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Sustainable Influencing:

An Empirical Study of Social Media Influencers' Impact on Young Consumers' Fashion Choices

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry has witnessed a notable shift in marketing strategies with the rise of influencer marketing. Fashion brands have increasingly collaborated with social media influencers to enhance product visibility and appeal to younger demographics. While the effectiveness of this approach on younger generations is widely acknowledged, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the influence of social media influencers on the fashion consumption patterns of young individuals and the dynamics of influencer-follower relationships. This study aims to meticulously investigate the extent of such impact and the nature of these intricate dynamics. Additionally, it aims to unravel the pivotal role influencers play in shaping fashion social norms and their consequent influence on the behavior of young consumers. To achieve these objectives, an empirical survey involving 172 individuals aged between 19 and 26 years has been conducted, providing a robust foundation of knowledge and insights. By combining theoretical exploration with empirical investigation, this study sheds light on the interplay between social media influencers, fashion brands, and consumers. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for brands and policymakers seeking to develop effective interventions that promote sustainable and ethical fashion consumption patterns. By understanding the intricate dynamics and their implications, this study aims to guide society toward a more sustainable and conscious fashion industry, shaping a brighter future for generations to come.

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INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has experienced a significant transformation in marketing practices in recent years, primarily due to the advent of influencer marketing. Fashion brands have increasingly recognized the power of social media influencers in boosting product visibility and attracting younger demographics.

While the effectiveness of influencer marketing on younger generations is widely acknowledged, there is a need to delve deeper into its impact on the fashion consumption patterns of young individuals and the dynamics of influencer-follower relationships.

This research study aims to meticulously investigate the extent of this impact and explore the intricate dynamics involved in these relationships. In addition to understanding the influence of social media influencers, this study seeks to uncover the pivotal role they play in shaping fashion social norms and the subsequent influence on the behavior of young consumers. By analyzing the interactions between influencers, fashion brands, and consumers, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between these stakeholders.

To achieve the research objectives, an empirical survey has been conducted involving 172 individuals aged between 19 and 26 years. The survey data provides a solid foundation of knowledge and insights into the impact of social media influencers on fashion consumption patterns.

Furthermore, this study aims to establish a firm theoretical underpinning by conducting an exhaustive literature review. The review critically examines the emergence of influencer marketing, elucidates the underlying principle of influence, explores the significance of social norms within influencer marketing, analyzes the motivations behind fast fashion's success, investigates the environmental implications of the fashion industry, and engages with the theory of social identity to understand its influence on fashion consumption patterns.

By combining theoretical exploration with empirical investigation, this research endeavors to shed light on the captivating interplay between social media influencers, fashion brands, and consumers. The findings derived from this study will lay a solid groundwork for brands and policymakers seeking to devise effective interventions that promote sustainable and ethical fashion consumption patterns. By understanding the intricate dynamics at play and their ramifications, the aim is to collectively guide society towards a more sustainable and conscious fashion industry, poised to shape a brighter future for generations to come.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 THE RISE OF GLOBAL FASHION INFLUENCER MARKETING

The global fashion influencer marketing market was valued at USD 3.01 billion in 2021 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 35.9% until 2030. Fashion influencers are professionals and everyday people with a committed social media following who post information about fashion and promote clothing, cosmetics, jewelry, fashion shows, and other brands on their networks. Fashion influencer marketing aims to create organic dialogues about the business and its products by providing subscribers and followers with relevant material (Polaris Market Research, 2022).

The availability of convenient and affordable internet connections has opened up a new avenue for customers to engage with their target markets, leading to the evolution of influencer marketing strategies. The growing trends of urbanization and internet usage have fuelled the demand for fashion apparel and cosmetics, influencing the expansion of fashion influencer marketing. By utilizing these marketing techniques, businesses and brands can create more targeted advertising campaigns that foster stronger customer connections and drive revenue growth.

Fashion Influencer Marketing Market Size, By Region, 2018 - 2030 (USD Billion)

North America   Europe   Asia Pacific   Latin America   Middle East & Africa

Source: Polaris Market Research Analysis

1.2 PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCE

Influence and persuasion have always been an aspect of marketing strategies. Cialdini sets up six principles of persuasion and influence that help to understand what engages people (Cialdini, 2007). These six principles are reciprocity, consistency, social proof, authority, scarcity, and liking. For this analysis of influencer marketing, it is important to further discuss the concepts of social proof, authority, and liking. Social proof is a strong factor in decision-making. It describes that people want and need to know what everyone else around them is doing. It gives them a feeling of security and confirmation about their actions. The authority principle, then, is, to a certain extent, indoctrinated into our lives through social norms. People tend to believe experts and authorities who seem to have more knowledge than themselves, whether legitimated or illegitimate. Finally, the principle of liking says that people would rather say "yes" to others when they know and like them. People are, indeed, more likely to favor people that are similar to them, attractive, or who give them compliments (Zietek, 2016).

But who is influential enough to be called an influencer?

1.2.1 Influencer Marketing in the Fashion Industry

Influencers are "people who possess greater than average potential to influence others due to the frequency of communication, personal persuasiveness or size of, and centrality to, a social network" (Nonprofit Business Advisor, 2015). Over the last decade, we have seen social media grow rapidly in importance. According to the most recent statistics, the projected number of global social media users in 2023 is 4.89 billion, indicating 6.5% rise from the previous year. Inevitably these people look up to influencers on social media to guide their decision-making.
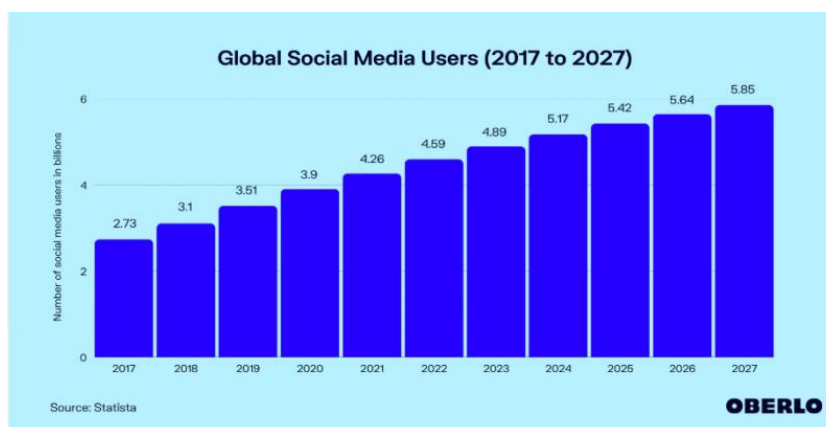
There are many ways of classifying social media influencers. Some of the most common methods are audience size, content types, and influence level. Regarding audience size, social media influencers classify into one of these four categories: nano-influencers, micro-influencers, macro-influencers, and mega-influencers.

The newest influencer type to gain recognition is the nano-influencer. These people only have a small number of followers, but they tend to be experts in a highly specialized field. In many cases, they have fewer than 1,000 followers. However, they are likely to greatly influence their followers; a nano-influencer's followers are usually keen and interested in his/her content, and they are willing to engage and listen to his/her opinions. While many brands would consider nano-influencers inconsequential, they can be extremely important to firms that make highly specialized and niche products. They may be cheap and carry tremendous sway with a small number of people; however, in most niches, a brand must work with hundreds of nano-influencers to reach a broad audience.

Micro-influencers are considered to have between 10,000 to 100,000 followers. They typically specialize in a particular area of interest and tend to be very knowledgeable or specialized in their subject, thus providing a more targeted follower base. Micro-influencers are becoming more and more common. Some have risen from virtual obscurity to being nearly as well-known as traditional celebrities. This rise can be partially attributed to Generation Z spending more time online than watching television, sports, or movies (Werner, 2023). According to the influencer marketing platform Markerly (2015), which conducted a survey with two million social media influencers from Instagram, micro-influencers generated the best ratio of reach and engagement (i.e., the interaction of the audience with posted content measured by considering post reach and viewer response in the form of clicks, likes and comments). The study shows that as influencers grow their audience, their engagement rate drops. Arguably, as an audience grows into millions, it becomes more challenging to maintain the level of intimacy micro-influencers create with their smaller and more nurtured communities (Chen, 2016). Micro-influencers are generally perceived to be more authentic than well-known influencers with larger networks, who tend to become less accessible as their popularity grows. It is precisely the portrayal of authenticity and accessibility that micro-influencers offer that connects with an audience (Hatton, 2018; Bernazzani, 2018).

People with followers in the range between 500.000 and 1 million on a social network are known as macro-influencers. This group tends to consist of two types of people. They are either B-grade celebrities or successful online experts who have turned their digital activity into a full-time professional endeavor using a business approach. This latter type of macro-influencer is likely more useful for firms engaging in influencer marketing as they generally have a strong digital presence on more than one platform. Thus, they can use different

platforms effectively to cross-promote and be more valuable for brands. Macro-influencers have a high profile and can be excellent at raising awareness. A brand, indeed, should engage with macro-influencers if it wants to reach a broad demographic, such as young females.

Mega-influencers are the highest-ranking category of social media influencers; they typically have more than a million followers. In having a substantial following, mega-influencers provide brands with a notably greater reach, but at a very high cost, up to $1 million per post. Furthermore, mega influencers do not have "real converting influencer power" due to their following being so diverse demographically and psychographically. They often have a very diverse audience with different topics of interest. Their relationships with the individual members of their followership tend to be more distant (Ismail, 2018), and they aren't necessarily subject matter experts. Hence, they are less likely to be trusted on a specific matter. Consequently, mega-influencers should be approached only by major brands who want to promote products that appeal to the masses.

Social media influencers also classify depending on the type of content they share. There are bloggers, YouTubers, podcasters, short-form video creators, and many others. Within the fashion industry, however, brands prefer to engage with short-form video creators, such as vloggers, which have a distinctive follower base on either Tik Tok or Instagram, or even on both. This category is the one that has the greatest influence on the target that we aim to study, young girls. Short-video content allows brands to promote their fashion items and show the fit of those items worn by the influencers. The most used platforms for this type of content are Tik Tok and Instagram, where content is shared through TikToks and reels. TikTokers are enormously helpful in promoting brands and products because they cater to the shorter attention spans common to people browsing social media. With quick, engaging, and casual videos, short-form video creators can make a brand or product seem fun, enjoyable, and (ultimately) relatable to audiences, thereby humanizing a brand and garnering interest in a product (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). However, brands need to be careful in this area. TikTok users are typically devoted to an influencer's unique style. TikTok influencer marketing is one of those places where personal branding and business branding are closely linked (Schaffer, 2022). Beyond the high engagement of these influencers' followers, the secret is to appear as authentic and sincere as possible; people will follow and trust micro-influencers only if they can relate to them. Thus, micro-influencers have to carefully calibrate between being authentic and sponsoring the products they were paid to advertise. Influencer marketing will be effective only if the brand sponsored matches the influencers' lifestyle, values, and area of expertise. If followers perceive the endorsement as sincere and not far-fetched, they will likely trust the influencer and be eager to buy the sponsored items. As a result, a brand should give influencers significant

creative freedom while remaining FTC-compliant to ensure that its influencer partnership does not read too much like an ad, thus turning potential customers away.

Social Platforms Used by US Marketers for Influencer Marketing, 2020-2025
% of total marketers

Instagram: 62.0% (2020), 67.9% (2021), 72.5% (2022), 76.6% (2023), 80.8% (2024), 84.1% (2025)
Facebook: 48.4% (2020), 52.0% (2021), 55.2% (2022), 58.0% (2023), 60.5% (2024), 62.3% (2025)
YouTube: 38.9% (2020), 42.0% (2021), 45.7% (2022), 49.0% (2023), 52.0% (2024), 54.9% (2025)
TikTok: 36.0% (2020), 40.8% (2021), 42.5% (2022), 44.2% (2023), 45.6% (2024), 46.8% (2025)
Twitter: 23.6% (2020), 24.4% (2021), 25.0% (2022), 25.5% (2023), 25.9% (2024), 26.2% (2025)
Snapchat: 15.5% (2020), 16.3% (2021), 17.1% (2022), 17.8% (2023), 18.5% (2024), 19.1% (2025)

■ Instagram ■ Facebook ▨ YouTube ▨ TikTok ■ Twitter ▨ Snapchat

Note: companies with 100+ employees; includes both paid and unpaid (i.e., compensation in the form of free product or trips) brand-influencer partnerships
Source: eMarketer, Dec 2021

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1.2.1.1 What Makes Fashion Opinion Leaders Influential on Social Media and Why is it a Risk?

Millennials interact with opinion leaders in social media for various reasons: entertainment, social interaction/communication, wanting to be on trend, fear of missing out on trends, easy/convenient to use, and routine behavior. The evolution of social media has created a turbulent environment for consumers and fashion retail businesses by changing ways to create, share, and exchange fashion-related information. Traditionally, fashion opinion leaders are "editors of leading fashion magazines and highly visible fashion consumers, such as society women, movie stars, and popular music stars" (Crane, 1999, p.16). The fashion opinion leaders of today are bloggers who share their unique tastes or product reviews through social media; they diffuse information about products and services using a two-step flow communication model (Katz et al., 2006). In the first step, opinion leaders understand and interpret information or products they receive or find. In the

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second step, they pass the digested information to their nearby environment. Opinion leaders, indeed, by providing on social media fashion product information (i.e., product reviews and locations), confirmation of purchases (i.e., relieving post-purchase dissonance), and styling advice (i.e., introducing and inspiring new trends), influence followers to replicate the opinion leader's style and, thus, to purchase products sponsored by the latter. They often work specifically as brand endorsers for millennial consumers. It is, thus, crucial to understand who the most influential fashion opinion leaders in social media are and how they influence millennial consumers' consumption.

Studies have revealed that the extent of trust that people put towards fashion opinion leaders in social media depends on two main factors: (influencers') personal and platform characteristics. Millennials strongly consider whether an opinion leader has a trendy lifestyle (aspirations), unique style, positive personality, attractive physical appearance, whether he/she is relatable (share similarities), well-known in the industry, and popular to the public before deciding to follow and trust him/her. Aspirations play an important role since people are likely to follow a certain influencer if he/she has either a lifestyle, physical characteristics, or even possessions they aim to achieve. In many cases, people will take the influencer as a role model that will guide them to obtain the lifestyle, the body, or even the car they desire. Here is where it gets extremely risky: first, many of these influencers show themselves as great experts even when they do not have the necessary knowledge to mentor other people; then, influencers on social media are paid to wear and sponsor new clothes at every occasion, to travel worldwide, and to go to fancy events; thus if people aim to achieve the kind of lifestyle they see on social media from these influencers, they will run after an unrealistic ideal and will likely develop both unhealthy habits and damaging mental models. In terms of fashion consumption, by seeing influencers who post "hauls" videos opening packages filled with new clothes and fashion accessories every week, if not every day, their followers will likely start to think that in society is considered "normal" to go shopping once, if not even seven times a week.

Moreover, by seeing influencers posting photos and videos with new outfits daily, people may feel that society expects them not to wear the same item more than once. These social expectations will instill the urge to compulsively buy new clothes every week, to look for a new outfit for every occasion. On the one hand, this will drive exceedingly up fashion consumption; on the other hand, it will generate in young consumers a huge sense of anxiety, along with the fear of not being socially accepted by the community. This process is furthermore facilitated by online retailers. Other than money, with fast fashion online retailers, even time is not an issue anymore. When watching a video of an influencer advertising fashion items of some brand, people can directly "swipe up" and buy the items they are interested in. Additionally, influencers on social media,

when sponsoring a brand, often try on some clothes or accessories so that people can see beforehand how these items fit and, thus, purchase them without risk of sending them back.

We already marked the importance for millennial opinion leaders to be inspirational; however, it is also crucial to show themselves as simple and relatable. People will likely follow a certain influencer if they feel connected to him/her. Connections emerge from various reasons, such as having (almost) the same age or style, living in the same city (or country), or enjoying the same kind of lifestyle. These connections enable followers to build in their minds a close relationship with influencers, leading individuals to trust them more and, thus, to be more affected by their products' advice.

Another relevant factor is influencers' platform characteristics, such as having large followers and aesthetically pleasing profiles and images. Consumers are generally more eager to trust an opinion leader if he/she has a large base of followers. Moved by the bandwagon effect, an individual may think that if many others follow a specific influencer, so should he/she. An opinion leader with a large base of followers is often considered an expert in giving useful advice. However, this constitutes a huge risk: does having many followers mean that an opinion leader is competent and should be trusted, or does it mean that he knows well its audience and knows how to target it effectively? In many cases, opinion leaders with a large follower base are not real experts. Consequently, to protect themselves from unhealthy influences, consumers should consciously process information released by social media influencers (DePhillips & Jihyeong, 2017).

1.3 SOCIAL NORMS IN INFLUENCER MARKETING

Normative influence refers to the impact of other people on one's behavior (Cialdini et al., 1990). It has been pointed to as a significant determinant of individuals' conspicuous consumer behavior (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004).

Literature most commonly distinguishes between two types of norms: descriptive and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms refer to individuals' perception of what significant others in their environment are doing (Cialdini et al., 1990; White et al., 2009). On the other hand, injunctive norms refer to individuals' perception of behaviors others in their environment would approve of (Cialdini et al., 1990) and thus signal potential rewards or punishments for engaging in or refraining from specific behaviors.

Individuals, particularly younger ones, tend to follow descriptive norms in their immediate responses. This means that their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions are often not solely derived from their own mind; instead, they are influenced, at least in part, by the reactions of those close or their peers. Adhering to

descriptive norms acts as a social autopilot, automatically directing immediate responses toward socially acceptable outcomes. The evidence for this automaticity is found in the fact that perceiving descriptive norms requires minimal cognitive resources, as observing others' behavior serves as a convenient mental shortcut (known as the "bandwagon heuristic") for making decisions.

A considerable amount of content shared on social networks evolves around product consumption (e.g., pictures of users' latest showy purchases, restaurant visits, or vacation trips) (Chen & Marcus, 2012; Mehdizadeh, 2010). Observing other users spending their money on such products or services might thus lead to the perception of what is considered normal (descriptive norms) or at least what is approved of in the social group of other Instagram users (injunctive norms). Since users are constantly exposed to the information shared by others on social networking sites (SNS), they may feel compelled to conform to the lifestyle, product preferences, and beliefs of their network. Notably, people's decisions to purchase certain products appear to be influenced, at least in part, by the power of positive word-of-mouth and the desire to align with normative influences. The large body of research in the field of communication and marketing science supports the assumption that media plays a vital role in shaping people's values and purchase intentions, especially toward material goods (Ger & Belk, 1999; Gorn & Goldberg, 1977). Extant scientific results further indicate that SNS might equally influence their users' intention to consume products to impress others and signal their status (Kamal et al., 2013).
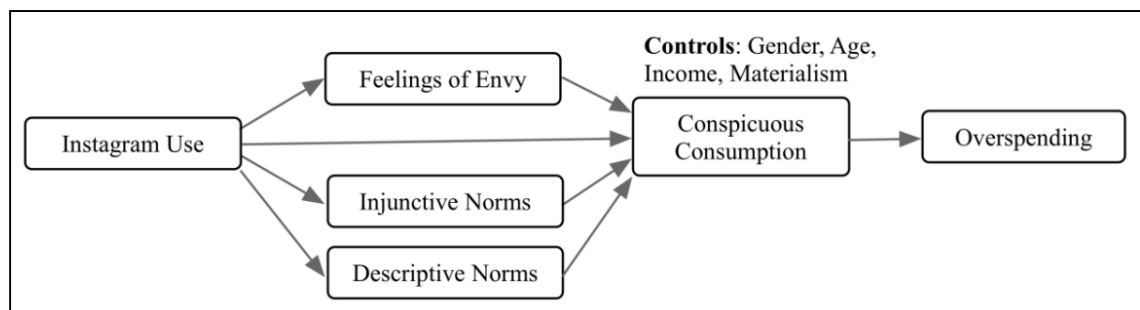
Persuasion knowledge pertains to consumers' understanding of the persuasive tactics employed by marketers to sway them, such as those found in advertising, as well as the underlying persuasive intentions behind such tactics. This knowledge gradually develops over time, and younger consumers progressively learn how to recognize how, when, and why marketers attempt to influence them. It is important to note that possessing persuasion knowledge does not automatically equip adolescents with the ability to critically analyze advertisements. Even if adolescents possess the necessary persuasion knowledge, they may not always be able to recall and apply it when confronted with advertising. Therefore, labels could serve as a means to indicate commercial ads on social media and encourage (young) consumers to activate their persuasion knowledge in

such contexts. However, research investigating the effectiveness of labels in engaging young consumers has produced inconclusive findings, generally suggesting that these labels have a limited impact on activating persuasion knowledge (Krause et al., 2019).

