparel sector, it is been found that social media engagement and exposure to sustainability narratives profoundly influence customer trust, loyalty and ultimately affecting consumer purchase intentions (Journal of Marketing & Social Research, 2025). Additionally, studies propose that in the context of sustainable fashion brands influencer authenticity and credibility play an important role in shaping consumer responses (Chen, 2024). Influencer credibility and environmental awareness increase social media engagement, which impacts positively on green lifestyle and purchase intentions (Ashsidik et al., 2024).

There is limited empirical evidence concerning how influencer credibility, following intensity, and engagement together form consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands. Even though there are many studies on Influencer marketing and sustainable consumption, this study designs a complete framework for explaining how apparel brands can use social media effectively and provide recommendations for sustainable development within specific regional settings like Navi Mumbai. Previous researchers have studied influencer marketing and sustainable consumption separately. In digitally active urban regions where usage of Instagram among young consumers is extensive, it will be relevant to explore these relationships.

Therefore, through this study the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands in the Navi Mumbai region is been examined. Particularly, it investigates the influence of influencer credibility, following intensity, and engagement on consumer awareness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media and Marketing Communication

Social media has significantly changed the modern marketing communication by enabling real time two-way communication in between brands and consumers (Joshi, Lim, Jagani, & Kumar, 2025). The traditional mass communication method has slowly been replaced by a more decentralized digital communication method, where content generated by users, word-of-mouth communications, and storytelling by influencers have become the important sources of brand information. This development has forced organizations and businesses to change their marketing methods to include social media widely in their strategies, as it will provide opportunities for relationship building with consumers (Joshi et al., 2025). This increasing use of social media marketing aligns with the overall digital transformation trend in consumer behavior and indicates the increasing role of digital environments in impacting buying decisions of consumers.

Previous research indicates that social media marketing is much more than a tool providing visibility to the brand. It helps in construction of meaning, nurturing community building, and helping personalized communication, which results in building stronger relationships and developing consumer loyalty (Ashsidik, Wibowo, & Sadat, 2024). In the era of sustainable fashion industry, where ethical placement and communications driven by value are of supreme importance, platforms like Instagram have become vital tools for sharing sustainability narratives and promoting sensible consumerism (Anonymous, 2025). Hence, it is important to evaluate the role of social media as a marketing instrument in understanding consumer awareness in digital environment.

2.2 Influencer Marketing and Consumer Perceptions

Influencer marketing has evolved as an important trend in social media marketing, making use of the credibility, authenticity, and shareability of content creators to form consumer attitudes and perceptions. The theoretical foundation of effectiveness of influencers depends profoundly on Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990), which says that the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of a message source can increase the effectiveness of persuasion. Recent research has used this theory to sustainability issues, demonstrating that credibility of influencers strongly contributes to boost consumer trust in sustainable brands (Poulis, Theodoridis, & Zacharatos, 2026).

Poulis et al. (2026) demonstrated that influencer credibility not only increases the improvement of perceptions of brand authenticity but also enhances purchase intentions for brands focused on sustainability. Their research shows that consumers are more open to content shared by influencers who display credibility and consistency in their communications. This signifies the essential role of credibility in reception of message and processing in marketing environments characterized by plentiful promotional content.

Trust, as a related concept, is also an important feature in digital marketing. In the emerging markets, which is categorized by consumer skepticism and information overload, trust in social media influencers can encourage consumers to adopt sustainable fashion behaviors by reducing perceived risk and improving acceptance of message (Discover Sustainability, 2025). Hence, credibility and trust in influencers are important qualifiers in the communication processes that cause increased brand awareness and preference.

2.3 Engagement and Interaction on Social Media

Engagement involves liking, commenting, sharing, and interacting with content, and it has been recognized as a very significant factor in digital influence. Unlike passive exposure engagement involves customers, which in turn leads to higher level of cognitive and emotional processing (Ashsidik et al., 2024). In the context of sustainable fashion, engagement with content shows that the consumer perception is associated with the values.

Ashsidik et al. (2024) examined the significance of environmental awareness, lifestyle orientation, credibility, and social media engagement in influencing the purchase intention of sustainable fashion items on TikTok. The findings exposed that the credibility of influencer communication increased with the increased levels of engagement, signifying that those users who engage with content are more likely to engross sustainability communication and include it into their purchase intentions. This authenticates the fact that

the intensity of engagement is an important predictor of awareness and consumer behaviour, rather than only followership.

