

Fashion design and fashion industry: The impact of social media on customer behaviour and its current role in the fashion industry

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Abstract: This article examines the effects of social media over time and their profound impact on marketing, fashion design, and societal values. Social media is deeply integrated into everyday life across all age groups, with a particularly strong influence on young people. These platforms have transformed traditional advertising, fuelled new economic models, and driven technological advancements such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence. They have become essential in shaping digitally-driven fashion trends, promoting sustainability, and enhancing personalised experiences. However, challenges persist, including negative impacts on mental health, the spread of misinformation, and issues with data protection and identity theft. The future of social media is also moving towards decentralisation and niche communities, reflecting a shift towards more personalised and ethically aware digital interactions. The oversaturation of audiences with online advertisements has led to the emergence of niche markets and the dominant trend of micro-influencers. The role of fashion is expected to evolve, emphasising functional, culturally diverse, and holistic approaches that go beyond aesthetics. The constant dynamism of this environment ensures that social media will continue to influence our decision-making, perception of trends, and the fashion industry, while also reflecting broader societal changes and emerging individual identities. This study employs a mixed-method approach, including three conducted questionnaires that highlight significant changes in consumer behaviour. The findings suggest that alongside the increasing influence of new technologies and artificial intelligence, there is a growing desire for offline experiences, authenticity, tangibility and personalisation. The methodology, results, and conclusions presented provide a comprehensive understanding of these shifts, though predicting future developments remains challenging.

Keywords: social media, fashion design, fashion industry, influencer marketing, consumer behaviour, technological advancements

INTRODUCTION

How did social media manage to become one of the most influential and, in terms of business, one of the most powerful communication media? This phenomenon characterises today's times. Whether it is a virtual world or the real one, there is a generation that still longs for authenticity and tangible reality. The statistics regarding psychological disorders, cyberbullying, and negative comments towards individuals and groups are alarming. Alongside the climate crisis, the differentiation of political opinions is being overshadowed by a concerning trend towards homophobia, countering the progress made in gender equality. Fashion has become a means of expression, a form of art, and a tool for advocating minority rights and personal attitudes. More than ever, social networks determine trends in clothing, cooking, and fitness. However, this is becoming increasingly complex with the rise of artificial intelligence, making it difficult to distinguish what is real. Society is grappling with the fact that AI-created supermodels, with millions of followers on Instagram, can influence fashion and trends.

Survey results indicate that while the internet and social networks remain a megamarket with billions of users, there is a noticeable shift in market behaviour towards tangible reality. Despite the digital influence, there is a growing desire for authentic, offline experiences. Social media is rewriting the history of advertising, business strategies, and the way of education and entertainment. The significant, dynamic, and enormous increase in users redefines the culture of communication worldwide and taken it to a new level. Social media users have acquired a sense of immediate proximity despite global distances; all you need is the Internet, and you can communicate with anyone in the world or participate in various events. WhatsApp redefines text communication, Instagram created a new concept of influence, and Facebook remains a leading advertising platform. Design, whether consciously or unconsciously, is a part of every individual's daily life. Whether it is the daily need to dress, eat, or spend free time, design is present in every sphere of everyday life because behind every product, service, logo on the packaging, or the packaging itself is the person who designed it. I decided to focus on this topic because I work as a designer and encounter problems that young designers face in the process of establishing themselves.

CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

In the current competitive environment, when the market is saturated, the need for a total quality design comes to the fore. Many local brands have grown in the past years in Slovakia, whether in the field of fashion, food industry, or industrial design. The trend of buying local products is progressing and goes hand in hand with the boom of promotion on social networks. However, one thing remains relatively unchanged: Most consumers prefer branded goods. The brand carries a message, and consumers associate their sensory perception and integrity with the brand and the message it conveys. This leads to another significant task for designers: the need for total design. By total design, designers understand that everything related to the product affects customers' decisions, whether it is the product itself, its packaging, smell, content, functionality, etc. Total building design is about building value. People are looking for value and choose a product or service that they can relate to and that is available to them. This concept, called dual availability, includes mental availability (consumers knowing about the product when they make a purchase decision) and physical availability (the product being easily accessible). This implies the necessity of a high-quality and well-thought-out total design.