Adolescents on social media will likely not allocate great cognitive resources to processing an ad label (Buijzen et al., 2010). They stay busy sending private messages to friends, posting reactions, liking pictures, playing social games, watching videos, etc. These entertaining activities will distract adolescents from processing an ad label systematically and critically (i.e., low ability). With low ability and motivation, adolescents will likely refrain from using cognitively demanding processes regarding ad labels and will instead engage in heuristic processing (Chaiken, 1980; Zuckerman & Chaiken, 1998).

To elaborate theoretically on norm-based labels, we rely on Sundar's MAIN (modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability) model, which posits that an interactive interface contains various features, tools, functions, or messages that can trigger cognitive heuristics (Sundar, 2008; Sundar et al., 2015). Heuristics are quick mental shortcuts that guide our beliefs, judgments, and decisions. Triggering these heuristics can shape users' assessments, judgments, and content evaluations within the given interface. Influencer marketing effectiveness relies on many heuristic rules which people unconsciously follow, such as "if others like something, then it must be good, so I should do so too" (Cialdini, 2006). As outlined by Sundar, specific bandwagon cues may have potent effects among adolescents, given their constant motivation to fit in with peer groups. For most adolescents, friends and peers are among the most significant sources of influence on their attitudes and behaviors (Brown & Larson, 2009). Adolescents have high sensitivity to heuristic cues related to peer beliefs and behaviors (Brahim et al., 2021).

1.3.1 Influencer Marketing Impact on Consumers' Attitudes and Intentions

One of the reasons influencer marketing is so effective is that social media influencers can be perceived as trustworthy as friends (Swant, 2016), and by driving purchasing decisions and brand awareness, they serve as opinion leaders (Lou & Yan, 2019). Thus, influencers can be perceived as trustworthy and relevant sources of valid recommendations, making them influential in consumers' purchase behavior. Opinion leadership can be achieved since the influencers have established their follower bases by specializing in a specific area (Lou & Yan, 2019), such as fashion, sports, or travel. Thus, if the endorsement corresponds to the influencer's area of expertise, the consumers will likely rely on the influencer's opinions (Lou & Yan, 2019). Naturally, trusting

the recommendations of the influencers can affect the consumers' attitudes or intentions to try out the endorsed brand.

Our attitudes are powerfully but also unwittingly shaped by the people surrounding us, and thus it is impossible to avoid being socially influenced (Levitan & Verhulst, 2015). We naturally strive to obtain social approval from others, be accurate, and maintain a positive self-concept (Izuma, 2013). Respectively matching these three human desires, normative, informative, and aspirational social influence can be leveraged to persuade consumers attitudinally.

Moreover, since considerable support exists for the link between attitude and intention (Ajzen, (1988); Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), intentions are also examined through normative, informational, and aspirational social influence concepts. From the theory of planned behavior, indeed, we know that intentions can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, norms can influence attitudes and intentions (Hynes & Wilson, 2016): for instance, when individuals act according to their personal norms, their sense of self-esteem is raised (Schwartz, 1973). The raised self-esteem can also connect to social identity, which motivates consumers to adopt attitudes and behaviors to be socially accepted.

1.3.1.1 Normative Social Influence on Attitudes and Intentions

Normative social influence is accomplished through compliance or identification (Burnkraut & Cousineau, 1975; Hu, Chen & Davison, 2019). In identification, behavior is adopted from the influencing individual or a group to fulfill a satisfying self-defining relationship with the influencing agent or a group (Kelman, 1961; Burnkraut & Cousineau, 1975). The source of the power of the influencing agent is attractiveness (Kelman, 1961), which fortifies the power of the influencers in social media (Kertz & Ohanian, 1992). Interestingly, different from compliance, in identification, the individual believes in the adopted opinions, and the attitude and behavior are accepted both publicly and privately (Kelman, 1961). Thus, in attitude formation induced by identification, the influencing agent should encourage continuous engagement with the external source to provide social support for the particular attitude.

Moreover, normative social influence can cause social pressure for attitudinal homogeneity (Levitan & Verhulst, 2015), which through public conformity, can lead to private acceptance of attitudes. Social pressure occurs especially due to normative influence that stems from the group's proximity (Levitan & Verhulst, 2015).

Thus, when individuals feel ambivalent and uncomfortable due to their views being inconsistent with others, they are motivated to avoid discomfort by changing their attitudes (Levitan & Verhulst, 2015).

Individual I-intentions stem from attitudes towards the personal act or from perceived interpersonal pressure, such as subjective norms to perform an act (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002). The normative influence thus considers the implied rules that specify how an individual should act, which influences I-intentions to the extent that individuals form intentions in accordance with their attitudes if perceived norms encourage acting accordingly (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002). These I-intentions in social media settings could thus explain intentions to act according to norms formed from perceptions of what social media influencers or community members do in a specific situation. It seems that consumers often use social comparison as a mechanism to understand themselves and their choices better.

Furthermore, conforming to social norms can also be a technique to impression management, that is, the motivation to create a good impression to gain social approval and project a positive self-image to others and to oneself (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Thus, in addition to gaining social approval, a positive self-image can be constructed by following normative guidelines.

Finally, when individuals identify with a group such as a social media community, they are exposed to an ingroup norm. Thus, via group conformity, group attitudes become interchangeable with personal attitudes, norms, and stereotypes, thus affecting behavioral intention (Hogg & Smith, 2007). Thus, normative social influence could partially explain why consumers follow influencers on social media.

In social media, trends come and go quickly, and influencers can communicate attitudes and behaviors to their vast follower bases. For instance, it is even suggested that normative social influence would pressure a consumer to purchase a product to not be treated as antisocial (Hu, Chen & Davidson, 2019). Therefore, consumers influenced normatively by social media tend to select products and services that reflect the tastes of their peers, both voluntarily or involuntarily.

1.3.1.2 Informational Social Influence on Attitudes and Intentions

Similar to normative social influence, informational social influence avoids and alleviates uncertainty (Cohen & Golden, 1972), further signaling individuals' dependence on others when making decisions or evaluations (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Internalization is how informational social influence operates (Hu, Chen & Davison, 2019). It occurs when influence is accepted since the induced behavior matches with an individual's value system. Thus, the adopted behavior is perceived as rewarding and inherently conducive to maximizing the

individual's values (Kelman, 1961). Here, the crucial dimension is the influencing agent's credibility, for instance being perceived as expert in a specific field.

The informational aspect of social media communication is also integral for social media influencers, whose income depends on successful information dissemination that affects the intentions and behaviors of individuals. Thus, it's crucial for the influencer to understand which information is relevant to the consumer and gain enough social media followers to achieve the desired intentional effects among the consumers. When aiming to generate internalization in consumers, evoking high message elaboration via interaction and participation can be beneficial.

1.3.1.3 Aspirational Social Influence on Attitudes and Intentions

On social media, consumers are faced with large amounts of information. They frequently change their self-concepts depending on the context (Firat, Dholakia & Venkatesh, 1995). Thus, consumers no longer seek for stable or consistent identity and thus accept a wider range of influence to support their ongoing identity construction processes, for instance, from social media influencers (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Individuals on social media seem to follow influencers for purposes such as gaining information and seeking behavioral guidance, but also because they like the influencer and want to be inspired by his/her content. Thus, following an influencer on social media can hold elements of all social influence forms, normative, informational, and aspirational, of which the aspirational could evoke motivation to reach one's ideal self through desirable attitudes.

As Argo (2019) explains, the separating factor between value-expressive (aspirational) and utilitarian (normative) social influence is that value-expressive social influence focuses on enhancing and protecting the self-concept rather than satisfying a need to belong. Important in this aspirational process is the concept of possible selves, as in an individual's ideas on what they might, would like, or are afraid to become (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Markus & Nurius, 1986). These realizations of possible selves motivate individuals' behavior to achieve these personal goals and provide the essential link between motivation and self-concept, attitudinally and behaviourally (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Here, aspirations could be evoked by an influencer's characteristics that are part of the individual's future possible selves. These already acquired characteristics of the influencer could also motivate the individuals to change their attitudes due to the desire to realize the possible self. To help identify aspiration formation, Ray (2003) presents the idea of a multi-dimensional 'aspiration window,' which explains that aspirations are born out of power relations that are unequal and direct

individuals to mold themselves in a way that suits their perceived expectations of acceptability (Ray, 2003). Thus, if the influencer fits into one's aspiration window, an individual can accept their aspirational guidance to achieve social acceptability through which one's self-concept can also be developed. When talking about aspirational or value-expressive social influence, an important factor is the identification process, in which an individual associates with positive social presence and naturally dissociates with negative social presence (Argo, 2019). A positive social presence in social media is boosted by enhancing oneself through consumption (Argo, 2019).

Interestingly, aspirational consumers that seek motivation to enhance their ideal selves imitate the purchasing behavior of those others who are part of the reference groups they would like to belong to (Dholakia & Talukdar, 2004). Social media influencers serve as role models and inspirations for their followers. Research has shown that when there is alignment between the influencer and the products they endorse, influencer marketing leads to positive intentions toward those products (Belanche et al., 2021). Thus, the influencers need to find a way to elicit admiration and aspiration, as well as select their product endorsements carefully in order for them to be congruent with consumers. Accordingly, Escalas and Bettman (2017) confirm that individuals can achieve self-motivated goals via celebrity-based brand associations. Thus, influencers hold power in affecting attitudes and behaviors, especially when underlying aspirations or motivations are triggered.

1.3.1.4 Parasocial Interaction & Role Models

Two concepts that relate closely to relationship formation on social media are parasocial relationships and role models. In their study, Escalas and Bettman (2017) discovered that consumers utilize celebrity endorsements to express and shape their self-identity, particularly when they strongly desire social belonging and seek guidance on products that fulfill their affiliation needs. Consequently, consumers with a high need for belonging often develop one-sided parasocial relationships with influencers, reinforcing their connection to the endorsed brands. Interestingly, the influence of influencer endorsements on consumers is mediated through the perception of a parasocial relationship, creating a false sense of friendship or closeness to the influencer and fostering deep psychological and emotional attachments to them. This parasocial relationship naturally leads consumers to trust the influencer's recommendations. Indeed, research has demonstrated that advice or cues from an endorser with whom the consumer has a parasocial relationship are perceived as more persuasive, resulting in greater changes in attitudes and behaviors (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). This finding supports the claim that encouraging interaction and evoking feelings of inspiration or admiration can benefit influencer

marketing. One of the issues determining the effectiveness of influence marketing is how to identify influential personalities who can genuinely and organically engage with the target audience, thus promoting a non-promotional approach to marketing.

Similar to the impacts observed in parasocial relationships, research suggests that superior individuals can act as inspirational role models. These role models evoke inspiration and self-improvement, particularly when their achievements appear attainable. It is crucial to note that superior individuals can elevate the aspirations and self-perceptions of the target group. Consequently, by employing an effective social influence strategy, role models have the potential to inspire consumers and influence their attitudes and behaviors through aspirational social influence. The perception of someone as superior to another is determined by the process of social comparison. Social comparison increases when there are similarities in age, gender, and personality between the self and the other (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997).

Moreover, not only the present abilities but also the possible future selves play a role in guiding aspirations (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Thus superior individuals can be a source of inspiration by demonstrating how future accomplishments can be achieved and by making the successful future selves appear more tangible (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Thus, influencers who can raise feelings of self-efficacy, show attainable success, and evoke feelings of closeness will have a greater effect on the attitudes and behaviors of individuals.

1.3.1.5 Persuasiveness

In social media settings such as Instagram, there is an overabundance of messages from competing actors, influencers, friends, sponsored ads, and other content that matches the individual's interest. Thus, to influence consumers through influencer marketing, the portrayed message or communication has to be persuasive enough to get one's attention. Persuasion can be described as a process that aims to change another person's attitudes, beliefs, or behavior (Izuma, 2013). Here, communicator expertise, argument quality, source credibility, and source attractiveness have been found to be the most important factors when constructing an effective persuasive message (Izuma, 2013). In general, celebrity endorsements increase the attention paid to an ad, and celebrities might be perceived as credible sources if they have expertise in their particular area (Escalas & Bettman, 2017).

Relating to persuasiveness, the elaboration likelihood model is becoming popular in studies concerning social media and persuasive communication. Here, elaboration is the amount of mental processing that takes place, which is determined by motivation, ability, and personal relevance (Teng, Khong & Goh, 2015).

Individuals with low motivation or ability base their attitude judgments on easily available attributes, messages, or situations, such can be the heuristic rule, which leads to agreeing with the majority position. Individuals with high motivation and a high ability to process information, instead, base their attitudes and behaviors on more systematic and thoughtful assessments of relevant information (Wood, 2000). Thus, more stable attitude changes can be evoked by providing relevant and persuasive messages in advertising contexts (Teng, Khong, & Goh, 2015). For instance, learning message content, dissonance-induced reasoning, and generation of cognitive responses are all considered high-elaboration processes (Petty & Wegener, 1998). On the contrary, less persuasive and relevant messages do not evoke elaboration, and only positive and negative cues are used to simply infer the persuasive message, which is less enduring (Teng, Khong & Goh, 2015). Furthermore, the motivation to engage in thoughtful processing is closely connected to self-esteem and self-efficacy. Individuals with high motivation tend to rely more on their evaluations than those with lower motivation unless they are presented with too brief stimuli. In such cases, individuals generally rely on heuristic cues. This is strongly related to the notion that uncertainty can be reduced through attitude change driven by social influence efforts. Consequently, when evaluating the persuasiveness of social media influencer marketing, it is important to encourage systematic processing when individuals seek a desired level of confidence in their judgments. This can be achieved by framing persuasive messages in unexpected ways, increasing the personal relevance of the messages, or when individuals already possess strong, easily accessible attitudes toward the topic and have confidence in their ability to evaluate (Wood, 2000).

Also, what supports the potential of communicating persuasive messages to younger audiences in social media is that the younger audience, in general, is less resistant to attitude change (Visser & Krosnick, 1998). Finally, from the influencer's point of view, seeming confident and secure in one's attitudes and opinions most of the time has a decisive effect on whether the message will persuade an individual to change his/her attitude and behavior.

1.3.1.6 Source Credibility

Source credibility generally is described as the "communicator's positive characteristics which affect the receiver's acceptance of a message," mainly pointing to perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Kertz & Ohanian, 1992, p.13). Here, trustworthiness is explained as the level of confidence the respondent of the message has in the endorser's intentions and abilities to make valid assertions (Hovland et al., 1953). Expertise, in turn, entails the source's knowledge and skills on a specific topic (Lou & Yan, 2019).

The three concepts are deeply intertwined: the perception of one can significantly influence the perception of others. For example, seeing a fit, fashionable, and attractive girl on social media may make us more likely to trust her and consider her an expert in the fashion department. This lies on a cognitive bias called the "halo effect", which occurs when positive impressions of people, brands, and products in one area lead to positive feelings in another area. This effect can be dangerous as individuals on social media can be extremely influenced by the advice of the people they follow. Thus, if people fully trust an influencer just based on her physical appearance without rationally elaborating the information received, then these people can engage in unhealthy habits. On social media, indeed, it is difficult to distinguish real from fake experts. There is an overabundance of information, and it is not straightforward to understand whom to trust. Influencers present themselves as experts in some field to gain followers, so rather than trust their words, people need to check the information received with other sources.

Individuals are inevitably influenced by others; thus, it's smart to purposely choose the right influences. Perceived expertise, in particular, has been found to strongly impact purchase behavior (Ohanian, 1990). For instance, the influencer's content's informational value and perceived expertise can positively affect their followers' trust and purchase intention. Moreover, an endorser with source credibility can encourage consumers to rely on the influencer's expertise when making quick purchase decisions rather than engaging in high elaboration processes (Kertz & Ohanian, 1992). This notion can be beneficial, especially when introducing new and low-involvement brands to customers.

Another reason for seeking source credibility is that consumers participate in s-commerce to enhance their shopping performance (Hu, Chen & Davison, 2019): consumers, indeed, are usually susceptible to information sources with high credibility in the shopping context. A social media influencer can thus play an integral role s-commerce by providing useful shopping knowledge through source credibility and by providing an interactive platform for consumers to seek social support from each other (Dahl, 2021).

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' SOCIAL INFLUENCE

INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE
NORMATIVE SOCIAL INFLUENCE
ASPIRATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE

PERSUASIVENESS

SOURCE CREDIBILITY

ATTITUDES TOWARD FASHION CONSUMPTION

PURCHASE INTENTIONS

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS & ROLE MODELS
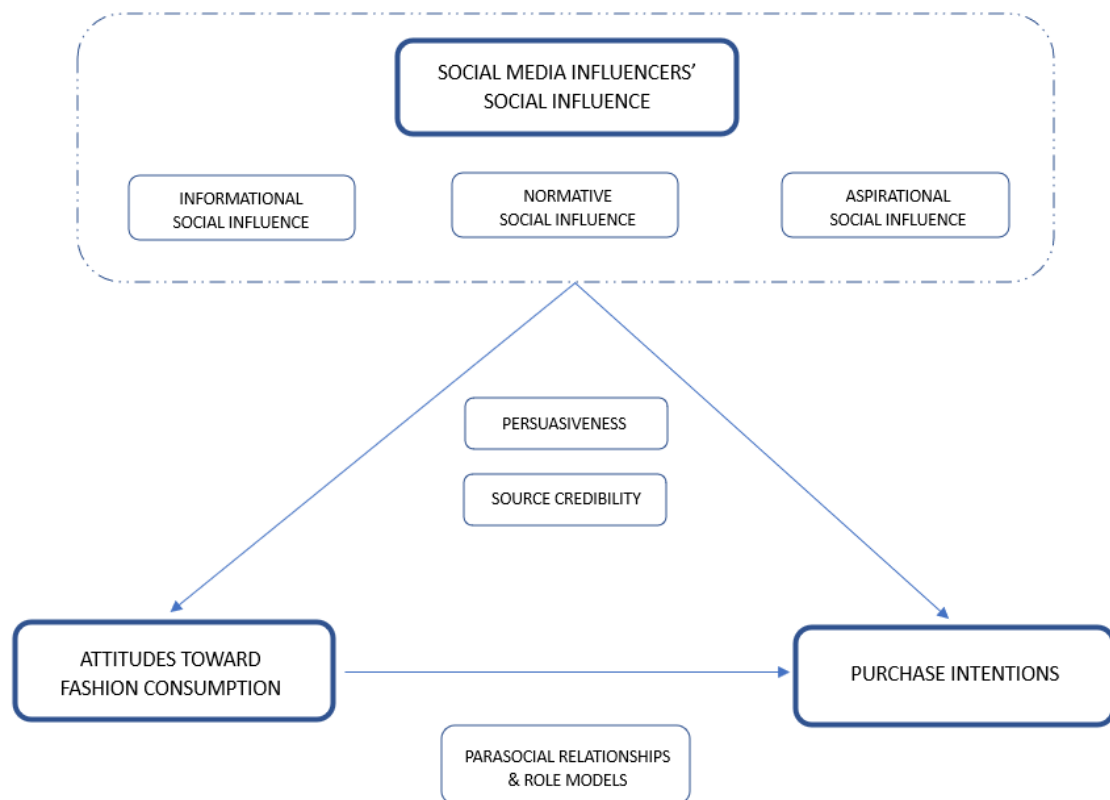
1.3.2 Fashion FOMO Fuelling Fast Fashion

Fast Fashion retailers' knowledge of their target audience is what makes them so successful. They know exactly who they are selling their products to, what these people want to see or hear, and how to communicate with them effectively. Fast-fashion retailers discovered that fear is one of the most powerful feelings that leads people into action. By massively increasing the number of fashion (micro-)seasons, launching limited-edition series, and, more importantly, being advertised by influencers that sponsor the newest trends every week, fast-fashion retailers have built serious FOMO between consumers.

Fashion FOMO, or fear of missing out, is the anxious translates as the exhausting need to keep up with the ever-changing fashion trends. The role played by social media influencers is very much significant. As we already stated, consumers see social media influencers as role models. Consumers see them wearing new clothes and accessories every day; every influencer has a brand-new outfit for every occasion or event. Algorithms behind social media deliberately send to people who are interested in the latest trends in fashion

and, in many cases, most inclined to compulsive buying, "hauls" or "get ready with me" videos in which influencers show daily new items and talk about the "must have" trends of the week. Consumers who see these influencers as aspirational and role models will likely develop the fear of being left out of the trend, fashion, and society.

Many of today's trends have a circular and brief life cycle. As soon as a new trend kicks off on social media, consumers will see that item everywhere, from the brand's and influencers' photos, videos and stories. Whenever a consumer scrolls his/her feed on Instagram or Tik Tok, he/she will see the trend multiple times worn by models and influencers. Influencers will talk about how flattering and perfect for different occasions is the piece and how they cannot live without it now. At this point, other people in the environment of the consumer in question may buy the item. Thus the consumer, even if he surprisingly managed to resist until now to buy the item, will likely fall into buying it. By continuously seeing the item on social media, both from influencers and friends, he/she will likely end up thinking that if he/she does not get it, he/she will be the only one not to have it, and, thus, the only one left out.