Moreover, engagement improves the visibility of content on social media platforms. Content that gathers significant levels of engagement is more likely to be recommended, in that way increasing visibility and supporting consumer learning. Therefore, analysing engagement provides valuable insights not only about individual consumer behaviour but also offers understanding about diffusion process that forms collective awareness.

2.4 Consumer Awareness of Sustainable Apparel Brands

Brand awareness is a concept that states the degree to which consumers can identify and recall a brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). In the brand equity framework of Aaker's (1991) awareness is highlighted as an important factor that drives consumer choice. In the area of sustainable apparel, awareness includes recognition of the policies and sustainable practices of the brand, understanding its ethical characteristics, and differentiating it from existing fast fashion brands.

Recent research has emphasized on the significance of sustainability practices on social media in forming awareness and attitudes of consumers towards sustainable fashion. A study of Urban India on sustainability narratives in (Journal of Marketing & Social Research, 2025) revealed that when the consumer was exposed to sustainability content, it had a positive impact on consumer awareness and intentions. This suggests that when communication is presented in a proper manner through digital platforms, it can enhance consumer awareness about alternatives of sustainability.

In sustainable fashion domain, consumer awareness is more than a cognitive recognition process; but also, it is a process of aligning value and ethical engagement. As sustainability evolved as an important concern among younger generations, awareness forms the intention, influencing the way in which consumers see the brands that coincide with their environmental and ethical principles.

2.5 Conceptual Gaps

2.6 Even though there are various studies on social media marketing, credibility, engagement, and sustainable consumption practices, there are still several conceptual gaps. First, the existing literature has mainly discovered these concepts within general digital platforms or global markets, emphasis on regional dynamics like the urban consumer market of Navi Mumbai is less explored. Second, credibility and engagement effect on consumer behavior in sustainable fashion area have been studied individually, there are comparatively few studies that have studied the combined effect of credibility and engagement on consumer awareness of sustainable fashion brands.

In online brand engagement, even though influencer marketing is considered as an important factor there is a dearth of empirical research on the relationship between various dimensions of influencer behaviour such as credibility, following intensity and engagement in forming consumer awareness of sustainable fashion brands in emerging markets like Navi Mumbai. In order to shed light on cultural, economic, and behavioural differences of Indian urban consumers, the examination of these relationships can offer a more understanding of digital marketing influence.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Brand Equity Theory, which together explain the role of social media influencers in shaping awareness of sustainable apparel brands in consumers.

3.1 Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory suggests that it is the perceived credibility of the communicator that chiefly impacts the effectiveness of a persuasive message. The concept of Credibility consists of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the source (Ohanian, 1990). The likelihood of consumers to accept and absorb the communicated message increases they perceive the source of message as knowledgeable and trustworthy.

In the domain of social media influencer marketing, influencers perform the role of opinion leaders, where consumer perceptions and attitudes are greatly influenced by their recommendations. Recent research reveals that mainly in sustainability-oriented markets, influencer credibility improves brand authenticity and consumer trust, (Poulis et al., 2026). In the era of sustainable fashion, credible influencers play a vital role in reducing scepticism and enhancing acceptance of the message, where consumers often inquire the authenticity of fulfilment of environmental claims.

Hence, Source Credibility Theory gives a strong theoretical basis for exploring the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands.

3.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) describes how persuasive information is managed through two routes which are the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves a high level of elaboration and requires deep processing of message as it is important for them and on the other hand in the peripheral route there is low level of elaboration and uses peripheral cues such as credibility and popularity to connect positively with the message.

Social media engagement shows the extent to which consumers actively process the content of the influencer. If there is deep mental involvement with the message there is higher levels of engagement like commenting, sharing, or interaction with posts. Previous research proposes that consumers that are engaged process the sustainability related content through the central route, resulting in enhanced awareness and attitude formation (Ashsidik et al., 2024).

Moreover, message familiarity and recall are increased by following intensity wherein there is repeated exposure the content of the influencer. According to ELM, outcomes of persuasion can be increased by repeated exposure, especially when consumers are inspired to process personal values information like environmental obligations.

Therefore, the Elaboration Likelihood Model presents theoretical explanation for inspecting how consumer awareness is impacted by engagement and following intensity.