One of the main goals of methodology is to streamline and simplify processes. Creating a designer product is a separate category. It is necessary to find a universal key or framework that will meet the needs of quality total design in its absolute form. However, the question arises as to whether it is possible to create a procedure for the design and creation of design, understood as art, which will always be evaluated subjectively by the end user. One of the main goals of methodology is to streamline and simplify processes. Creating a designer product is a separate category. It is necessary to find a universal key or framework that will meet the needs of quality total design in its absolute form. However, the question arises as to whether it is possible to create a procedure for the design and creation of design, understood as art, which will always be evaluated subjectively by the end user.

Comparison of traditional and online advertising

Traditional marketing has evolved into a new era through the Internet. By 2012, most marketers recognised the importance of online marketing for the long-term competitiveness of companies, leading them to allocate part of their budgets accordingly. Easy access to an infinite amount of information has transformed communication, information processing, and even thinking itself. Traditional marketing methods, such as print, television, and radio, are being displaced by the Internet and changing customer preferences. Today, on average, less than 30% of the total marketing budget is spent on traditional channels (Petro-syan, 2022).

The dynamic development of marketing has brought many opportunities but also confusion. Many marketers initially applied traditional principles to online marketing without knowing how to evaluate the success of online campaigns. *"The amount of change in marketing in the last three to five years is probably equal to the amount of change in the last 30 years"* (Baer, 2013). However, advertising in the online environment still shares many elements with print advertising. Generally, it includes a slogan, headline, main text, and image. Users often have even less time in the online environment than in the real world, perceiving advertisements as distractions. Consequently, advertisers must make advertisements as concise as possible to capture attention.

The lower cost of advertising compared to traditional channels, the ability to precisely target audiences, personalisation, interactivity, and ease of measuring campaign success are the main reasons for the popularity of online marketing among marketers. Together, these functionalities form a significant advantage of online marketing: a higher conversion rate. *"If you have a website, customers are always just a few clicks away from making a purchase. Unlike other media that require people to get up and call you or go to a store, digital marketing can be easy and immediate"* (Northern Ireland Business Info, 2018). Klimczak (2021) summarises the advantages of online marketing into four points: low cost, high return, easy measurability, and global reach. Everything that happens online can be tracked, measured, and analysed. Moreover, unlike traditional marketing, online campaigns are measurable in real-time.

Despite this, until recently, some companies, especially in the B2B sector, avoided online marketing or were only marginally interested in it. The situation changed in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally, and seemingly permanently, altered the way consumers and businesses around the world search for, buy, and sell products and services. This is supported by the fact that approximately 72% of marketing directors surveyed in 2021 reported a significant increase in the importance of online marketing in their companies over the past year (CMO Survey, 2021).

The following statistics illustrate how the pandemic has affected the marketing world. Consumers worldwide spent \$900 billion more online in 2020 than in the previous two years (Mastercard Economics Institute, 2021). During the pandemic, traditional advertising spending in the US fell by 35% in June 2020. Globally, spending on traditional advertising across formats including newspapers, television, and outdoor advertising was forecast to decline by 20.7% between 2021 and 2022. Furthermore, 62% of US consumers report shopping online more now than before the COVID-19 pandemic (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). However, there is no definitive answer to whether to invest in traditional or digital marketing. A well-balanced combination will bring success to companies (Sherman, 2022).

Social media growth has continued to increase. According to DataReportal (Kemp, 2021) more than half of the world now uses social media (62.3%). Today, over 5.04 billion people around the world use social media, with 266 million new users coming online within the last year. The average daily time spent using social media is 2 hours 23 minutes. One of the challenges of social media marketing is that, by its nature, social media are peer-to-peer, involving conversations between friends, families, and colleagues. Brands must be sensitive to how they use social media.