A significant part of this process lies on human cognitive biases that deeply affect decision-making. Worth-mentioning is the bandwagon effect, as the tendency to behave in a certain way simply because others are doing so. In fashion marketing, we talk about bandwagon consumption, which is the tendency to buy the same clothes others wear. Much of the bandwagon effect is explained by the concept of group membership. In order to build their social self, people behave to fit in their desired reference group or differentiate themselves from undesired reference groups.

Within the context of fashion consumption, to fit in a specific social circle, individuals purchase items that are considered fashionable from the reference group. (Irfan et al., 2020). The bandwagon effect plays an even more significant role in the success of fast fashion on social media: regardless of one's personal style, by seeing stories, photos, and videos advertising the products, as well as reviews of the latter, all over social media, individuals are very much likely to be influenced in buying the product. This effect is even more substantial when the people sponsoring the product are seen as trustworthy experts in the field, such as fashion influencers. Furthermore, fast-fashion brands infuse time pressures on consumers to intensify this feeling of FOMO. Here, the tools are various: a brand could offer occasional sales, launch limited-edition series, or even write the number of pieces of a particular item still in stock, such as "4 left!". Also, influencers working for the brand increase FOMO between consumers through statements such as "Run to X store and get it now because it will soon be out of stock."

CHAPTER 2

2.1 FAST FASHION TREND

Fast fashion is characterized by a quick response (short production and distribution lead times that enable close matching of supply with uncertain demand) and enhanced design (highly fashionable product design). Fast fashion brands are carefully monitoring consumer and industry tastes for unexpected fads and reducing design lead times, using "trend spotters" and designers to gather instant market information, paying close attention to seasonal fashion shows, and frequently changing product assortment (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). In the meantime, some fast fashion brands are characterized by low prices, long-lasting range rotation, and accessible and trendy products that copy and replicate the most up-to-date luxury fashion brands' designs (Amatulli et al., 2016).

In the context of fast fashion, quick response to the market trend and demand underpins the strategies adopted by fast-fashion brands such as Zara and H&M. As Cachon and Swinney (2010) highlight, fast-fashion brands aim to match supply and demand better and influence consumer purchasing behavior by reducing the frequency and severity of season-ending clearance sales. On the other hand, the enhanced fast-fashion design gives customers a trendier product that they value more, making them less willing to risk waiting for a sale if there is any chance the item will stick out. Hence, "whereas quick response decreases the expected future utility of waiting for a price reduction, enhanced design increases the immediate utility of buying the product at the full price" (Cachon & Swinney, 2011, p. 779).

In many societies, the craving for status is a vital driving power for acquiring luxury products (Dreze & Nunes, 2009). In the meantime, consumers are looking for a variety and continuously changing assortments and following the fashion trends by constantly renewing their wardrobes (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010), thus triggering their demand for a variety of items at affordable prices (Gabrielli et al., 2013). In today's post-modern era, shopping has also emerged as a social and leisure activity, reducing the number of cognitively planned purchases, thus making impulsive buying a common practice and a socially acceptable phenomenon in developed and developing economies (Dhurup, 2014).

2.1.1 Brand Addiction for Fast Fashion: Motivators

2.1.1.1 Continuous update of fashion-led items

Due to the shortened fashion cycle and rapid changes in trends, consumers' fashion calendar is rapidly becoming outdated. In the past, updating one's fashion wardrobe once per season was sufficient. However, nowadays, this approach no longer suffices. As a result, consumers are increasingly turning to fast fashion brands. These brands offer a constantly changing assortment of items that are regularly refreshed. The weekly launched collections, featuring novel colors, fabrics, styles, and frequent merchandise rotation, constantly cater to consumers' desire to feel fashionable and up-to-date.

Fast fashion brands have revolutionized individuals' consumption patterns. By making new designs publicly available every two to four weeks, these brands enable and drive individuals to get the trendiest items all year long without waiting for the new season's collection to be delivered to stores. This quick turnaround time aligns with consumers' insistent need for novelty, which is influenced by celebrity culture, social media, and high fashion. The fast pace at which fashion trends change creates a constant fear among consumers of being left out and no longer considered fashionable. However, fast fashion brands further increase this fear. Due to their fast production, these brands manage to launch products almost in parallel with upcoming catwalk trends. Consumers have access to runway-inspired trends, only available for a limited time. Trends' limited-time availability creates an irresistible temptation leading consumers to visit fast fashion stores more frequently and make larger purchases. The combination of constantly changing collections, trend synchronization, and limited-time availability thus creates a strong appeal for consumers, resulting in increased engagement and sales. Thus, as fast fashion brands offer the most popular trends combining the latest designs that celebrities wear or designers launch (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006), individuals become more obsessed with these brands. Accordingly, they will likely strongly desire to continuously visit the brands' stores or websites and repeatedly buy.

2.1.1.2 Time and Price/Quality Perceived Value

Brands' perceived values act as a major motivator for respondents' engagement in addictive behavior toward fast-fashion brands (Mrad et al., 2020). Individuals believe that fast fashion brands provide them with a good monetary value of products whereby the displayed prices are reasonable compared to other fashion brands available in the market. Fast fashion allows them to keep pace with the latest fashion trends and most exciting designs they could not afford to buy from luxury brands. The short-lived nature of fast fashion contributes to a higher perceived value of fast-fashion brands, tempting individuals to reveal hoarding behaviors.

Fast fashion brands also capitalize on the value of time, effort, and search involved when shopping. Fast fashion brands, indeed, are present almost everywhere, with their selection of the best cities and shopping malls in each country, other than the online websites, which are accessible from all over the world. Whatever item someone is looking for, from the most casual to the most elegant, individuals know that by going to Zara's store or website, they can find everything. There will be no need to lose time and go to another store. Additionally, due to the updated fashion lifecycle, individuals may develop an irresistible desire to obtain a variety of items driving them to become highly dependent on the brand and to rely on it for various occasions. As such, individuals' strong emotional bonds with fast fashion brands revolve around the concepts of convenience, accessibility, and affordability.

2.1.2 Brand Addiction for Fast Fashion: Consequences

2.1.2.1 Financial Management

As fashion trends continually evolve, consumers feel the need to perpetually renew their wardrobes. To satisfy their addiction to some of these brands, consumers often cannot control themselves from frequently visiting their beloved brands' physical and online stores. In addition, as fast fashion brands frequently launch new collections, brand addicts start to experience fear of missing out, therefore tempting them to purchase much more.

The rationale for being obsessed with fast fashion is that replenishing a person's wardrobe is generally cheap, motivating them to purchase continuously. As a result, people find themselves purchasing greater quantities of products and spending larger sums of money. The immediate satisfaction of acquiring numerous fashionable and trendy items gratifies consumers each time they make a purchase. Simultaneously, the affordable prices

of these items alleviate the guilt associated with spending substantial amounts of money. In the case of fast-fashion brand addiction, individuals tend to prioritize quantity over quality (Mrad et al., 2020).

2.1.2.2 Mental Issues

Studies show that compulsive buying is often associated with feelings of anxiety, depression, and irritation. Many people use shopping as a coping mechanism to mask difficult emotions like stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. However, shopping provides only temporary relief from their struggles. It gives them just an instant feeling of gratification, which is quickly replaced by an overwhelming sense of guilt. People who are unable to control their shopping habits often engage in a negative loop which inevitably leaves them with growing stress. Compulsive buying often leads to financial stress, which in turn increases anxiety and mood disorders while decreasing self-confidence. This overwhelming mental state is, in turn, dealt with by buying more and more unneeded products. In this way, people get stuck in a self-damaging loop which can cause severe mental disorders along with financial debt (Black, 2007).

2.2 THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF FASHION

The fashion industry represents an essential part of our economy, with a value of more than 2.5 trillion $USD and employing over 75 million people worldwide (Geneva Environment Network, 2023). While the fashion sector is booming, increasing attention has been brought to the impressive range of adverse environmental impacts that the industry is responsible for.

- The fashion industry is responsible for 8-10% of humanity's carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined (UNEP, 2018). If the fashion sector continues on its current trajectory, that share of the carbon budget could jump to 26% by 2050 (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017).
- Textile production is estimated to be responsible for about 20% of global clean water pollution from dyeing and finishing products. 500,000 tons of microfibers are released into the ocean each year from washing clothes, the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017).

- 93 billion cubic meters of water, enough to meet the needs of five million people, is used by the fashion industry annually (UNCTAD, 2020).
- Since 1996, the amount of clothes bought in the EU per person has increased by 40% following a sharp fall in prices, which has reduced the life span of clothing. Europeans use nearly 26 kilos of textiles and discard about 11 kilos of them every year. 87% of used clothes are incinerated or landfilled (Geneva Environment Network, 2023).

Besides its impact on the environment, fast fashion also comes with a significant toll on human well-being: textile workers, primarily women in developing countries, are often paid derisory wages and forced to work long hours in appalling conditions (UNEP, 2018; WRI, 2019). In many places, these conditions infringe on human rights (Human Rights Watch). The use of chemicals in clothes production also raises serious health concerns, both for the workers in the industry and consumers.

The environmental and social cost of the fashion industry forces us to rethink fast fashion and stresses the need for more sustainable business models and practices (Geneva Environment Network, 2023). In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition effectively captures the fundamental concept underlying the significance of sustainability. Nonetheless, it lacks precision and allows for broad interpretation (Mukendi et al., 2020). In the realm of sustainable fashion, establishing a singular definition is challenging due to the absence of an industry standard. Still, sustainable fashion encompasses numerous terms, including organic, green, eco, sustainable, recycled, slow, and upcycled (Cervellon et al., 2012). Each of these terms seeks to separate a variety of detected mistakes in the fashion industry, such as animal cruelty, behavior damaging the environment, and the abuse of workers.

Regardless of the specific definition of sustainable fashion we adopt, it is crucial for both producers and consumers to actively embrace the path toward change. Real progress toward a more promising future will be achieved only if both parties make a concerted effort to transform their current practices and behaviors. Specifically in the context of fashion, Haugestad, in his definition of sustainable consumption, highlights the critical areas of fashion consumption with a focus on end users: "Our consumption pattern is sustainable if all world citizens can use the same amount of basic natural and environmental resources per capita as you do without undermining the basis for future generations to maintain or improve their quality of life." He rightfully stresses how consumers' unsustainable practices warrant attention, particularly overconsumption and disposal practices of clothing (McNeill, 2019).

Authorities worldwide have already taken some steps to tackle the problem: launched at the fourth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-4), the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion is seeking to halt the

environmentally and socially destructive practices of fashion (Geneva Environment Network, 2023). Moreover, in 2021 at COP24 it was launched the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Change. It serves as a roadmap to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 within the textile, clothing, and fashion industries. Taking a closer look at the European Union, in February 2021, the Parliament adopted a resolution on the new circular economy action plan demanding additional measures to achieve a carbon-neutral, environmentally sustainable, toxic-free, and fully circular economy by 2050, including tighter recycling rules and binding targets for materials use and consumption by 2030. Additionally, as part of the circular economy action plan, the European Commission presented in March 2022 a new strategy to make textiles more durable, repairable, reusable, and recyclable, tackle fast fashion, and stimulate innovation within the sector (European Parliament, 2022).
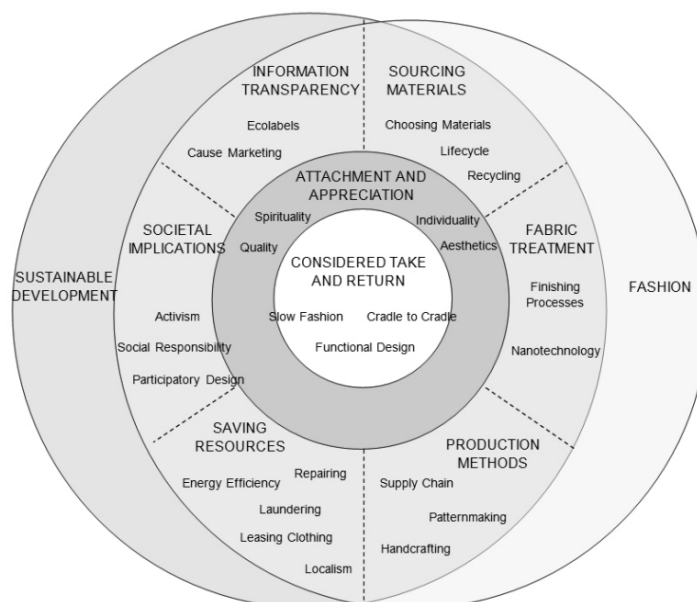
Fig. 1. Model of Sustainable Fashion Design

(Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013, p.14)

2.2.1 Sustainability issues with influencer marketing

On social media, more and more fashion influencers are addressing the problem of sustainability. Influencers are giving advice on how to consume sustainably: they are sponsoring online digital platforms where people can buy, sell and exchange second-hand clothes, such as Vinted or Poshmark. Furthermore, some of them bring light on some of the hard truths regarding the fashion industry's environmental impact to spread awareness among their followers. They also suggest some "sustainable brands" with which they often collaborate. The

problem of promoting these so-called "sustainable brands" arises from the fact that there are no clear standards on whether a brand can classify as sustainable; thus, brands can claim to be sustainable even when they consistently exploit workers or pollute the environment.

Sustainability has now become a trend on social media, and brands are trying to capitalize on it. That is why many brands are now guilty of greenwashing. Greenwashing is using generic, sustainably-minded verbiage in brand advertising to create an ethical or sustainable facade. Greenwashing is an increasing form of manipulation, especially in influencer-based advertising (Taylor, 2021). Both influencers and consumers often do not question sustainability and ethics when presented with them. Influencers, specifically, might take an approach from a large brand as a form of flattery, pushing them to overlook blatant greenwashing. Consequently, consumers, if they want to buy consciously and ethically, should always double-check if the brand presented is really sustainable in its production and distribution processes or if it is only a farce.

In addition to the intentional or accidental promotion of non-sustainable products, most "sustainable influencers" ultimately make their livings off the promotion of consumerism, which in practice is not sustainable. The excessive consumption of clothing has led to the current state of waste in the fashion industry: exponential clothing waste and further mistreatment of garment makers globally due to the ever-accelerated trend cycle for fashion. Even if a garment or product is produced sustainably and ethically, it is still possible to over-consume. The overconsumption of ethical goods does not contribute to a more sustainable future, and the only way for a "slow" fashion future to exist is to slow down all aspects of production, which also includes the consumption of clothing goods (the rate at which we purchase clothing). Still, many sustainable influencers perpetuate the idea that individuals must buy more clothing or items to achieve a fashionable lifestyle worth sharing.

The fault of this consumerist perspective can partly be attributed to the excessive gifts that brands send to social media influencers. Now videos like "Hauls" or "Unboxing" are all over Tik Tok and Instagram. Every week influencers receive lots of packages, mostly from cosmetic and fashion brands. This practice has a double negative effect. On the one hand, consumers are constantly shown new desirable products, which leads them to overconsume; on the other hand, most of these gifts end up being wasted since influencers do not have time to start using one product that they have already received a new one. When a brand sends a gift to an influencer, it also needs to make a fancy package to increase the influencer's willingness to make an unboxing video and share it with its followers. Thus, also packaging ends up having a significant impact on the environment. Brands usually have broadcast lists of influencers to which they send gifts. Usually, these brands do not implement a very refined process in selecting which influencers to add to the broadcast lists. Consequently, brands often send gifts also to influencers that either are not interested in the brand and will not advertise its

products, or are not a good match for the brand in terms of value they embrace and follower base. This results in a lose-lose for both the environment and the brand. The environment suffers from tons of wasted items and packages, as well as from the transportation of the latter. Simultaneously, brands lose time and money for ineffective, sometimes even harmful, advertising. If an influencer has a follower base that does not correspond to the target that a brand wants to reach, being advertised by that influencer will not bring, most of the time, any new customer to the brand, nor will it increase its image and desirability. Moreover, if the gifted influencer does not reflect the brand's values and characteristics, its image could be damaged by the influencer's advertisement. Thus, by implementing a more thorough and refined selection process that focuses on fewer, yet more effective, influencers, a brand could achieve better marketing results, and, at the same time, the environment would benefit from both fewer products being wasted and a lower lever of pollution in the air. However, the role played by influencers in attaining a more sustainable future could be much more impactful than the one played by brands. If environmentally-conscious influencers acted upon their leverage over followers in a way that truly supports sustainability practices, they could shift the culture from consumeristic to sustainable. Influencers, indeed, could place their power behind legislation that would promote a more sustainable and ethical garment industry rather than continue to promote the ongoing cycle of overconsumption, either advertising ethical companies or not. They could gradually remodel the values of honor and shame around fashion consumption. What is now socially considered fashionable and desirable, such as buying new clothes every day and throwing them away after having used them once, only to make place for something new, should turn into a motive for shame. At the same time, a new concept of fashion based on recycling, reinventing existing clothes, and long-term quality should be created and sponsored on social media by influencers. By changing both the descriptive and the injunctive norms around fashion consumption, and, thus, individuals' expectations of what is accepted, or even honored, by society, individuals' behavior will inevitably change.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION

Virginia Woolf's profound assertion challenges conventional notions of clothing as mere fabric. She contends that garments possess intrinsic significance beyond their utilitarian purpose of providing warmth. According to Woolf, clothes wield the power to reshape our perception of the world and dictate how the world perceives us. In her view, clothes assert control over us, molding our physical appearance and shaping the essence of our hearts, minds, and communication. This thought-provoking concept disrupts conventional understandings and is a captivating catalyst for in-depth exploration.

3.1.1 Self, Self-concept, and Self-identity

The self has three different components (Banister & Hogg, 2007). The actual or current self is how an individual perceives himself, the ideal self represents the qualities the individual would like to have but falls short of, and the social self is the individual's perception of how others see him. All three components of the self can be described as a symbolic project actively constructed by the individual from available symbolic materials.

The self-concept, instead, is conceived as the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Olsen & Chon, 1991). Given the different layers of the self, the self-concept is dynamic and changes according to social surroundings and situations functioning as incentives for future behavior (Banister & Hogg, 2007).

Self-identity, instead, is the subjective representation an individual has of himself involving individual, relational, and group levels (Vignoles et al., 2006; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). Identity is constructed through a set of knowledge about the world and active participation in the social world (Chryssochoou, 2003).

3.1.2 Identity Construction Through Consumption

Consumption is a means of searching for self-identity. People make judgments of others based on their possessions and use possessions to express their identity in terms of who they are or would like to be (Banister & Hogg, 2007). By consuming the product or brand and its symbolic social qualities, consumers can move closer to the ideal self (Banister & Hogg, 2007; Elliott, 1997).

Consumption has a two-fold nature in identity expression. Products can be seen as the 'outer skin' of identity, which consumers attain to express the 'inner self' (Dittmar, 2008).

Identity construction is a continuous process, subject to change, reconstruction, and fragmentation (Carrieri et al., 2008). The concept of identity is a project by individuals that develops continuously, based on an attempt to create a rational self, even though the self is fragmented, diversified, and based on other constructs (Shankar et al., 2009). Within this perspective, the consumer market is considered to be the "source of symbolic resources through which people construct their identity narratives" (Zanette et al., 2013, p. 540). The act of consuming becomes one of the most important human activities, not only for the economy but also for the creation of meaning by individuals, their recognition, and the construction of their identity and culture. Culture, consumption, and social relations are considered engines for individuals' identity construction, as it is through social interactions that the consumer displays objects of consumption, in an extension of the self (Belk, 1988), in order to affirm an identity project that is subject to other people's judgment (Zanette et al., 2013).

3.2 SOCIAL IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION

3.2.1 Social Identity and Self-categorisation Theory

The social self is part of an individual's self-concept. Individuals hold various social identities that become active in distinct social contexts. Social identity can become more important than personal identity and refers to the interaction between the individual and the in-groups and out-groups. The in-group is formed through a process of social comparison, where individuals with similar characteristics as self are in the same group. Those who are not characterised similar are perceived as the out-group. (Stets & Burke, 2000; Escalas & Bettman, 2005.) Social identity theory posits that individuals attain a sense of positive social identity by affiliating themselves with esteemed social groups and perceiving themselves as distinct from neglected groups. Consequently, when striving to establish a positive social identity, individuals tend to evaluate in-groups more favorably than out-groups, particularly concerning products, services, and brands associated with the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Self-categorization theory, instead, elucidates how individuals identify their group affiliations and establish social boundaries between different groups. This theory delves into how individuals categorize themselves as belonging or not to specific groups. Each individual possesses a distinctive assortment of social categories, resulting in a unique set of social identities that constitute their self-concept (Stets & Burke, 2000). Furthermore, not all individuals are granted direct entry into particular groups due to the social elements embedded in social categories, including cultural influences, social networks, and broader societal factors (Kihlstrom, 1992). Consequently, consumers with limited access to desired in-groups often resort to purchasing products to deceive themselves into feeling a sense of belonging to those desired groups.