3.3 Brand Equity Theory

Brand Equity Theory infers that brand awareness as an important component of brand value (Aaker, 1991). Awareness means ability of consumer to identify and recall a brand within a specific product category. when there is higher level of awareness the consumers are more likely to consider the brand and purchase.

In the era of sustainable apparel markets, awareness does not only limits to recognition but it also includes understanding of positioning of environmental narratives and ethical attributes. In the area of digital communication, Social media influencer marketing, improve visibility of brand and strengthen sustainability narratives of the companies (Journal of Marketing & Social Research, 2025).

By using Brand Equity Theory, persuasive communication by influencer and engagement procedures resulted in to consumer awareness.

3.4 Theoretical Model

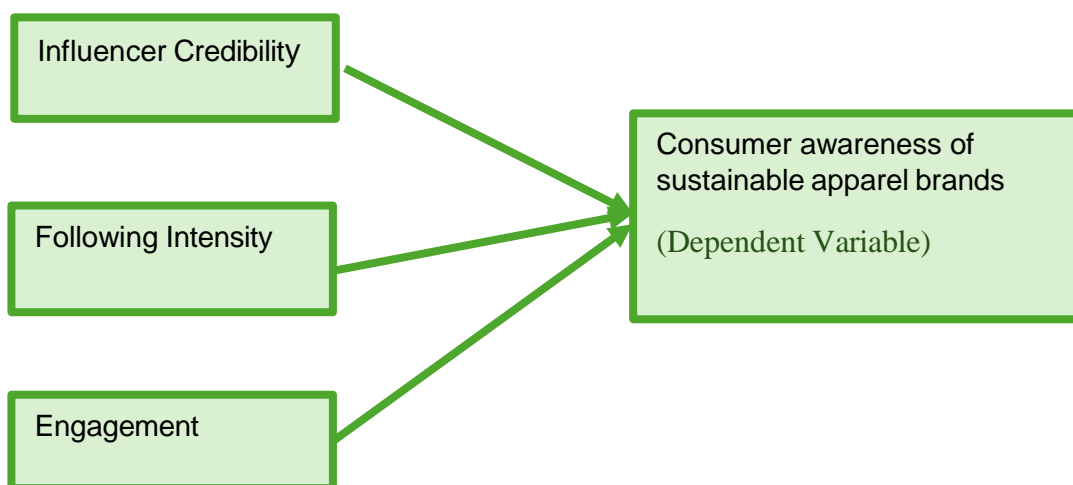
Inferring from these three theoretical perceptions, this study suggests that:

- Influencer credibility which is derived from Source Credibility Theory improves message acceptance and trust.
- Engagement and following intensity which is derived from Elaboration Likelihood Model impact the depth of message processing.
- These processes together contribute to consumer awareness which is derived from Brand Equity Theory.

The integration of these concepts gives a detailed explanation of how social media influencers shape consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands in the Navi Mumbai region.

Based on the theories the following framework is proposed:

Independent Variable



4. Hypotheses Development

On the basis of the theoretical grounds and previous researches, to inspect the relationship between influencer marketing variables and consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands

the following hypotheses are proposed

4.1 Influencer Credibility and Consumer Awareness

According to the Source Credibility Theory it is the communicators perceived expertise and trustworthiness that increases the acceptance of message and persuasion (Ohanian, 1990). In the domain of sustainable fashion, the authentic and sustainability related communication of the credible influencers, the awareness of consumer's increase.

H0: Influencer credibility does not significantly impact consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands.

H1: Influencer credibility significantly impacts consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands.

4.2 Following Intensity and Consumer Awareness

The brand recall and awareness increase in consumers who regularly engage with influencer sustainability related content. As a result, a higher following intensity may increase awareness levels through repeated exposure and information processing.

H0: Following intensity does not significantly impact consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands.

H1: Following intensity significantly impacts consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands.

4.3 Social Media Engagement and Consumer Awareness

Engagement behaviors of consumers display deeper cognitive and emotional connection with influencer content. As per the, Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), higher engagement may lead to robust information processing and better awareness.

H0: Social media engagement does not significantly enhance consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands.

H1: Social media engagement significantly enhance consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative approach to investigate the effect of social media influencers on consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands. A descriptive and cross-sectional method was used to gather the perception of respondents at a single point of time. The quantitative method is suitable for this study as it aims to test hypothesis using statistical analysis.