The statistics from the world's marketing agencies consistently present clear trends. Social media has become an integral component of marketing and the online realm. However, changes are noticeable. The end-user and potential buyer are increasingly sensitive to credibility and authenticity. Influencer marketing, a trend of recent years, is subject to evolving trends and influences. Among the myriad of profiles, attention is shifting towards micro-influencers, who may not have hundreds of thousands of followers but boast highly engaged audiences. These niche influencers often offer higher engagement rates and authenticity compared to macro-influencers.

The global influencer marketing industry was valued at \$13.8 billion in 2021 and is expected to reach \$22.3 billion by 2026 (Dencheva, 2024). Influencer marketing has become a staple in many brands' marketing strategies, with businesses leveraging influencers' reach and influence to promote their products or

services. Authenticity and transparency are becoming increasingly important in influencer marketing, with audiences demanding genuine relationships between influencers and the brands they promote. Influencer diversity is also on the rise, with brands seeking out influencers from diverse backgrounds and niche communities to better resonate with specific audience segments.

However, each social media platform differs significantly, making it challenging to determine which one is the best. Each platform caters to a distinct audience, resonating with varying themes and values. What defines an influencer is the number of followers who identify with their values, art, behaviour, and the influencer's ability to connect with them through their authority and influence on the platform. The allure of social media lies in the sense of closeness and accessibility it provides, the feeling of direct contact with a celebrity. Users often feel they are part of something larger, which was especially desirable during the pandemic.

We live in a world with more influencers and celebrities than ever before. While many have now achieved the one million follower milestone, the top social media influencers enjoy almost unbelievably large followings. That is part of the reason influencer marketing is now growing in popularity. When executed well with the right influencers on board, you can raise the profile of your brand at an accelerated rate. Not only can it introduce you to a brand-new audience, but it can potentially convert those who have seen your brand before but needed some extra reassurance. If you are unsure about working with influencers, it is better to start with a nano-influencer on a small, targeted campaign to establish whether it works for the proposed business.

MATERIALS, DATA AND METHODS

My survey, conducted through a questionnaire, involved 832 respondents and resulted in interesting data related to the Slovak market. To conduct the survey, I used my personal Instagram account, which has a follower base of 11,500, the majority of whom are women. This allowed me to gather insights primarily from a female demographic, making the survey results particularly reflective of women's decision-making patterns. I designed the survey using Google Forms, which provided a straightforward platform to collect responses. Then I posted an open call on my Instagram account, including a direct link to the survey. Within just 24 hours, I received 832 responses, offering a robust data set to inform the study.

The aim was to determine how social networks and influencers impact shopping behaviour and decision making. The results indicate a decline in the influence of macroinfluencers and a rise in smaller niche communities that promote authentically and believably. Excessive saturation with advertising posts tyres the follower, leading to a diminished effectiveness of promotions. For this paper, I used a mixed-method approach, including subjective examination of case studies and empirical data collected from user surveys and comparative analytics on social media. The study also uses a quantitative research design with a survey questionnaire to collect data from Instagram users.

Results

In evaluating the questionnaires, I compared the influence of the Internet, social media, and influencers. Since the survey was conducted through my own Instagram account, the demographic data showed that the majority of respondents were women (Fig. 1), which is a limitation of this survey. Fig. 2 presents the age range. The graph (Fig. 3) confirms a declining trend in influence, resistance to internet advertising, and a strengthening trend towards authenticity and niche markets and communities. Last year (2023), 48.8% of respondents shopped online, while this year it dropped to 42.9%. The most significant decrease is observed in the influence of social media influencers, with a dramatic drop from 78.2% in 2023 to 14.3% in 2024. Additionally, in 2023, 87.6% of respondents mentioned the influence of the Internet and advertisements, which decreased to 37% in 2024, representing a decline of more than half. This is illustrated in Fig. 4.