3.2.2 Social Identity Construction through Fashion Consumption

Fashion consumption plays a pivotal role in the construction of social identity. Clothing serves as a powerful means of expression, conveying various aspects of identity such as ethnicity, religious beliefs, age, education, and social class. Through clothing styles, one can make assumptions about a person's identity, as it acts as a tool of "identification" that establishes symbolic boundaries between individuals. Fashion, as a domain, utilizes clothing to create and unveil cultural and social identities. Personal identity entails a clear and consistent image of an individual's goals, characteristics, and capabilities, while social identity revolves around a sense of belonging to a group. Social Identity Theory posits that people categorize themselves and others into social categories based on factors like organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort. Psychodynamically, according to Freud, the process of identification begins when individuals incorporate aspects of others into their own identity (Akdemir, 2008). From sociological and psychological perspectives, fashion encompasses various forms of identity expression.

Fashion is also a form of non-verbal communication. The dressed body communicates our personal and social identities (Barnard, 2002). It expresses our thoughts, feelings, desires, and group membership (Hebdige, 1981). Clothing and fashion carry some vestimentary codes. Depending on the social group psychology, individuals wear special garments that all the group members also wear. Wearing the same fashion items strengthens group membership. "The garment is always involved in a social context, and it puts the individual's position in the face of the group" (Waquet & Laporte, 2011). Inclusion, opposition, incompatibility, disdain, or rejection can find a place through clothing.

Clothes refer to a lifestyle, and those who share the same lifestyle want to see and identify with each other to look like the custodian of these symbols. Thorstein Veblen proposes that conspicuous consumers seeks to impress people with possessions to increase one's standing in society and, consequently, maintain or improve one's social status (CFI, 2022). According to Santos and Cypriano (2014, p. 7), goods "are not only the tentatively established and temporarily stabilized ways of establishing social signs and meanings but also the materialized and tangible forms of categories of social classification." Douglas and Isherwood (2002) concur with this perspective, adding that possessions signifying wealth are not inherently necessary, but rather serve to sustain social relationships.

Since its inception, according to McCracken (2003), fashion has been responsible for reshaping itself as an expression of new identities and lifestyles, as traditional identities lost strength following globalization. If culture and identity were once limited to geographic territories, globalization and the advent of the Internet have allowed them to gain new meanings grounded in information and consumption. For Hall (2006, p. 12), "the subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented, composed, not of a single, but of several identities." The findings suggest that identities are mutable and subject to change, depending on the context. Barbosa and Campbell (2006) argue that the multiplicity of choices has made tastes and desires mutable, requiring identities to be reinforced or confirmed.

3.2.3 Consumer Socialisation Agents

As Social Learning Theory suggests (Bandura, 1977), the leading consumer socialization agents are family, friends and peers, and mass media. For this study, it is critical to analyze the influential force of mass media. These media serve as a benchmark for consumers to articulate and disseminate their social and personal identities (Muzzatti, 2007). Exposure to media has also been demonstrated to significantly influence consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Siegel et al., 2001).

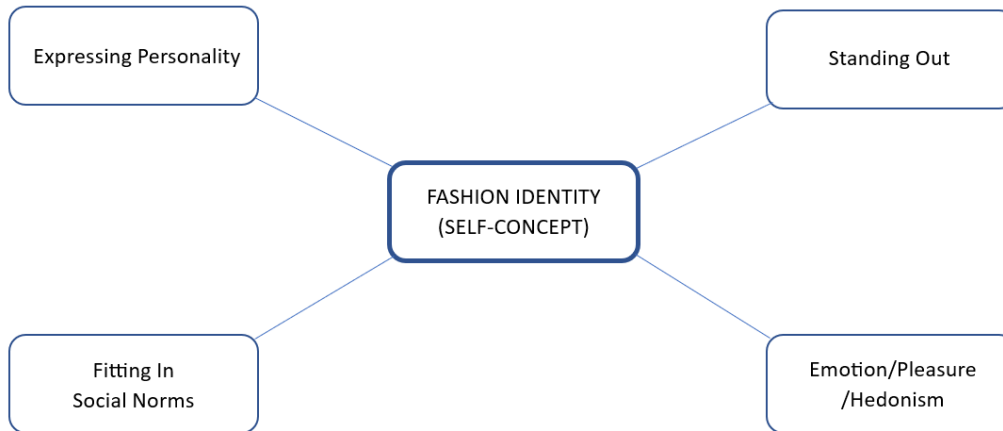## 3.2.4 Social Media Influencers and Conspicuous Consumption

The subjects' participation in public networks increases their desire for consumption, according to the sharing and consumption of images on online social networks (Kozinets et al., 2016). By watching photos and videos

of influencers showing off new clothes and accessories, individuals feel the instant impulse to buy them. This happens especially when the influencer is someone the individual relates to and admires. People are led to buy items that, if just seen in the store, they wouldn't normally buy. If they see the item worn by an influencer, that item acquires a whole different meaning. It becomes the means which brings the individual's identity closer to the admired influencer, a way to define and enhance his/her social self up to the desired ideal.

Conspicuous consumption is favored by the influencers' common practice of avoiding posting pictures wearing the same piece of clothing more than once. For them, in fact, it is essential to be seen as someone who follows fashion trends and has enough goods to show on social media. This behavior has contributed to forming a social norm in favor of overconsumption. Individuals feel that society expects them not to wear and post the same outfit twice. They tend to feel uncomfortable if they need to reuse an item or a complete outfit for a new occasion. They feel their social identity is diminished. They often think that other people will remember that they used the same outfit twice and think they do not have enough money to buy new clothes, they are not up-to-trend, or they have no creativity and taste in the fashion department.

The relationship between conspicuous consumption and social interactions, present on social networks, results in the need to display and, consequently, impress people with one's possessions. The simple act of identifying the preferences of different people can generate a sense of belonging in social groups based on the characteristics and lifestyles with which one identifies. These characteristics are expressions of identity construction resulting from social interactions and processes for identifying and constructing meanings in the online environment through consumption. As stated before, identities are not static or immutable but assume a fluid and fragmented character. They are supported by the consumption of fashion, which accompanies the construction of identity in the sense of expression and language, capable of communicating and producing social relations.

Currently, people using social networks want their posts to display their daily lives, possessions, and travels, thus demonstrating their purchasing power. To this end, people follow profiles with which they identify themselves and to whom they hope to become more alike; these profiles are likely to have a significant impact on individuals' consumption choices. Consumption is, therefore, a determining factor for identity construction. In the context of Instagram, for example, conspicuous consumption reveals this construction, which is influenced by people who have excessive possessions or at least show themselves as having them (Dantas & Abreu, 2020).

Expressing Personality • Standing Out • FASHION IDENTITY (SELF-CONCEPT) • Fitting In Social Norms • Emotion/Pleasure /Hedonism

CHAPTER 4

4.1 RESEARCH STUDY

4.1.1 Introduction

4.1.1.1 Objectives of the Research

The research aims to deeply explore the relationship between fashion influencers and young adults on social media; specifically, the primary aim is to understand what young adults seek when following a fashion influencer and how much fashion influencers' online content impacts young adults' fashion consumption patterns. Furthermore, the research wants to investigate social norms around fashion, which are currently fuelling fast fashion. By analyzing the gathered data, valuable insights can be obtained regarding the extent to which this impact can drive young people to adopt more conscious and sustainable consumption patterns in the future. To address this inquiry, the study also considers the willingness of young individuals to embrace

change. An empirical survey has been conducted as part of this study, with particular emphasis on Instagram and TikTok, recognized as highly influential platforms for fashion influencer marketing.

4.1.1.2 Research Questions

The survey is divided into six blocks. In the first block, general questions such as gender and age are asked. Then, the second block analyzes the number of influencers participants follow on Instagram and Tiktok and how many influencers share fashion content and engage in paid collaborations with fashion brands.

The third block explores the relationship between fashion influencers and participants on multiple fronts: what are the influencers' characteristics that most lead participants to trust them in the fashion department, whether participants look for influencers who have a similar style to their own or who have a style they aspire to have. This block also investigates if envy plays a role in the relationship between influencers and participants.

Then, the fourth block examines the impact of social media influencers on young people's online and in-store fashion consumption patterns. Within this segment, an assessment is conducted to determine whether diverse motives underlying participants' interest in following fashion influencers can result in varying degrees of influence on their fashion consumption patterns.

The fifth block gives insight into the current social norms around fashion and the motives driving young adults towards fashion consumption.

Finally, the sixth block explores if participants feel the fashion industry needs to change towards a more sustainable and ethical future. This block explores whether there exists a predilection for personalized fashion items and the profound motive that pushes people to shop and buy new clothes.

The data collected, specifically from this final section, will be utilized to ascertain the effectiveness of the proposed implementation outlined in the study. The objective is to assess whether leveraging the impact of social media influencers on young adults can successfully transform current fashion overconsumption patterns. Suppose social media influencers' and social norms' impact on young adults' fashion consumption is found to be significant. In that case, society should take advantage of it to turn the fashion industry into a more sustainable and ethical market.

This study could be life-changing: by understanding the dynamics behind social media influencers, brands, and consumers, all three could be nudged to favor an evolution of the fashion industry.

Each block from 3 to 6 answers to different key research questions:

Block 3: Aspirational Influence and Parasocial Relationships

Q1) How do young adults perceive their relationships with social media influencers, and to what extent do these relationships influence their fashion consumption patterns?

Q2) What factors contribute to young adults' trust in social media influencers, and how does this trust impact their fashion consumption patterns?

Q3) Do young adults experience envy toward social media influencers? Do they desire a lifestyle similar to social media influencers? How does this influence their fashion consumption patterns?

Block 4: Impact of Social Media Influencers on Fashion Overconsumption

Q4) To what extent do social media influencers impact online fashion overconsumption among their followers?

Q5) To what extent do social media influencers impact in-store fashion overconsumption among their followers?

Q6) Are young adults, who follow fashion influencers solely for entertainment purposes, equally influenced in their fashion consumption patterns compared to those who follow fashion influencers for inspiration or to stay updated with the latest trends?

Block 5: Fashion Social Norms

Q7) Is there a social norm that discourages people not to wear the same clothes more than once?

Q8) What is the need people aim to satisfy by overconsuming?

Q9) How many times should a person go shopping in a year from young adults' perspective?

Q10) Are young adults satisfied with their consumption patterns?

Block 6: Is there a chance for a real change?

Q11) Do young adults sense the need for a change in fashion consumption patterns toward a more sustainable future?

Q12) Do young adults like personalized items?

Q13) Are clothes the means through which young adults express themselves and stand out from the crowd, or the means through which they fit in with their peers and society?

4.1.1.3 Importance of the Study

This research study is of utmost importance as it shines a spotlight on the profound impact of social media influencers on the fashion consumption patterns of young individuals. By evaluating the potential for a sustainable and ethical future within the fashion industry, this study aims to contribute to a transformative shift in the way fashion is perceived and consumed. With influencer marketing being a relatively new phenomenon, there is a notable dearth of research specific to this field. The existing literature primarily focuses on the correlation between influencers, attitudes, and purchase intentions, leaving significant gaps in understanding the broader implications of their influence.

By delving deep into the dynamics of aspirational influence, trust, envy, and social norms, this study seeks to uncover the intricate mechanisms that shape fashion consumption patterns. It recognizes the crucial role of influencers in inspiring and motivating young adults while also considering the societal and cultural context that drives their choices. The findings of this study have far-reaching implications for brands, policymakers, and stakeholders within the fashion industry. They provide invaluable insights into designing effective interventions that promote sustainable and ethical fashion consumption patterns, helping to steer the industry toward a responsible and conscious future.

It is through understanding the dynamics between social media influencers, brands, and consumers that meaningful change can be achieved. This research study not only aims to bridge the existing knowledge gaps but also strives to catalyze a fundamental shift in the fashion industry. By leveraging the power of influencers, addressing prevailing social norms, and aligning with the aspirations and values of young adults, this study has the potential to spark a transformative movement toward a more sustainable and ethical fashion market. With its emphasis on positive change and the creation of a better future, this research study holds immense significance for shaping the fashion industry in the years to come.

4.1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Similarity-attraction Model (SAM):

Shared attitudes, interests, and opinions are predictive of frequent interactions and affiliations between two parties in a dyadic relationship (Byrne et al., 1967). In this context, the theory suggests that followers are attracted to influencers whom they perceive as similar to themselves.

Visual-Congruence-induced Social Influence (VCSI):

VCSI is an extension of SAM from textual to visual content. It suggests that visual content congruence increases engagement and affiliation. High engagement, which influencers garner from their followers through creating visual congruence, facilitates followers' brand engagement.

Theory of Reasoned Action (**TRA**):

TRA helps to understand which factors drive consumers' behavioral intentions. The theory also posits that intentions for a specific behavior can predict, explain or influence the actual use (Hoyer et al., 2013). Behavioral intention indicates how hard people are willing to try and how much effort they plan to exert to perform the behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Since behavior (B) is a function of a person's behavioral intention (BI), this theory could be summarized as a function of two components: the individual's attitude towards the behavior (AB) and the subjective norms (SN).

BI = (AB) W1 + (SN) W2

(W stands for how important the component is to the individual)

Attitude is the degree to which the person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior in question. Attitude is learned and tends to persist over time (Schwartz, 2007). Attitude toward a specific behavior is influenced by the consumers' beliefs about the consequences of engaging in the behavior and an evaluation of the significance of the consequences (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Suppose the positive consequences of performing the behavior outweigh the negative ones. In that case, the customer will likely form a positive attitude toward the specific behavior, which will, in turn, strengthen the likelihood of the behavioral intention and the likelihood of the behavior being performed. Subjective Norms are normative beliefs that result from social pressure influenced by the consumers' normative beliefs and what others feel about the behavior (Hoyer et al., 2013).
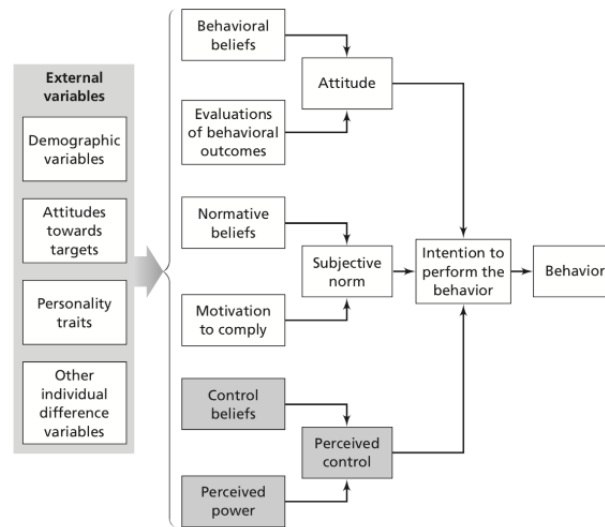
FIGURE 4.1. Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior.*

*Note: Upper light area shows the Theory of Reasoned Action; entire figure shows the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB):

TPB is an extension of TRA. It suggests that a third factor exists which, along with attitude and subjective norms, determines the likelihood of a purchase: perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control refers to the degree to which a person believes he or she can perform a given behavior.

Trust-transfer Cognitive Theory:

Using the example of social media influencers, one can state that if a person trusts an influencer and their opinion, he/she will transfer this feeling onto the products and brands that these influencers advertise. Notably, the transfer of trust depends on an individual's perception, mainly belonging, similarity, and proximity.

Social Influence Theory:

Kelman (1958) proposed the social influence theory, which revolves around the idea that reference groups shape an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and subsequent actions through three processes: compliance, identification, and internalization. According to Kelman (1958), social influence brings about changes in attitudes and behaviors, and these changes can occur at different "levels" depending on the processes individuals use to accept influence. Kelman (1958) outlined the three primary processes of influence as follows:

- Compliance occurs when individuals accept influence, adopt a certain behavior to gain rewards or approval, and avoid punishment or disapproval. The satisfaction derived from compliance stems from the social effects of accepting influence.
- Identification occurs when individuals adopt a particular behavior to establish or maintain a desired and beneficial relationship with another person or a group. The satisfaction, in this case, arises from the act of conforming.
- Internalization happens when individuals accept influence after perceiving the content of the induced behavior as rewarding, indicating the opinions and actions of others. Individuals adopting the induced behavior realize that it aligns with their value system. In this case, satisfaction occurs due to the content of the new behavior.

Each of these three processes is influenced by three determinants of influence: the relative importance of the anticipated effect, the relative power of the influencing agent, and the prepotency of the induced response. However, these determinants differ qualitatively for each process, meaning each has its distinct set of antecedent and consequent conditions. In the context of this research, social media influencers play a significant role as social references for fashion consumption, and their posts and recommendations can influence individuals' purchasing decisions.

Social Learning Theory:

Psychologist Albert Bandura developed the social learning theory, which suggests that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling and is influenced by attention, motivation, attitudes, and emotions. This theory considers the interplay between environmental and cognitive factors that impact learning processes. According to Bandura, individuals acquire behaviors by directly observing others through social interactions or indirectly through media. Usually, rewarded actions are imitated, while punished actions are avoided. Bandura identified three fundamental models of observational learning:
- Live models involve real individuals demonstrating or acting out a behavior.
- Symbolic models encompass real or fictional characters portraying behaviors in books, movies, TV shows, or online media.
- Verbal instructional models include descriptions and explanations of behavior.

Bandura also described intrinsic reinforcement as an internal form of reward, such as feelings of pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment. The observational learning and modeling process involves several steps:
- Attention:

To learn, one must pay attention. Distractions can hinder observational learning, but interesting aspects or novel situations enhance attention and promote effective learning.

- Retention:

  The ability to store information is crucial for the learning process. Factors influencing retention vary, but the capacity to recall and apply information later is essential for observational learning.

- Reproduction:

  After paying attention and retaining information, individuals must actively perform the observed behavior. Continued practice and repetition contribute to skill improvement and advancement.

- Motivation:

  Successful observational learning requires motivation to imitate the modeled behavior. Motivation is influenced by reinforcement and punishment. Observing others experience consequences can also impact motivation. For instance, witnessing a fellow student receiving extra credit for punctuality might prompt you to arrive a few minutes early each day.

In conclusion, the social learning theory emphasizes that learning occurs through observation and imitation, influenced by attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Observing others being reinforced or punished can also shape behavior (Bandura, 1997).

Social learning theory justifies that an individual derives motivation, consequently exhibiting a favorable attitude, from socialization agents via either direct or indirect social interaction (Subramanian & Subramanian 1995; Moschis & Churchill 1978). Previous marketing studies have adopted this theory to understand consumer consumption through various socialization agents such as celebrities, family, or peers. For instance, Makgosa (2010) revealed that social learning theory could convincingly explain the impact of celebrities on consumption behaviors. Aligned with Makgosa's assertion, social learning theory is proposed as a contextual foundation for understanding social media influencers as they represent a novel type of independent third-party endorser (i.e., the concept is somehow similar to celebrity endorsement) who can shape audience attitudes and decision-making through the use of social media.

Consumer Doppelganger Effect:

Consumer Doppelganger Effect explains why consumers mimic the behavior of influencers. The reasoning behind such behavior is a desire to look or be perceived similarly to the other person being mimicked. This can result in consumers being even more impacted by influencers' fashion styles and consumption patterns.

Social Identity Theory:

Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory suggests that one's identity is formed in relation to reference groups via three steps: categorization, identification, and comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000). As social identity theory explains, a group member's self-esteem and self-concept can be influenced by the group as the member begins associating and identifying with the group. In the context of fashion consumption, individuals may seek to conform to the fashion norms of their social group in order to maintain their sense of identity and belonging. The process of social identity formation starts with the categorization stage. During the categorization stage, an individual recognizes the group that he or she wishes to join. This person begins to explore the group for the membership's potential advantages and disadvantages. If the person decides to join the group, he or she enters the identification stage. During the identification stage, the person's identity components begin to change to reflect that of the "standard group member." The individual begins to significantly identify with the group not merely by mimicking group characteristics but also by incorporating such characteristics into his or her self-concept. Finally, once the individual achieves this new identity, he or she creates group comparisons to distinguish between in-groups and out-groups. Social identity theory can be applied to consumer behavior through both aspirational and non-aspirational groups.

Aspirational (Reference) Group Theory:

An aspirational group is a reference group an individual wishes to associate with. It is often the reference group of another individual whom one finds admirable or inspiring. In aspirational groups, there is a significant amount of prestige or notability that an outside individual desires to attribute to his or her identity. In addition to enhancing one's sense of self-worth, a key reason for desiring to associate with an aspirational group is to improve one's image. It is one's desire to be visible and have others view oneself as a valid member of a group that is imperative to one's satisfaction when attempting to associate with an aspirational group. High proximity with individuals of the aspirational group becomes crucial to keep up with the increasingly dynamic lifestyle of a group that one may not be accustomed to living. In contrast, a non-aspirational group is a group from which an individual wishes to detach his or her identity. A person views the norms of the out-group as negative compared to his or her values. It is from an association with or a detachment from these groups that individuals are able to increase their levels of self-verification and self-enhancement. Whether it is a group one is born into, a group one voluntarily chooses to be in, or a group one avoids being associated with, groups become part of one's identity, and this is especially true when purchasing products. The need to belong and the desire to attain self-enhancement and self-verification are essential to success in society. In consumer behavior, via product representation, individuals seek to belong to groups that enhance and verify their image and self-

esteem. It is important for one to recognize the impact that reference groups and their sub-groups (aspirational and non-aspirational groups) can have on an individual (Salmon, 2008).