5.2 Population and Sampling

The population targeted in this study is Instagram users living in the Navi Mumbai who follow any fashion or lifestyle influencers. As the study is of exploratory nature and there are accessibility constraints, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used.

Initially 200 responses were collected, after data cleaning and removal of invalid responses, 144 valid responses were used for analysis. The sample consisted mainly of young adults, displaying the major demographic of Instagram users in urban regions.

5.3 Instrument Development

A structured questionnaire adapted from previously validated scales to confirm reliability and construct validity was used for data collection. All items in the questionnaire were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire consisted of four constructs:

- **Influencer Credibility** which was adapted from Ohanian (1990), assessing perceived expertise and trustworthiness.
- **Following Intensity** – which was adapted from social media usage intensity scales (Ellison et al., 2007).
- **Engagement** which was adapted from latest influencer marketing studies assessing interaction behaviors of consumers.
- **Consumer Awareness** which was adapted from brand awareness scales developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001).

5.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed through google form. The link of the survey was circulated through social media platforms and messaging platforms like whatsapp to reach Instagram users in Navi Mumbai. Participation of the respondents was voluntary, and their anonymity and confidentiality was assured.

Data collection was conducted over a period of one month that is January 2026-February 2026.

5.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. The analytical procedures that were executed are as follows.

- **Descriptive statistics** to summarize characteristics of respondents.

- **Reliability analysis was done** using Cronbach’s Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the constructs.
- **Correlation analysis** was used to explore relationships among different variables.
- **Multiple regression analysis** was applied to test the hypothesized relationships between independent variables which are influencer credibility, following intensity, and engagement and the dependent variable which is (consumer awareness).
- **Multicollinearity diagnostics** were carried out using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values to ensure that there is no severe multicollinearity.

A significance level of $p < .05$ was used for hypothesis testing.

6. Data Analysis and Results

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

In order to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents, descriptive statistics was computed. It was found that majority of respondents were active Instagram users staying in the Navi Mumbai region. The demographic distribution of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 144)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	100	69.4
	Female	44	30.6
Age	18–25	124	86.1
	26–35	3	2.1
	36–45	1	0.7
	46+	16	11.1
Education Level	Undergraduate	34	23.6
	Postgraduate	94	65.3
	Other	16	11.1
Daily Social Media Usage	Less than 1 hour	2	1.4
	1–2 hours	36	25
	2–4 hours	24	16.7
	More than 4 hours	82	56.9

The sample was mainly male (69.4%) and mostly contained respondents aged 18–25 years (86.1%), representing a young and active social media user base. A majority of respondents were postgraduates (65.3%) and informed spending more than four hours daily on social media (56.9%).

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results show that all constructs display acceptable to good reliability, as the alpha values exceed the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019).

The reliability coefficients for each construct are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Influencer Credibility	5	0.843
Following Intensity	5	0.848
Engagement	5	0.73
Consumer Awareness	7	0.85

The results disclose that all constructs show acceptable to good internal consistency. Influencer credibility ($\alpha = .843$), following intensity ($\alpha = .848$), and consumer awareness ($\alpha = .850$) show good reliability, displaying strong consistency among the items used for measuring each construct. Engagement ($\alpha = .730$) which is acceptable reliability in social science research, which is meeting the minimum recommended cut off value of .70 (Hair et al., 2019).

The reliability results validate that the questionnaire is stable and fit for statistical analysis, and it can be used further for the testing of correlation and regression.

6.3 Correlation Analysis

To study the relationships between Influencer Credibility, Following Intensity, Engagement, and Consumer Awareness, Pearson’s correlation analysis was performed. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (N = 144)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Influencer Credibility	3.97	0.8	1			
2. Following Intensity	4.05	0.95	.739**	1		
3. Engagement	4.22	0.77	.681**	.803**	1	
4. Consumer Awareness	4.24	0.85	.791**	.843**	.852**	1

Interpretation

The results show there is strong and significant positive correlations among all the variables of the study.

Influencer Credibility is strongly correlated with:

- Following Intensity ($r = .739, p < .01$)
- Engagement ($r = .681, p < .01$)
- Consumer Awareness ($r = .791, p < .01$)

Following Intensity shows a strong positive relationship with:

- Engagement ($r = .803, p < .01$)
- Consumer Awareness ($r = .843, p < .01$)

Engagement also reveals a strong positive correlation with Consumer Awareness ($r = .852, p < .01$).