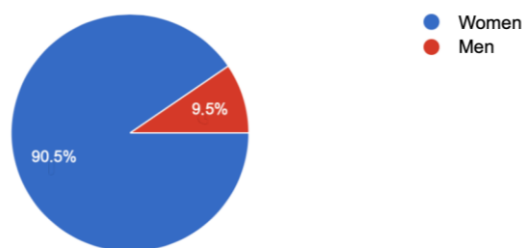


Fig. 1. Survey results - gender. (Source: Author, 2024)

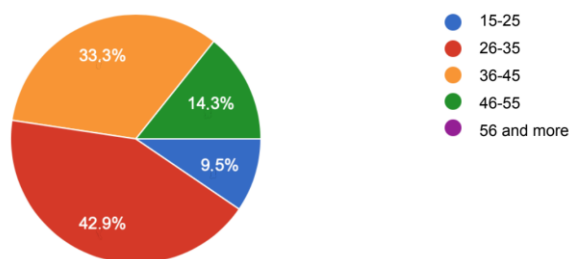


Fig. 2. Survey results - age range. (Source: Author, 2024)

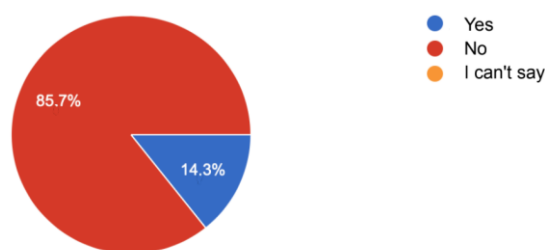


Fig. 3. Survey results - impact of influencers. (Source: Author, 2024)

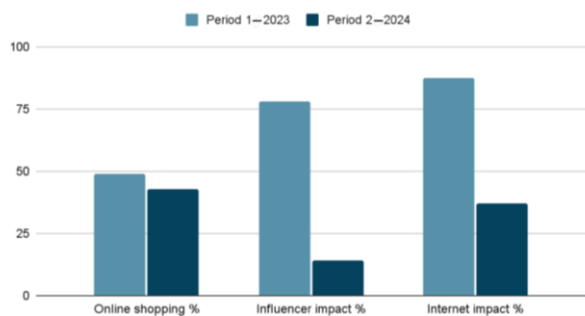


Fig. 4. Survey results - comparison of increase/decrease of trends in years 2023 and 2024. (Source: Author, 2023, 2024)

1. Pre-Purchase Research Behaviour: According to the survey data, a significant majority (79.3%) of respondents reported searching for information about products online before visiting a physical store. This highlights the critical role of online research in the shopping journey, indicating that consumers rely on social media and other digital channels to gather information, read reviews, and compare prices before making purchasing decisions. Fashion brands can leverage this insight by optimising their online presence, providing detailed product information, and actively engaging with consumers on social media to influence their decision-making process.

2. Influencer Impact: Despite the widespread popularity of influencer marketing, the survey data reveals that only 21.8% of respondents believe in the recommendations of influencers. Furthermore, a significant portion of respondents (34.4%) no longer trust influencer recommendations, while 43.8% claim that influencer promotions have never had an impact on their purchasing decisions. These findings suggest a growing scepticism towards influencer marketing among consumers, possibly due to concerns about authenticity, credibility, and oversaturation of sponsored content. Fashion brands should take note of these trends and carefully evaluate their influencer partnerships to ensure alignment with their target audience and brand values.

3. Effectiveness of Online Advertising: The survey data also provides insights into the effectiveness of online advertising in influencing shopping behaviour. While a small percentage (8.5%) of respondents reported being directly influenced by online advertisements, a larger proportion (33.4%) acknowledged that online ads have some influence on their purchasing decisions. However, the majority of respondents (58.1%) claimed that online ads have low or no influence on their shopping behaviour. These findings underscore the importance of targeted advertising strategies, compelling creative content, and personalised messaging to capture the attention of consumers in a competitive digital landscape. Fashion brands can leverage data analytics and consumer insights to optimise their advertising campaigns and maximise return on investment. (Fig. 5)

4. Consumer Preferences and Behaviours: Beyond the specific findings related to influencer marketing and online advertising, the survey data may also provide valuable insights into broader consumer preferences, behaviours, and trends in the fashion industry. For example, analysis of demographic data such as age, gender, income level, and geographic location can help identify target audience segments and tailor marketing strategies accordingly. Similarly, examination of purchase frequency, preferred shopping channels, and product preferences

can inform product development, inventory management, and pricing strategies. By mining the survey data for actionable insights, fashion brands can gain a deeper understanding of their target market and drive more effective marketing initiatives.