Social Comparison Theory:

The theory suggests that people evaluate themselves based on how they compare to others, particularly those in their social group. In the context of this research, individuals may be influenced by social media influencers because they aspire to be like them or because they want to fit in with their social group.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory:

The theory suggests that individuals adopt new ideas, products, or behaviors as they spread through social networks. This theory offers insights into the realm of fashion consumption, specifically concerning how certain fashion trends gain popularity among young adults through social networks. As these trends disseminate and gain momentum, they exert a strong influence on young adults, prompting them to embrace these items to align with their social circle or project an image of being innovative and fashionable.

This theoretical framework lays the groundwork for constructing the conceptual framework, which will be described in detail shortly. Additionally, it will be used to analyze and interpret the data gathered from the survey.

4.1.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

BLOCK 3: ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

H1: Participants follow influencers as a source of inspiration

The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:

- Aspirational Groups Theory:

Aspirational groups theory posits that individuals are motivated to associate themselves with groups or individuals they admire and aspire to emulate. In the context of following influencers, participants may perceive these influencers as aspirational figures who possess qualities, lifestyles, or achievements they desire. By following influencers, participants seek inspiration and hope to emulate their success, style, or values.

- Social Comparison Theory:

Social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their own attributes, abilities, and achievements with those of others. In the case of following influencers, participants may engage in upward social comparison. They compare themselves to influencers perceived as superior in specific domains, such as fashion, fitness, or entrepreneurship. By following influencers, participants may seek motivation to improve themselves and close the perceived gap between themselves and the influencer.

- Social Learning Theory:

Social learning theory suggests that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and values of others. When participants follow influencers, they are exposed to their content, including demonstrations of skills, advice, or motivational messages. Participants may learn from these influencers and adopt their behaviors, habits, or perspectives as a source of inspiration.

- Social Identity Theory:

Social identity theory emphasizes the importance of group membership and identity in shaping individual behavior. When participants follow influencers, they may develop a sense of belonging to a particular community or identity group associated with that influencer. By aligning themselves with the influencer's values, beliefs, or interests, participants may find inspiration in reinforcing their own social identity and feeling a sense of connection with like-minded individuals.

In summary, the assumption that participants follow influencers as a source of inspiration can be explained by the aspirational groups theory, as participants aspire to be like the influencers. The social comparison theory highlights how participants may compare themselves to influencers and seek motivation to improve. The social learning theory suggests that participants learn from influencers and adopt their behaviors. Lastly, the social identity theory emphasizes the role of group identity and the sense of belonging participants derive from following influencers.

H2) Participants follow specifically fashion influencers as a source of inspiration for their own style
The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:
- Aspirational Groups Theory:

The theory of aspirational groups proposes that individuals are inclined to seek association with groups or individuals they aspire to resemble or emulate, driven by their desire to attain similar qualities or achievements. In the context of fashion influencers, participants may follow them because they perceive them as fashion-forward and stylish individuals. By following fashion influencers, participants seek inspiration and aspire to enhance their own style to align with the influencer's fashion sense and image.

- Social Comparison Theory:

Social comparison theory suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes, abilities, and achievements with those of others. When it comes to fashion influencers, participants may engage in upward social comparison. They compare their style and appearance with that of the influencer, seeking inspiration and motivation to improve their fashion choices. By following fashion influencers, participants aim to elevate their style and stay updated with the latest trends.

- Social Learning Theory:

Social learning theory posits that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and values of others. When participants follow fashion influencers, they are exposed to a wealth of fashion-related content, including outfit ideas, styling tips, and trend updates. Participants may learn from these influencers and adopt their fashion choices, incorporating them into their style. By following fashion influencers, participants can enhance their fashion knowledge and skills through observational learning.

- Social Identity Theory:

Social identity theory emphasizes the significance of group membership and identity in shaping individual behavior. When participants follow fashion influencers, they may develop a sense of belonging to a specific fashion community or identity group associated with the influencer. By aligning themselves with the influencer's fashion choices and aesthetics, participants reinforce their fashion identity and seek inspiration to express themselves through their style. They may feel a sense of connection with like-minded individuals who follow the same influencer and share similar fashion interests.

In summary, the assumption that participants follow specifically fashion influencers as a source of inspiration for their own style can be explained by the aspirational groups theory, as participants aspire to emulate the fashion sense of these influencers. The social comparison theory highlights how participants compare their style with that of the influencer and seek motivation to enhance their fashion choices. The social learning

theory suggests that participants learn from fashion influencers and incorporate their fashion ideas into their own style. Lastly, the social identity theory emphasizes the role of group identity and the sense of belonging participants derive from following fashion influencers.

H3) Participants' trust in fashion influencers' is mainly affected by the influencer's expertise and attractiveness
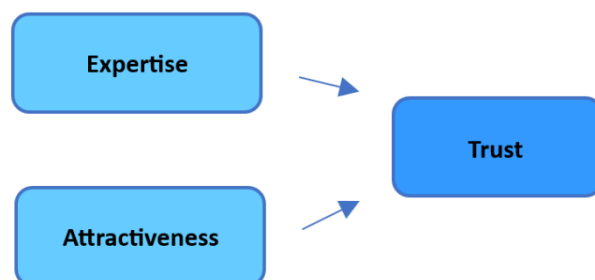
The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:

- Source Credibility:

Source credibility theory suggests that individuals evaluate the credibility of a source before accepting and trusting the information provided by that source. The credibility of a fashion influencer can be influenced by two key factors mentioned in the assumption: expertise and attractiveness.

1. Expertise:

    When young adults perceive a fashion influencer as knowledgeable, experienced, and skilled in the fashion industry, they are more likely to trust the influencer's recommendations and advice. The influencer's expertise in fashion, which could be demonstrated through their educational background, industry experience, or demonstrated fashion knowledge, contributes to their perceived credibility. Young adults may view influencers as trusted sources for fashion-related information based on their expertise in the field.

2. Attractiveness:

    In the context of fashion influencers, attractiveness refers not only to physical appearance but also to the influencer's overall style and image. Young adults may be more likely to trust influencers with a sense of style that aligns with their preferences and aspirations. When an influencer's fashion choices are considered appealing or attractive to young adults, they may view the influencer as someone who can guide them in enhancing their own style. The influencer's attractiveness, in terms of personal style and overall image, can contribute to their perceived credibility as a fashion influencer.

- Aspirational Group Theory:

The theory of aspirational groups posits that individuals are driven to align themselves with groups or individuals they admire and aspire to emulate. In the context of fashion influencers, young adults may follow them because they perceive them as role models whose fashion choices and lifestyles align with their own aspirations.

1. Expertise:

   Young adults may trust fashion influencers who are seen as experts in the fashion industry because they aspire to develop their own fashion expertise. By following these influencers, young adults believe they can learn from their fashion knowledge and gain insights into the latest trends, styling techniques, and industry insights. They trust influencers who possess the expertise they aim to acquire themselves.

2. Attractiveness:

   Young adults may be inspired by fashion influencers who are attractive in terms of personal style and overall image. These influencers serve as aspirational figures who represent a desired fashion aesthetic and lifestyle. Young adults trust influencers they perceive as having a sense of style they admire and wish to emulate. By following such influencers, young adults seek inspiration and guidance to improve their style and become part of the aspirational group represented by the influencer.

In summary, the assumption that young adults' trust in fashion influencers is mainly affected by the influencer's expertise and attractiveness can be explained through the source credibility and aspirational group theories. In the fashion industry, influencers' expertise lends credibility and fosters trust, positioning them as knowledgeable and reliable sources. Additionally, their captivating personal style and overall image make them aspirational figures, eliciting a strong desire among young adults to emulate them.

H4) Participants follow influencers who, for the greatest part, have a style they aspire to achieve or similar to their own

The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:

- Aspirational Groups Theory:

Aspirational groups theory posits that individuals are motivated to associate themselves with groups or individuals they admire and aspire to emulate. In the context of following influencers, young adults may be drawn to influencers with a style they aspire to achieve. These influencers serve as role models representing a

desired fashion aesthetic or lifestyle. By following such influencers, young adults seek inspiration and guidance to improve their style and become part of the aspirational group represented by the influencer.

- Social Comparison Theory:

Social comparison theory suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes, abilities, and achievements with those of others. Young adults may follow influencers whose style is similar to their own to engage in social comparison. By following influencers with a similar style, young adults may seek validation and reassurance that their fashion choices are aligned with current trends or are considered fashionable. They may also compare their style to that of the influencer to gather ideas for improving or refining their own fashion choices.

- Social Learning Theory:

Social learning theory posits that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and values of others. When young adults follow influencers with a style they aspire to achieve, they are more likely to learn and adopt fashion-related behaviors and choices from these influencers. By observing the influencer's style, outfit combinations, or fashion advice, young adults can incorporate elements of the influencer's style into their own, enhancing their fashion sense.

- Social Identity Theory:

Social identity theory emphasizes the importance of group membership and identity in shaping individual behavior. Young adults may follow influencers with a style similar to their own due to feelings of similarity and connection. By aligning themselves with influencers with a similar style, young adults reinforce their fashion identity and feel a sense of belonging to a group that shares their fashion preferences and aesthetics. Following influencers with a similar style allows young adults to express and affirm their own sense of fashion identity.

- Similarity-Attraction Model:

The similarity-attraction model suggests that individuals are attracted to others who are similar to them in various aspects. In the context of following influencers, young adults may be drawn to influencers with a style similar to their own. They feel a sense of connection, relatability, and attractiveness toward influencers who share their fashion preferences and aesthetics. Following influencers with a similar style allows young adults to engage with content that resonates with their fashion choices and reinforces their sense of style.

In summary, the assumption that young adults follow influencers with a style they aspire to achieve or similar to their own can be explained through the theories of aspirational groups, social comparison, social learning, social identity, and the similarity-attraction model. These theories provide insights into how young adults seek inspiration, validation, learning, and a sense of belonging by following influencers whose style aligns with their own fashion aspirations and preferences.

H5) Participants would like to have the same lifestyle as influencers

The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:

- Aspirational Groups Theory:

The theory of aspirational groups proposes that individuals are inclined to seek association with groups or individuals they aspire to resemble or emulate, driven by their desire to attain similar qualities or achievements. In the context of influencers, young adults may be attracted to the lifestyle portrayed by influencers. They see the influencers as role models who represent a desirable lifestyle. By following these influencers, young adults seek inspiration and strive to emulate the influencers' lifestyle choices, activities, and experiences.

- Social Identity Theory:

Social identity theory emphasizes the importance of group membership and identity in shaping individual behavior. Young adults may be drawn to influencers whose lifestyle aligns with their desired self-image and identity. By adopting aspects of the influencers' lifestyle, young adults reinforce their own social identity and feel a sense of belonging to a group that shares similar values, interests, and experiences.

- Social Comparison Theory:

Social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes, abilities, and achievements with those of others. Young adults may compare their lifestyle to that of influencers and aspire to attain similar success, enjoyment, and fulfillment. By following influencers and witnessing their lifestyle, young adults may feel motivated to make changes in their own lives to achieve a comparable lifestyle or to bridge the perceived gap between their current and desired lifestyles.

- Similarity-Attraction Model:

The similarity-attraction model suggests that individuals are attracted to others who are similar to them in various aspects. In the context of influencers, young adults may be attracted to influencers whose lifestyle is similar to their own or represents their ideal lifestyle. They feel a sense of connection and relatability with influencers who share similar values, interests, and activities. By following these influencers, young adults seek validation for their own lifestyle choices and may be inspired to make adjustments or enhancements to align more closely with the influencers' lifestyles.

In summary, the assumption that young adults would like to have the same lifestyle as influencers can be explained through the theories of aspirational groups, social identity, social comparison, and the similarity-attraction model. Young adults aspire to adopt influencers' lifestyles as they see them as desirable and representative of their desired self-image. They seek inspiration, validation, and a sense of belonging by following influencers who embody a lifestyle that aligns with their own aspirations and values.

BLOCK 4: IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON FASHION OVERCONSUMPTION

H6) Following fashion influencers significantly impact participants' fashion consumption

The hypothesis is be explained by the following theories:
- Social Learning Theory:

Social learning theory suggests that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and values of others. When young adults follow fashion influencers, they are exposed to an extensive range of fashion-related content, including outfit ideas, styling tips, and trend updates. Through this exposure, young adults learn about new fashion trends, brands, and products, which can influence their fashion consumption patterns. They may imitate the influencers' fashion choices and incorporate them into their wardrobe, thus shaping their consumption behaviors.

- Social Comparison Theory:

Social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes, abilities, and achievements with those of others. When young adults follow fashion influencers, they engage in social comparison by comparing their own fashion choices to those of the influencers. This comparison can influence their fashion consumption patterns as they strive to emulate the influencers' styles and keep up with the latest trends. They may feel motivated to purchase similar clothing items or brands endorsed by the influencers to align their fashion choices with those they admire.

- Aspirational Reference Groups:

The theory of aspirational groups posits that individuals are driven to align themselves with groups or individuals they admire and aspire to emulate. Fashion influencers often serve as aspirational reference groups, representing a desirable fashion aesthetic or lifestyle. By following these influencers, young adults seek inspiration, validation, and guidance for their fashion choices. The influencers' fashion consumption patterns serve as a reference point, influencing young adults' preferences and encouraging them to adopt similar consumption behaviors.

- Consumer Doppelganger Effect:

The consumer doppelganger effect refers to the tendency of individuals to imitate the consumption patterns of others they perceive as similar to themselves. When young adults follow fashion influencers who share similar characteristics or values, they may view the influencers as doppelgangers or counterparts. They perceive a sense of similarity and relatability, which can lead to the adoption of similar fashion consumption patterns. Young adults may be more inclined to trust and emulate influencers who reflect their own identity, thus impacting their fashion consumption choices.

- Trust-Transfer Cognitive Theory:

Trust-transfer cognitive theory suggests that individuals transfer their trust in a source to the products or recommendations associated with that source. When young adults trust fashion influencers and perceive them as credible and knowledgeable, they are more likely to trust the fashion-related content and recommendations provided by the influencers. This trust can significantly impact their fashion consumption patterns as they are more inclined to purchase products recommended or endorsed by the influencers, leading to changes in their consumption behaviors.

In summary, the assumption that following fashion influencers significantly impacts young adults' fashion consumption patterns can be explained through the theories of social learning, social comparison, aspirational reference groups, trust-transfer cognitive, and the consumer doppelganger effect. These theories highlight how young adults learn, compare, aspire, identify with, and trust fashion influencers, resulting in changes in their fashion choices, preferences, and consumption behaviors.

BLOCK 5: FASHION SOCIAL NORMS, FAST FASHION & IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

H7) Current social norms discourage individuals from wearing the same outfit multiple times

The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:

- Social Identity Theory:

Social identity theory emphasizes the importance of group membership and identity in shaping individual behavior. In the context of fashion, individuals often use clothing choices as a means of expressing their social identity and belonging to a particular group. Current social norms surrounding fashion may create a perception that wearing the same outfit multiple times is seen as a lack of variety, creativity, or status. To conform to their desired social identity, individuals may feel pressure to avoid repeating outfits and instead strive to present themselves as fashion-forward and up-to-date.

- Social Comparison Theory:

Social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes, abilities, and achievements with those of others. In the context of fashion, individuals may compare their clothing choices to those of others, including celebrities, influencers, or peers. Suppose the norm is to wear unique outfits and avoid outfit repetition. In that case, individuals may engage in social comparison and feel the need to meet or exceed the perceived standards set by others leading them to constantly update their wardrobe and avoid wearing the same outfit multiple times.

- Aspirational Reference Group Theory:

Aspirational groups theory posits that individuals are motivated to associate themselves with groups or individuals they admire and aspire to emulate. In the realm of fashion, individuals may look up to fashion influencers, celebrities, or other admired figures as their aspirational reference group. If these influencers or celebrities are often seen wearing new, trendy outfits, individuals may feel compelled to follow suit and avoid

outfit repetition in order to align themselves with their aspirational group. They may strive to imitate the perceived fashion norms set by these influential figures to enhance their own status and fashion identity.

In summary, the assumption that current social norms discourage individuals from wearing the same outfit multiple times can be explained through social identity, social comparison, and aspirational reference group theories. These theories highlight how individuals' desire for social belonging, comparison with others, and aspiration to align with influential figures in the fashion world contribute to the pressure to avoid outfit repetition and adhere to perceived fashion norms.

H8) Participants buy clothes to express themselves and get a feeling of instant gratification
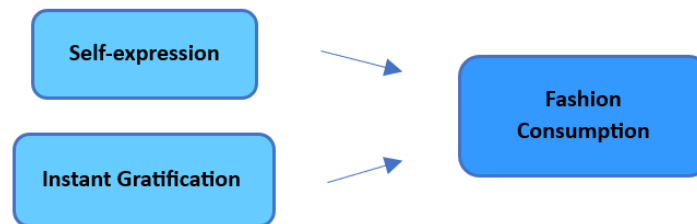
The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:

- Social Identity Theory:

Social identity theory emphasizes the role of group membership and identity in shaping individual behavior. In the context of buying clothes, young adults may use their fashion choices to express their social identity and belonging to a particular group. By selecting clothing items that align with their desired self-image or the identity of a specific group they identify with, young adults can showcase their individuality, values, and style preferences. By purchasing and wearing these clothes, they express themselves and reinforce their social identity.

- Aspirational Reference Groups:

The theory of aspirational groups proposes that individuals are inclined to seek association with groups or individuals they aspire to resemble or emulate, driven by their desire to attain similar qualities or achievements. In the realm of fashion, young adults may look up to fashion influencers, celebrities, or other admired figures as their aspirational reference group. They may buy clothes these influential figures endorse or wear to mimic

their style and feel closer to their aspirational group. By acquiring similar clothing items, young adults seek to align themselves with their desired reference group and experience a sense of gratification and belonging.

- Social Learning Theory:

Social learning theory posits that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and values of others. In the context of buying clothes, young adults may learn about new fashion trends, styles, and brands by observing the choices of fashion influencers, celebrities, or peers. Through social media, fashion magazines, or other sources, they are exposed to a constant stream of fashion-related content, which influences their own purchasing decisions. They may buy clothes to imitate the styles they have seen, seeking the same gratification and validation as those they admire.

- Theory behind Fast Fashion Addiction:

Young adults may experience instant gratification from buying clothes from fast fashion brands due to affordability, availability, and novelty. Fast fashion brands constantly release new collections, prompting young adults to engage in frequent purchases to keep up with the latest trends. The act of buying clothes provides a temporary sense of excitement, pleasure, and self-expression, which can create a cycle of continuous consumption for instant gratification.

In summary, the assumption that young adults buy clothes to express themselves and experience instant gratification can be explained through the theories of social identity, aspirational reference groups, social learning, and the theory behind fast fashion addiction. These theories highlight how fashion choices serve as a means of self-expression, identity formation, and affiliation with aspirational groups. The act of purchasing clothes and keeping up with fashion trends provides a sense of immediate satisfaction and fulfillment for young adults.

BLOCK 6: IS THERE A CHANCE FOR REAL CHANGE

H9) Participants feel that fashion needs to change and be more sustainable
Data supporting the hypothesis:
- Surveys and Market Research:

Numerous surveys have been conducted to gauge young adults' attitudes towards sustainable fashion. These surveys consistently indicate a strong desire for more sustainable practices within the fashion industry. For example, a 2020 study by GlobalWebIndex revealed that 58% of Gen Z respondents believe brands should be more environmentally friendly. Additionally, a 2020 survey by McKinsey pointed out that, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, 65 percent of respondents plan to purchase more durable fashion items, and 71 percent plan to keep the items they already have for longer. Additionally, 57 percent of respondents are willing to repair items to prolong usage. Particularly among younger European consumers, there is interest in purchasing second-hand fashion items following the COVID-19 crisis. Of surveyed consumers, around 50 percent of Gen Zers and millennials expect to purchase more items second-hand (Granskog, 2020). Then, a 2022 survey by Deloitte revealed that 64% of Gen Z respondents are willing to pay more for sustainable products.

- Social Media Influence:

Social media platforms play a significant role in shaping young adults' opinions and preferences, including their views on sustainability in fashion. Influencers, activists, and sustainable fashion advocates utilize platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to raise awareness about sustainable fashion practices and showcase sustainable clothing options. The increasing popularity of hashtags such as #sustainablefashion and #ethicalfashion reflects the growing interest and engagement among young adults in the topic.