These findings suggest that higher perceived credibility of influencers, stronger following intensity, and higher engagement levels are associated with increased consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands in Navi Mumbai.

6.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of Influencer Credibility, Following Intensity, and Engagement on Consumer Awareness of sustainable apparel brands in Navi Mumbai.

Model Summary

The regression model was statistically significant.

- $R = .933$
- $R^2 = .871$
- Adjusted $R^2 = .868$
- $F(3, 140) = 315.736, p < .001$
- Durbin–Watson = 1.309

Interpretation

The R² value of 0.871 specifies that 87.1% of the variance in Consumer Awareness is described by Influencer Credibility, Following Intensity, and Engagement. This represents that it's a very powerful model

The model stability is confirmed by adjusted R² which is 0.868. The F-statistic is significant ($p < .001$), indicating that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

The Durbin–Watson value (1.309) advocates that there is no serious autocorrelation issues.

ANOVA Table

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	90.212	3	30.071	315.736	< .001
Residual	13.334	140	0.095		
Total	103.546	143			

Coefficients Table

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	p
(Constant)	-0.037	0.163	—	-0.227	0.821
Credibility	0.294	0.048	0.276	6.135	< .001
Following Intensity	0.258	0.069	0.288	3.742	< .001
Engagement	0.49	0.078	0.444	6.265	< .001

Interpretation of Coefficients

All three predictors significantly influence Consumer Awareness.

1. Influencer Credibility

$$\beta = .276, p < .001$$

Influencer credibility has a positive and significant effect on consumer awareness.

2. Following Intensity

$$\beta = .288, p < .001$$

Following intensity significantly contributes to consumer awareness.

3. Engagement

$$\beta = .444, p < .001$$

Engagement has the strongest impact on consumer awareness among all predictors.

Hypothesis Decision

Since all predictors are significant ($p < .001$):

H0 is rejected.
H1 is accepted.

Influencer credibility, following intensity, and engagement significantly impact consumer awareness.

7. Discussion

In this study how the of influencer credibility, following intensity, and engagement of influencer impact the consumer awareness of sustainable apparel brands in Navi Mumbai is being examined. The findings disclosed that consumer awareness is significantly impacted by all the three variables, with the model explaining 87.1% of the variance.

Awareness is positively influenced by Influencer credibility, signifying that when influencers are perceived as knowledgeable and trustworthy consumers are more open to sustainability related content posted by the influencer. Following intensity also significantly contributes to the awareness, indicating that consistent exposure to content of the influencer improves familiarity with the brand.

The strongest predictor of awareness developed is engagement. This specifies that passive exposure does not lead to engagement, it is active interaction like liking, commenting, and sharing which plays an important part. The findings suggests that active participation supports cognitive processing and improves awareness of sustainable fashion brands in consumers

In total, the results of the study backs influencer marketing theories and approves that strategies driven by engagement are largely effective in promoting awareness of sustainable apparel among young consumers in Navi Mumbai.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has some limitations. First, the research was restricted to Navi Mumbai, due to which the results cannot be generalised to other regions. Secondly, the sample was mostly composed of young respondents 18–25 years, the perceptions of older consumer groups may not be represented. Third, the study depends on self-reported survey data, which may be led to response bias. Future research can study different cities and demographic groups in order to improve the generalizability of the findings. In future researchers may also study other variables such as purchase intention, brand loyalty, or buying behaviour of consumers. Additionally, studies could apply mediation or moderation analysis to examine relationships among constructs.

9. Conclusion

Social media influencers significantly increase awareness of consumers of sustainable apparel brands in Navi Mumbai has been concluded by this study

The findings reveal that

- Consumer awareness of sustainability apparel brands is positively influenced by the Influencer credibility.
- Exposure and awareness are enhanced by following intensity of the influencers.
- Awareness is strongly driven by engagement.

In this digital era, the stud emphasis that, awareness is not only a function of exposure to the influencer content but it is also strongly affected by interactive participation.

As sustainability has become an important concern for the consumers, marketing strategies which are led by social media influencers are becoming effective in promoting sustainable fashion awareness in markets in urban Indian.

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