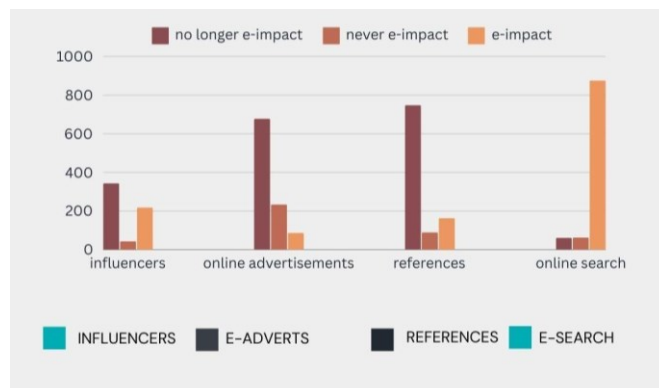


Fig. 5. Comparison of importance of online references, influencer impact and online advertisements: survey results - comparison of e-channels impact in 2023. (Source: Author, 2023)

DISCUSSION

The responses provided in the questionnaire offer insights into people's attitudes and experiences with online shopping and digital advertising. Many respondents appreciate the convenience and time-saving aspects of online shopping. They value the ability to shop anytime and anywhere without the need to physically visit stores. This convenience is often seen as a significant benefit, particularly in today's fast-paced lifestyle. Internet shopping provides access to a wide range of products and brands, including those not locally available. This aspect is especially beneficial for individuals living in smaller towns or remote areas with limited shopping options.

When executed effectively, digital advertising can offer personalised recommendations based on users' interests and browsing history. However, some respondents express concerns about excessive targeted ads and potential privacy invasions. Many respondents prefer quality over the sheer quantity of ads. They appreciate well-crafted and subtle ads that provide value or evoke emotion. Conversely, excessive advertising can be perceived as annoying and may deter potential customers. There is recognition of the need to balance consumption and avoid artificial needs created by advertising. Some respondents emphasise the importance of conscious shopping and purchasing only items they genuinely need.

Despite the advantages, online shopping and digital advertising present challenges. These include the inability to physically inspect products before purchase, concerns about data protection, and the saturation of advertisements on digital platforms. Many respondents prefer to buy from verified online retailers or e-commerce platforms with positive past experience. They tend to avoid unknown websites or ads from unfamiliar sources due to concerns about reliability and potential fraud. The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced consumer behaviour, leading more people to turn to online shopping as a safer alternative to in-person experience. This shift has accelerated the adoption of e-commerce and prompted changes in advertising strategies to meet evolving consumer habits. (Figs. 6-9)

As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer behaviour in the retail sector is experiencing significant shifts. While online shopping saw unprecedented growth during the pandemic due to lockdowns and social distancing measures,

there is now a noticeable trend of consumers returning to physical stores. This shift is influenced by several factors, including the desire for tangible experiences, immediacy, and social aspects of shopping. One of the primary reasons consumers are returning to physical stores is the desire for tangible experiences. Shopping in-person allows customers to see, touch, and try products before making a purchase, which is particularly important for items like clothing, accessories, and home goods. This sensory experience cannot be fully replicated online, even with advanced technologies like augmented reality. Moreover, physical stores offer the immediacy that online shopping cannot provide at all. Despite advancements in logistics, same-day or next-day delivery, the instant gratification of purchasing and taking home an item immediately from a store remains a compelling advantage for brick-and-mortar retailers.

Shopping is often a social activity. Physical stores provide an environment where consumers can shop with friends or family, seek advice from sales associates, and enjoy the overall experience of browsing in a well-curated space. This social aspect of shopping contributes to the resurgence of in-store visits. The retail landscape is evolving into a hybrid model that combines the best of both physical and online shopping experiences. Many consumers now engage in “click-and-collect” services, where they purchase online and pick up in-store. This model offers convenience while still driving foot traffic to physical locations. Additionally, in-store returns for online purchases provide another touchpoint for retailers to engage with customers and potentially drive additional sales. To stay competitive, physical stores are integrating technology to enhance the shopping experience. This includes mobile payment options, personalised promotions through apps, and interactive displays. By merging the convenience of digital tools with the tangible benefits of in-store shopping, retailers are creating a more engaging and efficient customer experience.