- Rise of Sustainable Fashion Brands:

The emergence and growth of sustainable fashion brands further support the assumption. Many young adults actively seek out and support brands that prioritize sustainable and ethical practices. These brands incorporate environmentally friendly materials, promote fair labor practices, and have transparent supply chains. The success of these brands indicates a demand for fashion that aligns with young adults' values of sustainability and social responsibility.

- Increased Awareness of Environmental Impact:

Young adults are increasingly aware of the detrimental environmental impact of the fashion industry. They recognize the significant water usage, pollution, and carbon emissions associated with conventional fashion production and consumption. This awareness has led to a desire for change and a demand for fashion that minimizes its ecological footprint.

- Sustainable Fashion Events and Initiatives:

The popularity of sustainable fashion events, such as eco-fashion shows, clothing swaps, and second-hand markets, demonstrates the interest and involvement of young adults in sustainable fashion. These events provide platforms for showcasing sustainable fashion practices, exchanging pre-owned garments, and promoting conscious consumption.

Overall, these points highlight the growing sentiment among young adults that fashion needs to change and become more sustainable. The data support the assumption that young adults between 19-26 years old feel a strong need for sustainable fashion practices and are willing to engage with brands and initiatives aligning with their environmental consciousness and social responsibility values.

H10) Participants have a propensity toward personalized items

The hypothesis is explained by the following theories:

- Social Identity Theory:

Social identity theory suggests that individuals strive to establish and maintain a positive social identity by seeking group membership and expressing themselves through the groups they identify with. In the context of personalized fashion, young adults use clothing to express their unique identity and establish their social identity within their peer groups and communities.

- Expression of Individuality:

Young adults aged 19-26 are often in the process of self-discovery and identity formation. They desire to express their individuality and stand out from the crowd. Personalized fashion items allow them to showcase their unique tastes, preferences, and personal style. By customizing clothing items or opting for limited edition and exclusive pieces, young adults can assert their individuality and differentiate themselves from others.

- Symbolic Significance:

Clothing choices hold symbolic significance and communicate a sense of identity to others. By personalizing their fashion items, young adults can signal their membership in specific subcultures, social groups, or communities that share similar values and interests. This enables them to create a sense of belonging and affiliation with like-minded individuals, reinforcing their social identity and fostering a sense of connection.

- Social Comparison Theory:

Social comparison theory suggests that individuals evaluate their self-worth and social status by comparing themselves to others. In the context of personalized fashion, young adults engage in social comparison to assess their fashion choices and style in relation to their peers and influential figures.

1. Differentiation and Status:

   Personalized fashion items allow young adults to differentiate themselves and stand out from the crowd. By showcasing their unique and customized clothing items, they can enhance their perceived status and gain attention and admiration from their peers. Through social comparison, they seek to achieve a higher fashion status and establish themselves as trendsetters within their social circles.

2. Norms and Trends:

   Social comparison also plays a role in adopting personalized fashion items. Young adults compare their fashion choices to influencers', their peers', or other reference groups' choices. If personalized fashion is seen as a norm or a trend within their social circle, they are more likely to embrace it to fit in and conform to the perceived fashion standards set by their reference groups.

In summary, the propensity of young adults aged 19-26 toward personalized fashion items can be explained through social identity theory and social comparison theory. Personalized fashion allows them to express their individuality, establish their social identity, and differentiate themselves from others. Additionally, social comparison influences their adoption of personalized fashion as they compare their fashion choices to those of their peers and influential figures.

Data supporting the hypothesis:

- Customization and Personalization Trends:

There has been a rise in customization and personalization trends within the fashion industry, catering to the preferences of young adults. Many brands and retailers offer options for consumers to personalize their clothing items, such as choosing colors and patterns or adding personalized details like monograms. This trend reflects the demand for individuality and uniqueness among young adults.

- Growth of Made-to-Order and Direct-to-Consumer Brands:

The rise of made-to-order and direct-to-consumer brands suggests that young adults prefer personalized fashion. These brands allow customers to customize their clothes by selecting specific measurements, styles, and details, ensuring a personalized fit and design. This shift towards made-to-order models indicates a desire for unique and tailored fashion experiences.

- Social Media Influence:

Social media platforms play a significant role in shaping fashion trends and consumer behavior among young adults. Influencers and digital content creators often showcase personalized fashion items and promote customization options. Their influence contributes to the popularity of personalized fashion among young adults who seek to emulate their favorite influencers' styles.

- Demand for Limited Edition and Exclusive Items:

Young adults often value limited edition and exclusive fashion items, which provide a sense of exclusivity and individuality. Brands that offer limited runs or collaborations with artists, designers, or influencers tend to attract young adult consumers who appreciate the opportunity to own something unique and distinctive.

- Consumer Preferences and Surveys:

Surveys and market research provide insights into consumer preferences and support the assumption of young adults' propensity towards personalized fashion items. For instance, Deloitte in 2015 revealed that 36% of Gen Z consumers (which includes young adults) expressed interest in personalized products (Black, 2015). Additionally, a survey by Euclid Analytics found that 63% of Gen Z respondents preferred brands that offer personalized experiences (Anyanwu, 2017).

These points highlight the growing preference for personalized fashion among young adults aged 19-26. The availability of customization options, the growth of made-to-order brands, the influence of social media, and consumer surveys all indicate a propensity towards personalized fashion items among this demographic. Young adults seek individuality, uniqueness, and the ability to express their personal style through customized clothing options.

4.1.4 METHODOLOGY

4.1.4.1 Sampling Method

The survey is conducted on Qualtrics, a subscription-based software used for collecting and analyzing data. It is then distributed via personal messages on WhatsApp and shared on social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn. In this way, the survey quickly reaches a large number of people. A nonprobability sampling technique is used for participant selection, specifically a convenience sampling method with some elements of a snowball sampling method. Convenience sampling seeks to obtain a sample of convenient elements, and when used, sampling units' selection is primarily left to the interviewer. This technique is the least expensive and time-consuming as the sampling units are accessible, easy to measure, and cooperative (Malhotra, 2020). The only criteria considered for selecting participants are their age, between 19-26 years old, and their availability and willingness to answer the survey's questions. This enables quick and easy recruitment of a large number of participants with different personal characteristics. No monetary reward is offered to potential participants, who are free to choose whether to complete the survey after reading the introduction, which specifies the study's purpose and topic.

4.1.4.2 Sample

The sample comprises people of all genders of the age range of 19-26 years. The target choice is linked to many reasons. First of all, young adults are social media's most active users. They are often more fashion-conscious than other age groups, making them more likely to follow fashion influencers and keep up with the latest trends. At this stage of their lives, they are forming their own identities and making decisions about their personal style. As a result, they may be more impressionable and open to being influenced by social media fashion influencers. As teenagers, they are greatly incentivized to interact with social media looking for and often suffering from social comparison; yet, differently from teenagers, young adults are in the process of creating a stronger personal identity and are, on average, more aware of the sustainability and ethical issues around fashion consumption. Additionally, compared to teenagers, young adults also have greater purchasing power.

4.1.4.3 Survey Structure

The questionnaire is in English, and it is anonymous. It is distributed in the form of a link. As soon as the link opens, there is an introductory page with the author's name, place of study, and the purpose of the research.

From page 2, the questions start; there are 23 questions distributed into six blocks. All of the questions, except the one asking for participants' age, are close-ended, meaning that respondents are required just to select the response option. The decision to exclusively use closed-ended questions was motivated by the advantages associated with this question type, including the ease of response for survey participants and the ability to complete the survey quickly. Close-ended questions also benefit researchers by enabling quick and easy recording of answers, which are easily categorized and suitable for subsequent analysis. The close-ended questions are further divided into multiple-choice and matrix table questions. For the multiple-choice questions, participants are able to choose between three, four, or five options. For the matrix table questions, instead, participants need to express their level of agreement with the statement written on top of the question. The level of agreement is expressed through a 5-point Likert Scale, which goes from "Strongly Disagree" (point 1) to "Strongly Agree" (point 5).

CHAPTER 5

5.1 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

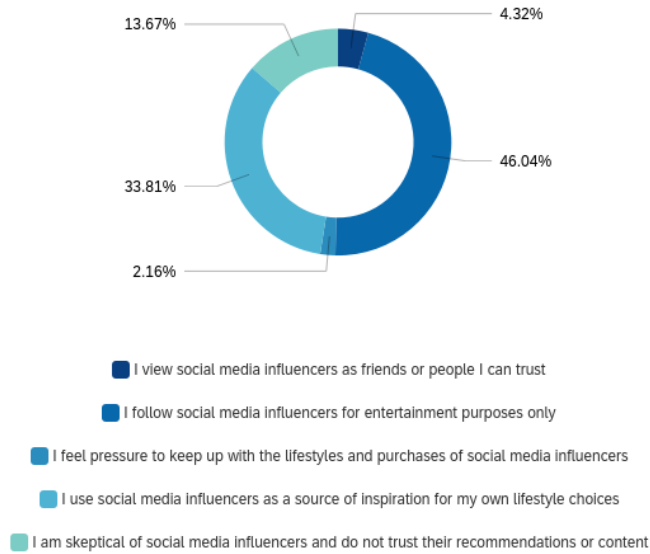The survey was answered by 172 young adults, predominantly of Italian nationality, with smaller proportions of Spanish, Mexican, German, American, Canadian, and French participants.

5.1.1 Hypothesis Validation

BLOCK 3: ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

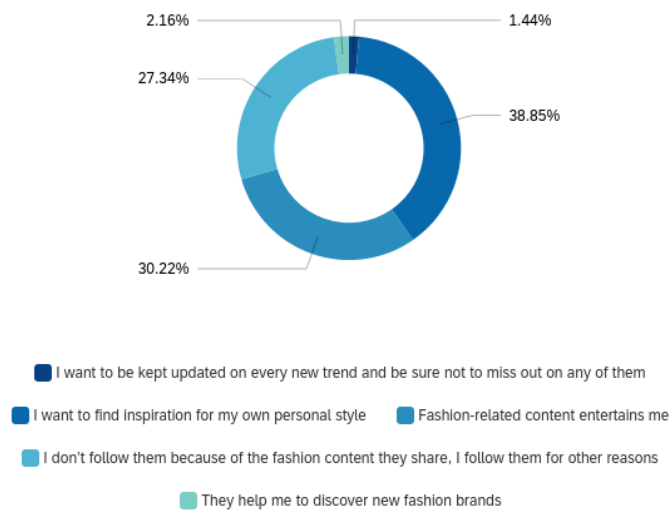**H1: Participants follow influencers as a source of inspiration**

Q7 – How do you view your relationship with social media influencers?

I view social media influencers as friends or people I can trust

I follow social media influencers for entertainment purposes only

I feel pressure to keep up with the lifestyles and purchases of social media influencers

I use social media influencers as a source of inspiration for my own lifestyle choices

I am skeptical of social media influencers and do not trust their recommendations or content

Question 7 of the survey investigates the nature of the relationship between participants and influencers and participants' perceptions of this relationship. 33.81% of participants state they follow influencers as a source of inspiration for their own lifestyle choices. Data validate H1.

H2) Participants follow specifically fashion influencers as a source of inspiration for their own style

Q8 – Specifically, why do you follow fashion influencers on social media?

I want to be kept updated on every new trend and be sure not to miss out on any of them

I want to find inspiration for my own personal style   Fashion-related content entertains me

I don't follow them because of the fashion content they share, I follow them for other reasons

They help me to discover new fashion brands

Question 8 investigates the nature of the relationship of participants, specifically with fashion influencers, and participants' perceptions of this relationship. 38.85% of respondents affirm that they follow fashion influencers to find inspiration for their personal style. Data validate H2.

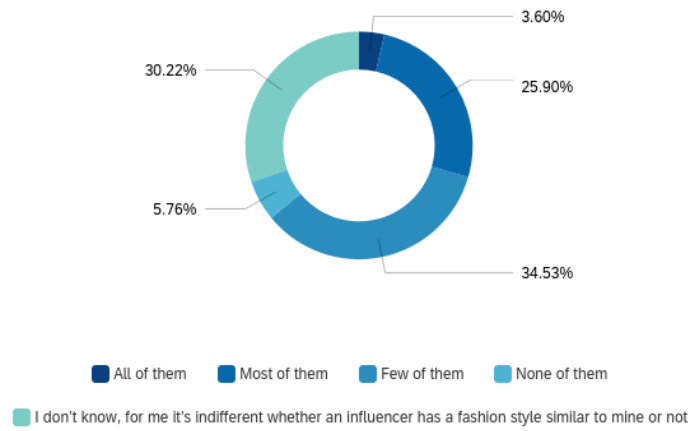**H3) Participants' trust in fashion influencers' is mainly affected by the influencer's expertise and attractiveness**

Q9 - What is the thing that makes you trust the most an influencer and, consequently, follow his/her lead in fashion consumption?

Legend:
- Physical attractiveness
- Known in the fashion industry (such as for job experience)
- Trendy Lifestyle
- Unique Personality
- Popular to the public (i.e. has a lot of followers)
- I relate a lot with him/her
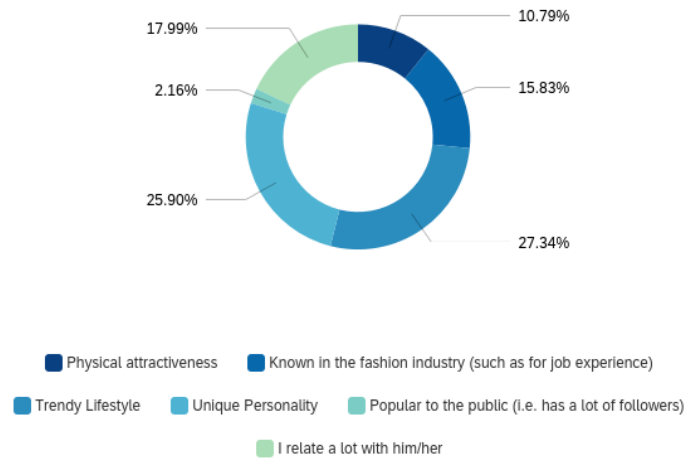
Question 9 explores influencers' characteristics that affect participants' trust the most. Job expertise does not appear to be one of the most relevant factors since only 15.83% of participants mention it. Similarly, physical attractiveness does not seem to impact participants' trust toward influencers significantly. Participants, instead, express a pronounced interest in an influencer's trendy lifestyle (25.90%) and unique personality (27.34%). The data shows that fashion expertise and physical attractiveness are not significant factors in determining participants' trust towards influencers; lifestyle attractiveness, instead, plays a major role. H3 is only partially validated.
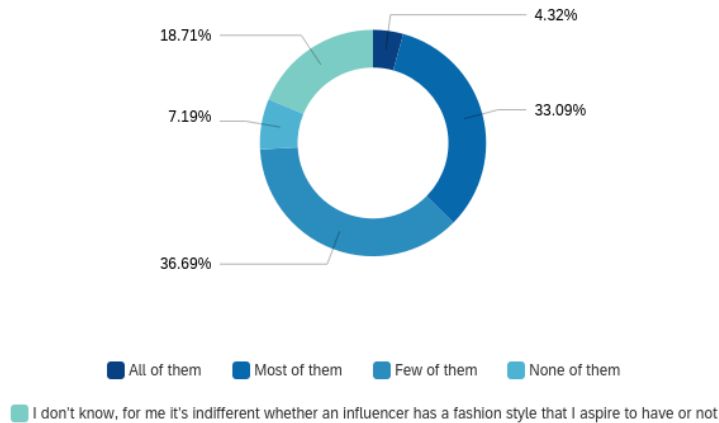
H4) Participants follow influencers who, for the greatest part, have a style they aspire to achieve or similar to their own

Q10 – Do the influencers you follow have a fashion style similar to yours?

All of them — 3.60%
Most of them — 25.90%
Few of them — 34.53%
None of them — 5.76%
I don't know, for me it's indifferent whether an influencer has a fashion style similar to mine or not — 30.22%

Question 10 evaluates whether participants look for a similar fashion style in the influencers they follow. 64.03% of participants declared to follow at least a few influencers with a similar style to their own. Precisely, among them, 3.60% exclusively follow influencers whose style aligns closely with their own, while 25.90% predominantly follow influencers who share a similar style with them. Style similarity, thus, appears to be a relevant factor for participants.

Q11 - Do the influencers you follow have a fashion style that you aspire to have?

All of them — 4.32%
Most of them — 33.09%
Few of them — 36.69%
None of them — 7.19%
I don't know, for me it's indifferent whether an influencer has a fashion style that I aspire to have or not — 18.71%

Question 11 investigates whether participants tend to follow influencers with a fashion style they aim to achieve. 71.1% of participants affirm following at least a few influencers with a fashion style they aim to achieve. In particular, 4.32% declare to follow only influencers with a style they aim to achieve, and 33.09% follow influencers who, for the vast majority, have a style they aim to achieve. The significance of aspirational style appears to outweigh that of style similarity.

Overall, the findings confirm the importance of both style similarity and aspirations. Data, therefore, validate H4.

H5) Participants would like to have the same lifestyle as influencers

Q12_2 – I wish I had the same lifestyle as social media influencers
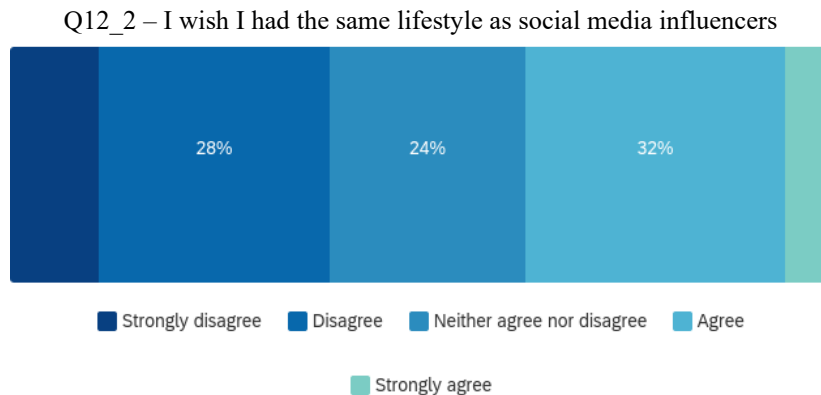

Question 12_2 explores whether participants desire to have the same lifestyle as influencers. A significant portion of the participants (37.41%) expresses this desire. Here, lifestyle means an influencer's way of living and habits in terms of food, travel, sport, connections, and social events. Data validate H5.

BLOCK 4: IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON FASHION OVERCONSUMPTION

H6) Following fashion influencers significantly impact participants' fashion consumption

Q13 - How often do you purchase a fashion item you previously saw from an influencer's video, story or post, within 2 to 5 days after having seen it?
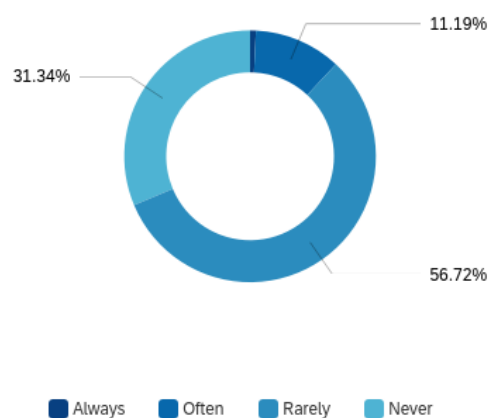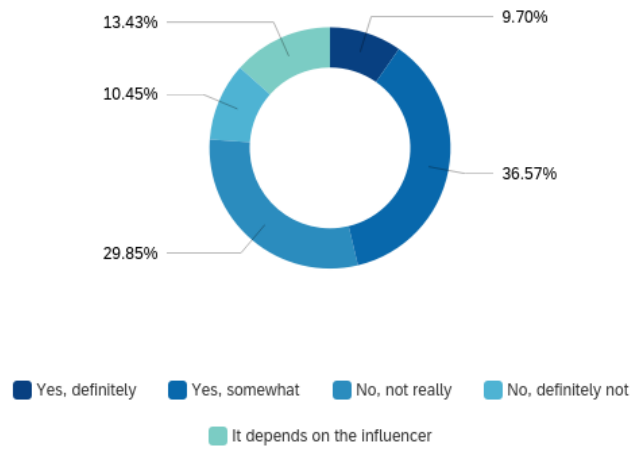
Question 13 investigates the short-term impact of influencers on participants' both online and in-store consumption. 68.66% of participants affirm that by seeing a fashion item in an influencer's online content, they always, often, or rarely purchase it within 2 to 5 days. Participants' fashion consumption patterns are thus significantly affected by fashion influencers' content.

Q14 - In this month, how many times have you purchased a fashion item directly from a fashion influencer's video, story or post, by pressing the "swipe up" button?