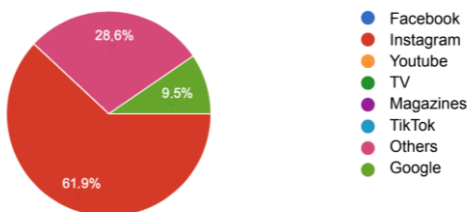


Fig. 6. Platform with major influence in cloth shopping, survey results - social platforms. (Source: Author, 2024)

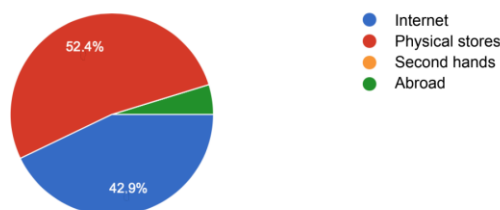


Fig. 7. The most usual way of cloth shopping, survey results - way of shopping. (Source: Author, 2024)

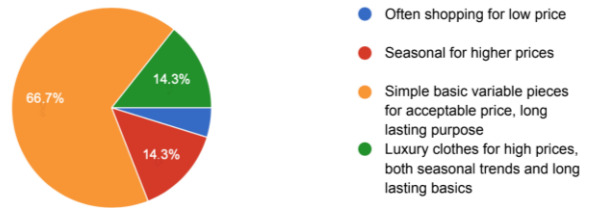


Fig. 8. Cloth purchasing frequency, survey results - kind and frequency of cloth shopping. (Source: Author, 2024)

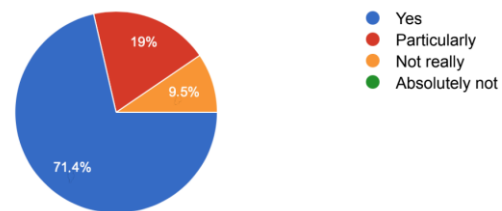


Fig. 9. Significant change in cloth purchases due to social changes (war, pandemic, inflation, etc), survey results - significant change in shopping frequency in past years. (Source: Author, 2024)

Despite the growth of online shopping, concerns about data security, privacy, and fraudulent activities persist. Physical stores offer a sense of security and trust that is sometimes lacking in online transactions. This is especially true for high-value items where consumers prefer to verify authenticity and quality in person. There is also a growing trend of consumers wanting to support local companies and shop locally. Physical stores, especially small businesses, benefit from this trend as consumers seek to contribute to their local economies and enjoy unique, personalised shopping experience that large online retailers often cannot provide.

While online shopping continues to be a dominant force in the retail industry, the return to physical stores reflects a balanced approach to consumer shopping habits. Physical stores offer tangible experience, immediate gratification, social interaction, and a sense of security that online shopping cannot fully replicate. The future of retail is likely to be characterised by a hybrid model, where the convenience of online shopping is complemented by the experiential advantages of physical stores. Retailers who can seamlessly integrate these two channels will be best positioned to meet the evolving needs and preferences of modern consumers.

Personalisation is a significant and integral part of the future of social media, driven by advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. As social media platforms evolve, they will increasingly offer highly personalised experience to users. Enhanced personalisation will manifest in several ways: Firstly, AI-driven recommendations will tailor content feeds, ensuring that users see posts, videos, and advertisements most relevant to their interests, thereby increasing engagement and satisfaction. Advertisers will leverage this technology to create highly targeted advertising campaigns based on detailed user profiles, delivering commercials that match users’ interests, demographics, and online behaviour, making advertising more effective and less intrusive. Secondly, platforms will provide more options for users to customise their interfaces, themes,

and notification settings according to their preferences. AI can optimise content delivery, ensuring users see the most relevant information at the right times. Social media stories and short-form videos will be tailored to individual tastes, enhancing the user experience, while live streams and interactive content will adapt in real-time based on user engagement and feedback.