- 2.24%
- 5.22%
- 10.45%
- 82.09%

■ Almost everyday　■ Once/twice a week　■ Once/twice a month　■ None
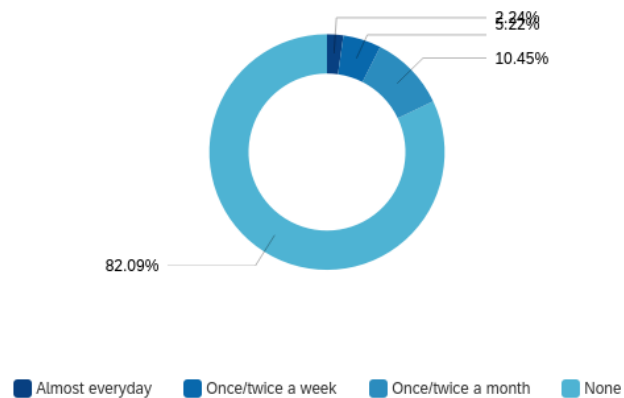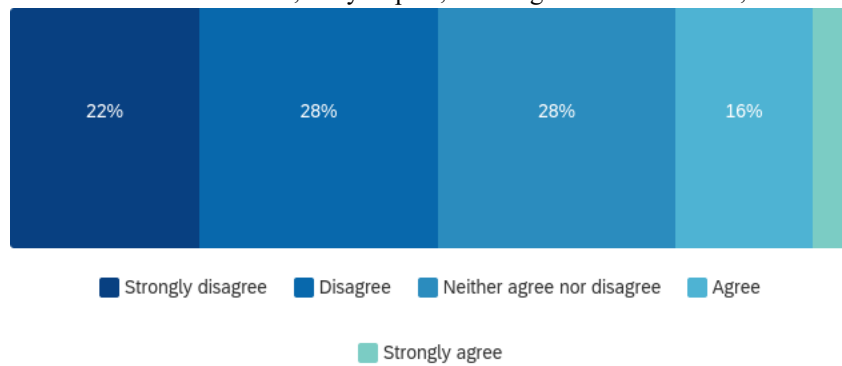
Question 14 examines in detail the effect of sponsored fashion items on participants' consumption patterns. Specifically, it explores the effect of the Instagram "Swipe Up" feature, which allows users with a certain number of followers, such as influencers, or those who have a verified account to add links to their Instagram Stories. Additionally, the feature allows them to include a call-to-action ("Swipe Up"), which prompts viewers to swipe up on the story to access a link to external content. Fashion influencers, brands, or businesses can use the feature to direct their followers to specific fashion items or product pages, thus increasing website traffic and online consumption. By swiping up on the story, users are redirected to a website where they can learn more about the fashion items, make purchases, or explore additional content related to the products. Surprisingly, most participants (82.09%) state not having purchased any fashion item from the "Swipe Up" feature last month. Still, the remaining 17.91% admit to purchasing some fashion item directly from the "Swipe Up" feature at least once this month.

Q15 - Does seeing a fashion item on an influencer's video, story or post, make you more eager to buy it if you then see it at the store?

Legend: Yes, definitely — Yes, somewhat — No, not really — No, definitely not — It depends on the influencer

Percentages shown: 9.70%, 36.57%, 29.85%, 10.45%, 13.43%

Question 15 explores the impact of influencers specifically on participants' in-store consumption. Most participants (59.70%) state that seeing a fashion item on an influencer's online content makes them more eager to buy it if they see it at the store. Thus, participants' in-store consumption appears to be significantly affected by influencers. Additionally, 13.43% of these participants reveal that the extent of the impact depends on the influencer who sponsors the fashion item. Here, it is clear how trust plays a major role. The impact of viewing a fashion item on a trusted influencer's video or other online content may differ from seeing the same item on a less reputable influencer's video or content online.

Q16_1 - After I see an influencer's video, story or post, showing some new clothes, I feel the urge go shopping

Values: Strongly disagree 22% | Disagree 28% | Neither agree nor disagree 28% | Agree 16%

Legend: Strongly disagree — Disagree — Neither agree nor disagree — Agree — Strongly agree

Question 16_1 explores the emotional and psychological impact of seeing new fashion items shown and sponsored by influencers. Does seeing influencers buying, receiving, or trying on new outfits make participants eager to go shopping and buy some new clothes? A significant proportion of participants (20.90%) shows a compelling inclination to engage in shopping following exposure to fashion-related content from influencers. While the observed percentage is slightly lower than initially hypothesized, it still represents a substantial and noteworthy response.

Overall, results prove that influencers significantly affect participants' fashion consumption patterns. Data partially validate H6.

BLOCK 5: FASHION SOCIAL NORMS, FAST FASHION & IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

H7) Current social norms discourage individuals from wearing the same outfit multiple times

Q17_3 - I feel uncomfortable wearing the same outfit more than once in social occasions
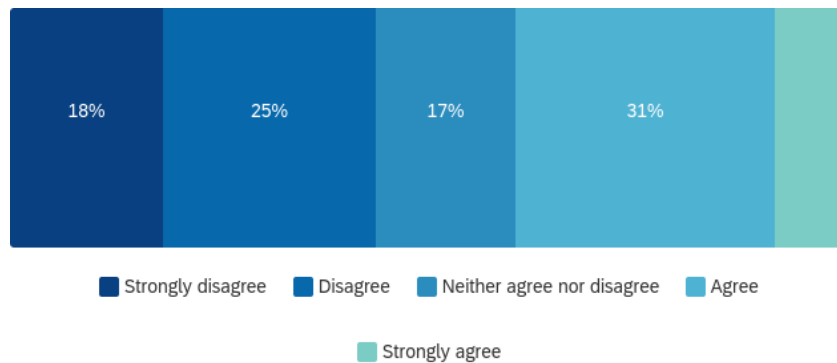
Question 17_3 explores current social norms around fashion. In particular, it investigates whether participants have a social expectation of wearing new outfits for each occasion. 39.68% of participants, as hypothesized, admit to feeling uncomfortable wearing the same outfit more than once for social occasions. Indeed, data substantiate the existence of social expectations among young adults, prompting them to wear, and consequently purchase, new clothes to present themselves favorably in various social situations.
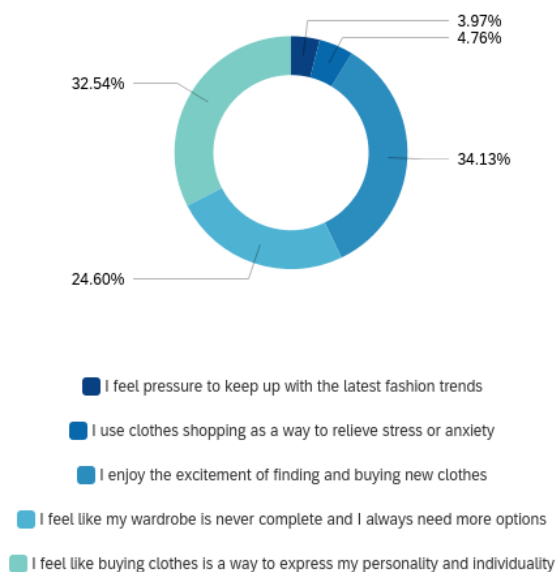
Q18_2 - If people see me wearing the same outfit more than once they will think that I don't have a good style and that I don't know how to create new outfits
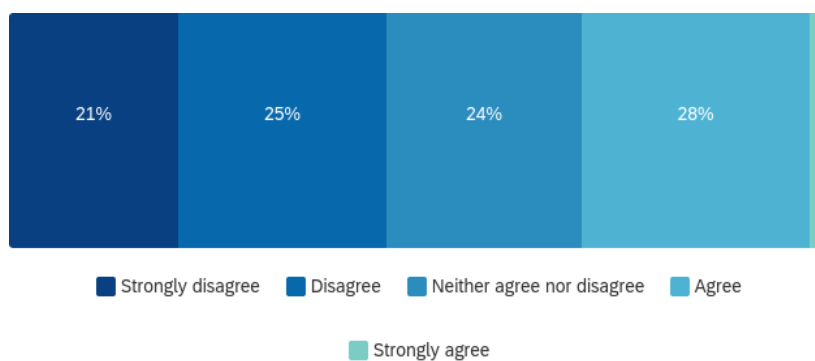
Question 18_2 further investigates fashion social norms. It specifically explores the injunctive norms perceived by participants: what do they expect other people to expect from them? Do they believe other people expect them always to wear different outfits for every new social occasion? And, if this is the case, what do they think will be other people's reaction if they do not conform to their expectations? 30.16% of participants believe that if other people see them wearing the same outfit more than once, they will think that participants lack a good sense of style or the ability to create innovative outfits. If participants do not meet these injunctive expectations, their self-perception may be negatively impacted, consequently decreasing their sense of self-worth. Participants are motivated to meet these expectations to minimize the possibility of feeling diminished. This leads them to purchase new clothing for each unique event or occasion to create fresh and cool outfits. Overall, data validate H7.

H8) Participants buy clothes to express themselves and get a feeling of instant gratification
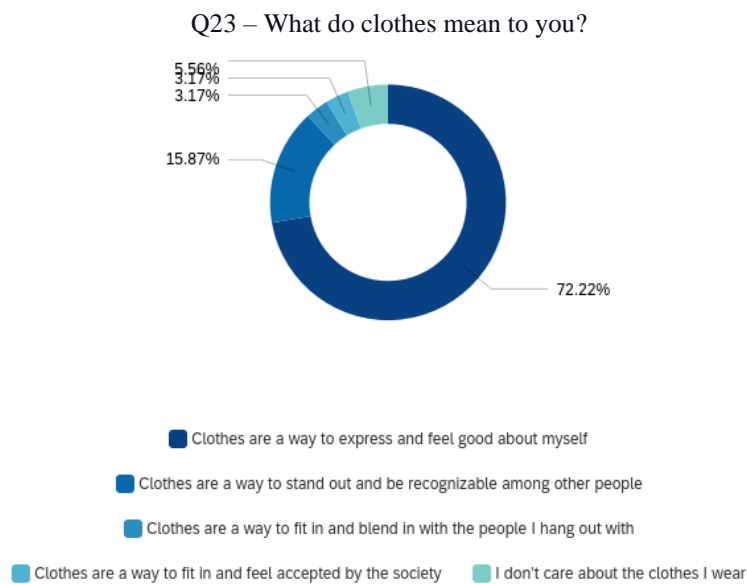
Q20 – What motivates you the most to constantly buy new clothes?

- I feel pressure to keep up with the latest fashion trends
- I use clothes shopping as a way to relieve stress or anxiety
- I enjoy the excitement of finding and buying new clothes
- I feel like my wardrobe is never complete and I always need more options
- I feel like buying clothes is a way to express my personality and individuality

Question 20 delves into the primary motivations driving people to engage in continuous shopping. Three key factors emerge as particularly relevant. Firstly, 34.13% of participants express the thrill they derive from discovering and purchasing new clothes. Prior to making a purchase, individuals experience instant satisfaction by trying on outfits in fitting rooms. This process not only boosts their confidence but also nurtures a favorable self-image. Moreover, individuals frequently visualize themselves wearing the desired item, mentally projecting themselves into an idealized future situation that elicits positive emotions. A second motivating

factor is the need for self-expression and individuality, as mentioned by 32.54% of participants. A significant connection exists between personal identity and consumption, as individuals utilize fashion to construct their unique identities and showcase their distinct styles. Clothes can thus serve as statements of freedom or symbols of uniqueness. Additionally, 24.60% of participants strongly emphasize that their shopping habits are primarily motivated by the belief that their wardrobe is never fully satisfied or complete. They continually feel dissatisfied with their clothing, believing they constantly require more options. This sentiment partially aligns with the normative expectations discussed earlier; there is, indeed, an enduring belief that what individuals currently possess is insufficient; thus, they perpetually seek novelty to present themselves at their best during upcoming social occasions.

H8) Participants buy clothes to express themselves and get a feeling of instant gratification

Q23 – What do clothes mean to you?

5.56%
3.17%
3.17%
15.87%
72.22%

■ Clothes are a way to express and feel good about myself

■ Clothes are a way to stand out and be recognizable among other people

■ Clothes are a way to fit in and blend in with the people I hang out with

■ Clothes are a way to fit in and feel accepted by the society   ■ I don't care about the clothes I wear

Question 23 explores the significance of clothes in terms of the meanings attributed to them by participants. Two key concepts, namely self-expression and self-enhancement, emerge as crucial factors. A substantial majority, 72.22% of participants, view clothes as a powerful medium for expressing themselves and experiencing a positive sense of self. During young adulthood, individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves and actively construct their own identities. Clothes become a valuable tool for self-discovery, self-definition, and outwardly expressing their identity to the world. Sometimes, indeed, clothes can make even better statements than words. On the other hand, 15.87% of participants emphasize how clothes enable them

to stand out from others. Clothes serve as a means to be recognizable and distinctive among their peers, satisfying the need for individuality.

Overall, self-expression and instant gratification are proven by data to be significant in participants' fashion consumption patterns. Clothes play a vital role in both expressing one's identity and achieving a sense of immediate satisfaction. Data thus validate H8.

BLOCK 6: IS THERE A CHANCE FOR REAL CHANGE

H9) Participants feel that fashion needs to change and be more sustainable

Q22_1 - I feel that fashion needs to change towards a more ethical and sustainable future
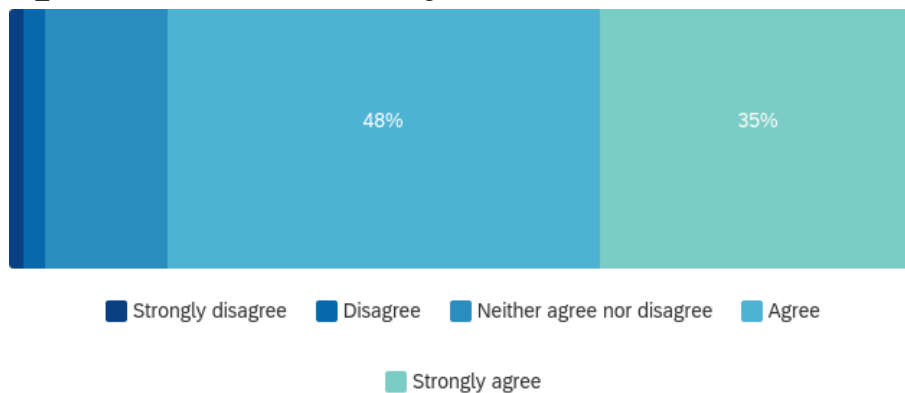
Question 22_1 investigates the sentiment of young adults regarding the necessity for the fashion industry to embrace a more sustainable future. A resounding majority of participants (82.54%) agree with this change. These findings indicate a significant awareness among young adults regarding sustainability and ethical concerns within the fashion industry.
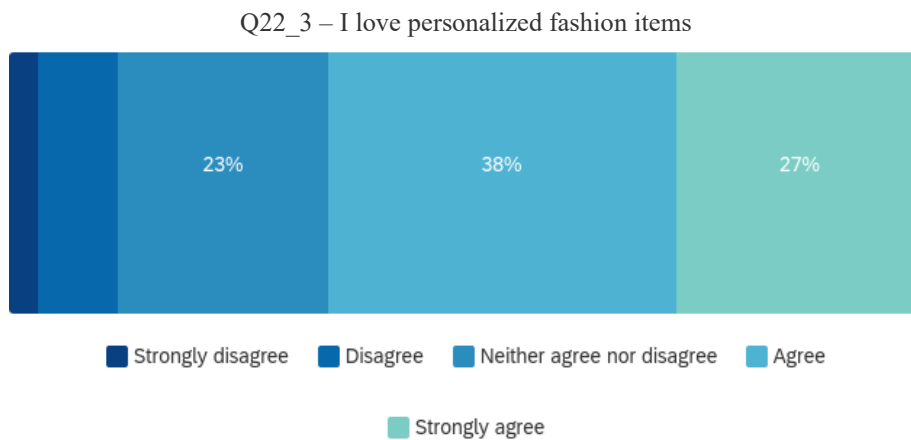
Q22_2 - I would sustain a new era of fashion enhancing better-quality and long-term clothes

| 44% | 44% |

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree

■ Strongly agree
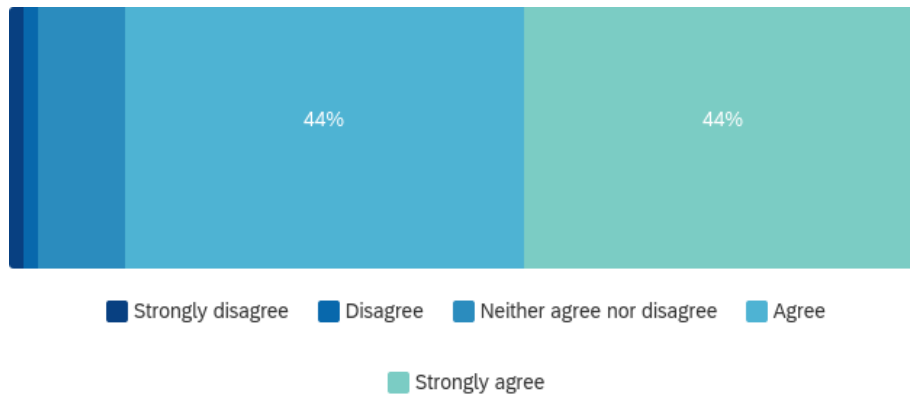
Question 22_2 explores the stance of young adults on the potential sustainability of a new fashion era characterized by improved clothing quality and durability. This time, 87.30% of participants assert their willingness to support such a fashion era if it were to emerge. Notably, when the question is framed in terms of garment quality and longevity, it garners an even stronger agreement than the previous question. Interestingly, while both questions revolve around sustainability, participants appear more receptive to terms like quality and longevity than sustainability and ethics.

Overall, the findings affirm the positive outlook of young adults towards a fashion industry that prioritizes sustainability. Data strongly validate H9.

H10) Participants have a propensity toward personalized items

Q22_3 – I love personalized fashion items

| 23% | 38% | 27% |

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree

■ Strongly agree

Question 22_3 delves into the preferences of young adults regarding personalized fashion items. These unique fashion pieces serve as a powerful means of self-expression and individuality and to create a distinctive

identity. The results indicate that 65.08% of participants strongly favor personalized fashion items, thus confirming hypothesis H10.

5.1.2 Presentation of the Study's Findings and Discussion

BLOCK 3: ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Block 3 aims to understand how young adults perceive their relationships with social media influencers and the extent to which these relationships influence their fashion consumption patterns. We also explore the factors affecting young adults' trust in social media influencers and how this trust impacts their fashion consumption. Additionally, we investigate the influence of envy and the desire for a similar lifestyle as social media influencers on fashion consumption patterns. Based on the findings, it is evident that participants are more inclined to follow influencers on Instagram rather than TikTok. A slight majority of respondents (38.82%) reveal following more than ten influencers on Instagram, whereas 45.86% state that they do not follow any influencers on TikTok. Notably, the data indicates that the majority of influencers followed by the participants share fashion-related content and frequently engage in sponsored collaborations with fashion brands. Data, then, reveal a significant number of young adults having a parasocial relationship with social media influencers. These relationships are found to considerably impact their fashion consumption patterns. Participants indicate following influencers primarily for entertainment (46.04%) or inspiration for their lifestyle choices (33.81%). Then, specifically to fashion influencers, 38.85% of participants declare to follow them to find inspiration for their personal style, 30.22% because fashion-related content entertains them, and 27.34% for reasons other than fashion-related content. Surprisingly only 1.44% affirm relying on fashion influencers to stay updated with the latest fashion trends. These findings reveal intriguing insights: many participants follow influencers not only for inspiration and to stay updated on new trends but also for entertainment purposes. Thus, even those who initially seek entertainment can inadvertently be influenced in their fashion consumption choices, similarly to those who consciously seek fashion inspiration from influencers. Moreover, participants are notably inclined toward influencers who share a similar fashion style. Additionally, a considerable percentage of respondents (37.41%) tend to follow influencers with a fashion style they aspire to attain. This discovery implies that young adults view influencers as aspirational individuals and regard them as fashion role models while seeking a sense of connection and relatability. Moreover, trust emerges as a crucial factor in the influencer-follower relationship. Participants indicate that they are more

likely to trust influencers with unique personalities (25.90%) or trendy lifestyles (27.34%). Trust is found to have a direct impact on participants' fashion consumption patterns, as they are more inclined to purchase products recommended or endorsed by influencers they trust. Envy, instead, does not seem to play a role in the influencer-follower relationship. Many participants do not report experiencing envy towards influencers; however, most participants agree they would like to have the same lifestyle as influencers. This desire to achieve a particular lifestyle still has a significant influence on their fashion consumption patterns, as participants often try to emulate influencers whom they admire by purchasing similar clothing items or brands. Overall, the results of this block suggest that social media influencers strongly influence young adults' fashion consumption patterns. Both influencers' aspirational influence and trustworthiness significantly contribute to the adoption of certain fashion styles and consumption behaviors.