AI chatbots will offer personalised customer support, providing instant, tailored responses to inquiries, improving customer satisfaction and efficiency. E-commerce features on social media will also become more personalised, with recommendations based on past purchases, browsing history, and social interactions. AI-driven virtual shopping assistants will help users find products that match their preferences, sizes, and styles. User-generated content will be encouraged, with platforms facilitating the formation of niche communities where users can connect with others who share similar interests. Enhanced privacy settings will give users more control over their data and how it is used, building trust and ensuring compliance with data protection regulations. Platforms will offer transparency about how personalisation algorithms work, allowing users to understand and control the customisation of their content.

Additionally, personalised mental health and well-being features will be integrated into social media platforms. These may include recommendations for managing screen time, promoting positive content, and providing mental health resources tailored to individual needs. In conclusion, personalisation is not just a trend but a cornerstone of the future of social media. By leveraging AI and machine learning, social media platforms will create more relevant, engaging, and satisfying user experience. However, balancing this with ethical considerations, such as user privacy and data security, is crucial for building trust and maintaining user satisfaction. As personalisation technology advances, it will continue to shape how users interact with social media, making these platforms more integral to daily life.

CONCLUSION

In today's digital landscape, Instagram has emerged as a dominant force in influencing consumer behaviour, especially within the realms of e-commerce and fashion. My own survey results reveal a compelling dynamic: while 62% of people acknowledge being influenced by Instagram when deciding to make a purchase, only 10% report that the broader internet shapes their buying decisions. However, there is an interesting contradiction—72% of respondents claim that their style of clothing is not influenced by these platforms. This paradox highlights the complex relationship between social media and personal identity. On the one hand, Instagram has become a powerful tool for brands, allowing them to leverage visual storytelling, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content to engage with consumers. The platform's integration of shopping features further streamlines the purchasing process, making it easier for users to discover and buy products without leaving the app. On the other hand, despite these advancements, many individuals still perceive their style as independent and authentic, free from external influences. This could suggest that while Instagram significantly impacts specific purchasing decisions – such as discovering a new brand or product – people may not fully recognize or admit the broader influence it has on their overall style.

Yet, despite these advancements, many individuals still perceive their style as independent and authentic, free from external influences. This could suggest that while Instagram significantly impacts specific purchasing decisions—such as discovering a new brand or product—people may not fully recognise or admit the broader influence it has on their overall style. This phenomenon can be attributed to a few factors. First, the influence of

Instagram may be more subtle than overt, affecting users' preferences and decisions without them explicitly acknowledging it. Second, there's a strong desire among consumers to maintain a sense of individuality, which leads them to downplay the impact of social media on their personal style. Lastly, while Instagram is a significant driver of trends in fashion, cooking, and fitness, the rise of artificial intelligence complicates the landscape, making it increasingly difficult to discern what is genuinely real.

Despite the digital nature of Instagram's influence, my survey results indicate a growing trend towards a return to tangible reality. As the market becomes saturated with online advertisements and AI-generated content, there is a noticeable shift in consumer behaviour, with many seeking more authentic, offline experiences. In conclusion, while Instagram continues to be a major influencer in the e-commerce and social media spheres, particularly in shaping purchasing decisions, there remains a strong undercurrent of resistance among individuals who strive to preserve their personal style and authenticity. This duality suggests that as we move forward, brands will need to strike a delicate balance between leveraging the power of social media and respecting the consumer's desire for genuine, real-world experience.

In summary, online shopping offers convenience and accessibility, while digital advertising plays a significant role in shaping consumer decisions. However, achieving the right balance between effective advertising and invasive tactics is crucial for businesses to engage positively with consumers. The future of showcasing and social media will be moulded by innovation, societal shifts, and changing customer inclinations. Brands that stay dexterous, grasp advancement, and understand their clients will succeed in this dynamic environment. Continuous learning and adaptation will be the keys to remaining relevant and viable in future marketing endeavours.

Disclosure

The author used Open AI (ChatGPT 4) in the writing process before submission solely to improve the language and readability of the paper. The final text has been corrected by a professional proofreader of the journal.

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