BLOCK 4: IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON FASHION OVERCONSUMPTION

Block 4 examines the extent to which social media influencers impact their followers' online and in-store fashion consumption. It also investigates whether individuals who follow fashion influencers for entertainment purposes are as affected in their fashion consumption patterns as those who follow influencers for inspiration or to stay updated with trends. The findings indicate that social media influencers have a greater impact on in-store than online fashion consumption. Most participants (46.27%) report that seeing fashion items showcased in influencers' content makes them more eager to buy them if they see them at the store. Differently, most participants (82.09%) report not having purchased any fashion item in the last month online, directly from the "swipe up" button. Additionally, 56.72% of participants state they rarely purchase fashion items within 2 to 5 days after seeing them showcased online by social media influencers. 20.90% of participants still agree to feel the urge to go shopping after seeing some new fashion-related content released by some influencer. The persuasive power of influencers is proven to be relevant, leading participants to engage in impulsive buying behaviors and excessive fashion consumption. Interestingly, participants who follow fashion influencers for entertainment purposes are influenced in their fashion consumption patterns, although to a slightly lesser extent than those who follow influencers for inspiration or trend updates. This suggests that even individuals who view fashion influencer content as purely entertaining can still be swayed toward certain fashion choices and consumption behaviors. These findings highlight the power of social media influencers in driving fashion overconsumption, particularly in-store, among young adults. Brands and marketers can leverage this influence

to promote their products, although it raises concerns about the sustainability and ethical implications of such consumption patterns.

BLOCK 5: FASHION SOCIAL NORMS

Block 5 aims to understand existing social norms around fashion and how they influence young adults' consumption behaviors. We also explore the underlying needs that individuals aim to satisfy through overconsumption and examine their perspectives on the frequency of shopping. The results reveal the presence of a social norm that discourages people from wearing the same clothes more than once. Many participants report feeling societal pressure to constantly wear new and different outfits (39.68%), contributing to their overconsumption habits. 30.16% of participants fear being seen as unfashionable and unable to create good outfits in case other people see them wearing the same outfit on multiple social occasions. Here, both descriptive and injunctive norms play a major role: on the one hand, young adults expect their peers to be fashionable, on the other hand, young adults expect their peers to expect them to be fashionable. Due to the fact that currently, people publicly known as fashionable, such as celebrities and influencers, display always wearing new outfits for every occasion, it has been built a link between the concepts of fashion and newness. Consequently, if there are social expectations among young adults of being fashionable, and if being fashionable is associated with wearing brand-new outfits each time, young adults are drawn to buy and wear new outfits each time to conform to the social expectations. Not meeting the expectations could result in self-devaluation and lower confidence. Diversely, fears of being valued less, excluded, or considered poor are not found to be significant among participants. Finally, this norm of novelty and constant change in fashion is proven to drive excessive consumption and contribute to the issue of fast fashion. Regarding the frequency of shopping, there are two dominant perspectives: 48.41% of participants consider the right amount of shopping to be 2-4 times a year (once before each fashion season), while 42.86% state once a month. 22.22% of participants then express the need to reduce their current amount of shopping. The underlying needs that participants aim to satisfy through overconsumption are diverse. For instance, 32.54% of individuals affirm purchasing new clothes to express their personality and individuality. On the other hand, 34.13% of participants highlight the thrill of discovering and acquiring new clothing items. This excitement constitutes an obstacle to changing fashion overconsumption patterns among young adults. Indeed, the feeling of instant gratification that one gets by buying a new fashion piece and wearing it for the first time is difficult to replicate by wearing already-owned clothes. Additionally, 24.60% of respondents mention that the constant desire for

a more extensive wardrobe and a greater variety of options compels them to shop and buy unneeded clothes continually. This last motive is closely linked to the social norms we discussed above.

BLOCK 6: IS THERE A CHANCE FOR REAL CHANGE?

Block 6 explores young adults' perceptions of the need to change fashion consumption patterns toward a more sustainable future. It also analyzes their preferences for personalized fashion items and whether clothes are seen as a means of self-expression or fitting in with societal expectations. Immediately, the findings reveal that most participants like to mix and match already-owned clothes to create new outfits, which constitutes a good starting point. This kind of creativity, indeed, can be a strong motivator leading young adults to reuse their clothes without getting tired of them and feeling the necessity to buy something new. Participants may still be able to get the novelty thrill they need by matching owned pieces in different ways. Results, then, highlight that a significant number of participants (82.54%) recognize the need to change fashion consumption patterns toward sustainability. 87.30% of participants specifically state they would support a new era of fashion based on better-quality and long-term clothes. It is interesting to highlight how the same question analyzing participants' propensity toward a more sustainable future, posed before in terms of sustainability, then in terms of clothes' quality and lifespan, receives different responses. When asked if they would support a more sustainable future of fashion, just 82.54% of participants appeared in favor; instead, 87.30% of participants, 4.76% more than before, supported the idea of better-quality and long-term clothes. The results generally suggest a growing awareness among young adults regarding the need for a shift towards a more conscious and responsible fashion industry. Most participants (65.05%) also prefer personalized fashion items, indicating a desire for uniqueness and individuality. This finding suggests that personalization could be a potential avenue for promoting more sustainable consumption habits by emphasizing the value of customized and long-lasting items over fast fashion trends. Furthermore, clothes are found to serve a dual purpose for young adults. Most participants (72.22%) view clothes as a means of expressing and feeling good about oneself; others (15.87%) instead see them as a way to stand out and be recognizable among other people. Only a few individuals see clothes as a way to fit in with their peers (3.17%) or to feel accepted by society (3.17%). These findings suggest that in order for the fashion industry to change towards a more sustainable and ethical future, brands should leverage young people's need for self-expression, as well as their desire to stand out. The study of social identity construction is thus of crucial importance. The gathered results from this last block will also be used as the empirical basis for the study's intervention proposal to lead the fashion industry towards a more

sustainable path by leveraging the impact of social media influencers and social norms on young adults' consumption patterns. The intervention will then be thoroughly discussed. Overall, the findings of this study shed light on the potential for real change in fashion consumption patterns among young adults. Recognizing the need for sustainability, preferences for personalization, and the dual role of clothes provides opportunities for interventions and initiatives promoting conscious and responsible fashion choices.

5.1.3 Summary of Key Results and Implications

5.1.3.1 Summary of Key Results

Block 3: Aspirational Influence and Parasocial Relationships

- Participants follow more influencers on Instagram than on TikTok.
- Parasocial relationships with influencers have a significant impact on fashion consumption patterns.
- Participants follow influencers for entertainment purposes and to seek inspiration for their own lifestyle choices.
- Trust in influencers influences participants' fashion consumption patterns.
- Envy does not play a significant role, but the desire for a similar lifestyle as influencers does.

Block 4: Impact of Social Media Influencers on Fashion Overconsumption

- Influencers have a greater impact on in-store than online fashion consumption.
- Influencers lead to impulsive buying behaviors and excessive fashion consumption.
- Followers who view influencer content as purely entertaining are still influenced in their fashion choices.
- Influencers' impact on fashion overconsumption raises concerns about its sustainability and ethical implications.

Block 5: Fashion Social Norms

- Social norm discourages wearing the same clothes more than once.
- Societal pressure to constantly wear new outfits contributes to overconsumption.

- Descriptive and injunctive norms drive the expectation of being fashionable and wearing new outfits.
- Fear of being seen as unfashionable and inability to create good outfits influence fashion consumption patterns.
- Fashion norms drive excessive consumption and contribute to the issue of fast fashion.
- The frequency of shopping varies, with some participants expressing the need to reduce their shopping.

Block 6: Is there a chance for real change?
- Participants show a preference for mixing and matching owned clothes to create new outfits.
- There is a significant recognition of the need for a change toward sustainability in fashion consumption patterns.
- Participants support a new era of fashion based on better-quality and long-lasting clothes.
- Personalized fashion items are preferred, indicating a desire for uniqueness and individuality.
- Clothes serve as a means of self-expression and standing out among peers.
- Leveraging self-expression and the desire to stand out can promote more sustainable consumption habits.

5.1.3.2 Implications

- Social media influencers have a strong influence on young adults' fashion consumption patterns. Brands and marketers can leverage this influence, but it raises concerns about sustainability and ethics.
- Societal norms and expectations drive excessive consumption and contribute to fast fashion. Addressing these norms and promoting alternative perspectives can lead to more sustainable choices.
- Young adults value personalization and uniqueness. Thus, promoting customization and long-lasting items can encourage responsible fashion consumption.
- Recognizing the desire for self-expression and the need to stand out can be key in driving sustainable changes in the fashion industry.
- Interventions and initiatives should focus on conscious and responsible fashion choices, leveraging the impact of social media influencers and social norms on young adults' consumption patterns.

The key results highlighted in this study demonstrate influencers' role in shaping participants' fashion choices, consumption patterns, and self-perception. These findings provide valuable insights for businesses aiming to

engage effectively with their target audience and capitalize on the power of influencer marketing in the fashion industry. Moreover, the study sheds light on the impact of social norms and aspirations on consumer behavior, emphasizing the need for sustainable fashion practices in response to the prevalent fast-fashion tendencies. Moreover, the study highlights the significance of self-expression, sustainability, and personalization in participants' fashion consumption patterns. This insight provides an opportunity for brands to align their strategies with these motivations, promoting sustainability, offering unique and personalized fashion options, and emphasizing the immediate gratification and self-expressive aspects of their products. By embracing these principles, brands can effectively cater to young adult consumers' evolving preferences and values while fostering a more sustainable future for the fashion industry. With a deep understanding of the influential power of influencers and the importance of self-expression, sustainability, and personalization, brands can reshape their approaches to fashion in a way that resonates with consumers' desires for inspiration, individuality, and ethical consumption. By integrating sustainability into their practices and emphasizing the value of quality over quantity, brands can steer the industry towards a more responsible and environmentally friendly path. These results provide a roadmap for brands to navigate the complex fashion landscape, paving the way for a sustainable and prosperous future.

5.2 FUTURE IN FASHION CONSUMPTION: LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' IMPACT TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE FASHION INDUSTRY

According to the data, social media influencers significantly impact young adults' attitudes and fashion consumption patterns. Based on an influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness, and relatedness, followers are, consciously or unconsciously, driven to mimic influencers' fashion consumption patterns.

Other than influencing the individual, social media influencers contribute to shaping fashion social norms. They have the power to dictate what is acceptable and what is not, what is favorably and negatively perceived by society. Fashion brands and social media influencers have created a fashion environment that has favored fast fashion's success. By being bombarded with new collections every week, tons of video hauls sponsoring new items and current trends, young adults have developed a need for overconsumption, a need to continuously update their wardrobe in order to fit in the society's standards.

Moreover, young adults see social media influencers as role models; thus, they tend to mimic influencers' fashion consumption patterns deluding themselves that they will finally belong to their aspirational group and enhance both their social identity and lifestyle. Most of the time, influencers' fashion consumption patterns mislead young adults: influencers show to possess a huge amount of clothes and accessories; however, they often derive from gifts or collaboration with brands. Individuals who aim to reach the influencers' reference group may strive to achieve the same amount of new fashion items that influencers have, developing serious mental and financial problems.

However, fashion overconsumption does not harm just young adult consumers: it has, in fact, severe consequences on the whole ecosystem, from the environment to textile workers. Still, it is not too late to call for a real change within the fashion industry. Awareness about sustainability issues has recently started to spread, particularly among young adults. Fashion consumers have started demanding a greater effort from fashion brands within the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Fashion brands have acted accordingly to consumers' demands: some have invested in reducing their carbon footprints, others in improving working conditions, and others in changing harmful manufacturing processes. Yet, some brands are neither transparent nor sincere about their CSR activities; it is indeed not uncommon to encounter cases of greenwashing, in which brands claim and sponsor sustainable practices that do not really exist to attract environmentally-conscious consumers. Greenwashing is also favored by the fact that the definition of sustainability is still really vague, and that has still not been implemented a clear legal and monitoring system that regulates CSR.

Moreover, many consumers who claim to prefer environmentally-conscious brands end up buying from fast fashion brands anyways. In other words, consumers' actual fashion consumption patterns tend to significantly differ from both their attitudes toward sustainable fashion and their purchase intentions. And why is that? Simply the switching costs are too high. Sustainable shopping is both time and money-consuming. Fast fashion brands offer limitless choices at very affordable prices. They offer various style options for every occasion, from casual fits to work clothes or night outfits. People can find whatever they need just by going to one shop, saving a considerable amount of time. Fast fashion brands have tons of shops in strategic locations; they also have fast and cheap delivery services. On top of that, clothes there sell at a very low price; thus, individuals can purchase multiple items receiving a huge sense of gratification every time. Furthermore, in this way, they can keep pace with the fast-changing trends, adopt their aspirational reference group (i.e., influencers) fashion consumption patterns and be sure to fit society's standards. Switching to sustainable brands would consume more time: individuals may have to drive a long way to reach a particular shop or stop by multiple shops searching for different looks. Switching to sustainable brands would also result in being able to purchase, with

the same budget, fewer items. With the current fashion social norms, young people, most of the time, cannot afford to lose even one trend. They do not want to be exposed to social exclusion. They do not want to be associated with the out (of fashion) group. The pressure to conform to social norms and the desire to imitate aspirational reference group models currently represent the strongest promotors of the fast fashion industry. Nonetheless, by understanding the dynamics between social media influencers, brands, and consumers, it is still possible to capitalize on the impact of social norms and aspirational reference groups to nudge society toward a more sustainable and ethical fashion industry. It is now the time for a change since the new generations of consumers are deliberately asking for it. Influencers here could play a crucial role in reshaping the social norms around fashion. They could re-establish the concepts of honor and shame within fashion consumption practices: what is now considered honorable, such as overconsuming and constantly updating one's wardrobe, could slowly convert to be something shameful; vice versa, buying less and reutilizing the same clothes multiple times, which is now considered a motive for shame, could then be converted into an honorable and respected behavior. In the last block of the research study illustrated above, some questions are asked to gather insight on whether young adults would favorably receive a similar intervention.

From the gathered data, participants express both the need for the fashion industry to change and a propensity to a future of better-quality and long-term clothes. Participants also show a relevant appreciation for personalized items. These results show a big potential for change and constitute the empirical basis for this policy proposition. By capitalizing on the impact of social media influencers and social norms on young adults' fashion consumption patterns, fashion brands and influencers could work together to create a new fashion scene. A new trend could be launched based on the ancient Greek proverb "less is more." The whole fashion competition could take a major turn. Fashion brands could shift their competitive focus from quantity and speed to quality. By doing so, they could establish a new competition standard in the industry.

In order to lay the foundations for a sustainable future in the fashion industry, the last step is to understand the profound motives which drive young people to fashion consumption. For years fast fashion has capitalized on fast-changing trends, instilling in young people the need to keep up and fit society's standards. However, is it really to "blend in with others" the reason why young adults purchase clothes? From this research, it emerges that the main goals behind the consumption of clothes are to express oneself and to stand out from the crowd. So, why do we not capitalize on that? United States, Italy, France, and Germany are all individualistic countries: people there feel the urge to affirm and enhance themselves in society, especially during the critical years of young adulthood. Social learning, social identity, social comparison, and aspirational reference groups theories all show that behind the human need to belong, there is a stronger need to emerge. By understanding this very concept, the path toward fashion sustainability is paved. Individualization calls for better quality.

Brands should focus on higher-quality, thus, also longer-term clothes. This does not regard luxury brands; the intervention calls for brands affordable to everyone. Brands that still focus on quantity and speed instead of focusing on quality and the environment. The need for individualization, then, should be satisfied by personalizing the fashion items in many ways. The purchased piece would be a sign of distinctiveness, of identification. The brands should sell complementary accessories, which consumers may use to reinvent already-owned pieces whenever they get tired of them. Influencers here would play a key role by launching the new trend of mixing and matching already-owned items to make new and fashionable outfits. A new type of content could be "How many outfits can you make with one pair of jeans?". Based on social learning and aspirational reference groups theories, followers would probably replicate influencers' behavior. Here, creativity and individualization would be the major motivators. Social networks would be the perfect channel to spread this new concept of fashion, durable, quality-based, self-enhancing, and sustainable.

Social expectations on fashion consumption could shift, and this would certainly have an impact on young adults' behavior. If one does not expect others to expect him/her to always wear new outfits and be up-to-date with the current trends, he/she may not feel the urge to purchase every new fashion item. If one, instead, expects others to expect him/her to wear his/her distinctive piece(s) every time as a sign of recognition and identity, he/she may do so. Fashion is a social phenomenon, and people never have to forget the impact that social dynamics have on it.

Given the need to change the industry, there should be extensive research on people's perception of fashion social norms and how this affects their behaviors. Additionally, the role of social media influencers in shaping society's fashion expectations should be further examined. Finally, a thorough study exploring people's social identities and their connections with fashion consumption should be conducted. Research in this field has been developed only in the context of luxury brands; however, it should also be expanded to diffusion, bridge, and mass-market brands to give rise to real change.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND GAP FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the nature of the research and the sample's constraints, this study entails several limitations:

Sampling Bias: The survey data might not be representative of the larger population, as it mainly includes Italian people who have access to social media platforms or are interested in fashion. Therefore, the study's results may not generalize to the broader population.

Social Desirability Bias: Respondents may answer the survey questions in a socially desirable manner rather than providing honest answers. This could affect the accuracy of the results, as participants may be reluctant to admit certain behaviors or attitudes.

Recall Bias: The respondents' memory of their purchasing behavior and habits may not be accurate, as they may not remember the exact number of times they purchased fashion items, either online or in-store. This could potentially impact the reliability of the data collected.

Self-Report Bias: Self-reported data may not always be reliable, as respondents may provide inaccurate information due to misunderstandings or lack of knowledge.

Limited Scope: The study focuses solely on the impact of social media influencers on fashion overconsumption. Other factors such as personal income, lifestyle, or cultural norms could also play a role in influencing fashion consumption habits; thus, they should be further examined.

Causality: The survey data may indicate a correlation between social media influencers and fashion overconsumption, but they cannot establish a causal relationship. Other factors that are not captured in the study design may be at play.

Sample size: The sample size may be too small to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic, and the results may not be statistically significant.

First, this study should be scaled to a larger sample. Then, future research could investigate the effectiveness of different interventions aimed at promoting sustainable and ethical fashion consumption patterns among young adults based on the insights gathered in this study. They could include testing the impact of different messaging strategies or using social media influencers to promote sustainable fashion brands or products. Additionally, future research could explore the role of other factors, such as personal values, cultural norms, and social comparison, in shaping young adults' fashion consumption patterns and attitudes toward sustainability. Finally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to track changes in young adults' fashion consumption patterns and attitudes in response to different interventions or changes in the fashion industry.

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APPENDIX: THE SURVEY

Survey Report

Impact of Social Media Influencers on Fashion Consumption

May 29th 2023, 1:27 pm CEST

Q1 - To which gender identity do you most identify?
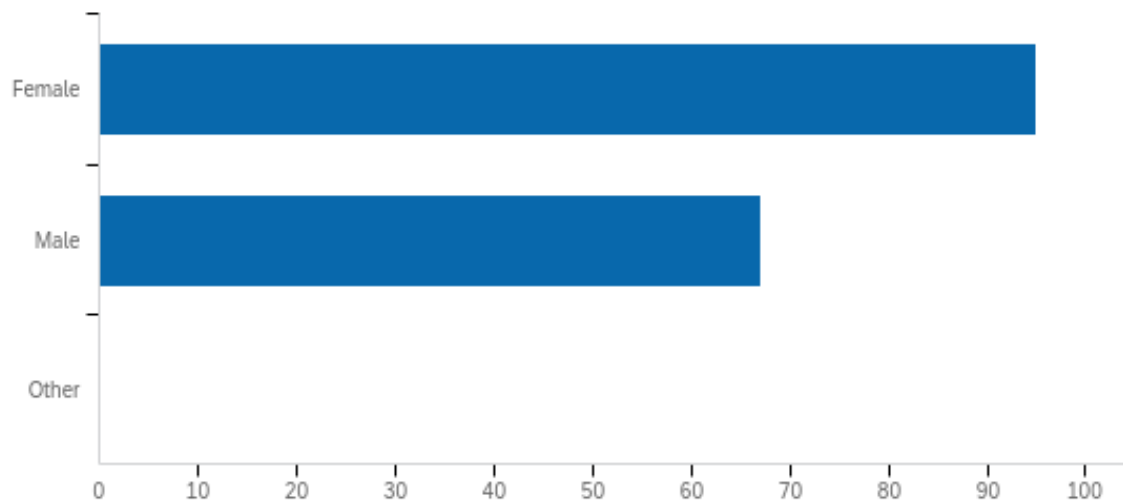
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	To which gender identity do you most identify?	1.00	2.00	1.41	0.49	0.24	162

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Female	58.64%	95
2	Male	41.36%	67
3	Other	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	162

Q2 - How old are you?

How old are you?
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Q3 - How many influencers do you follow on Instagram?
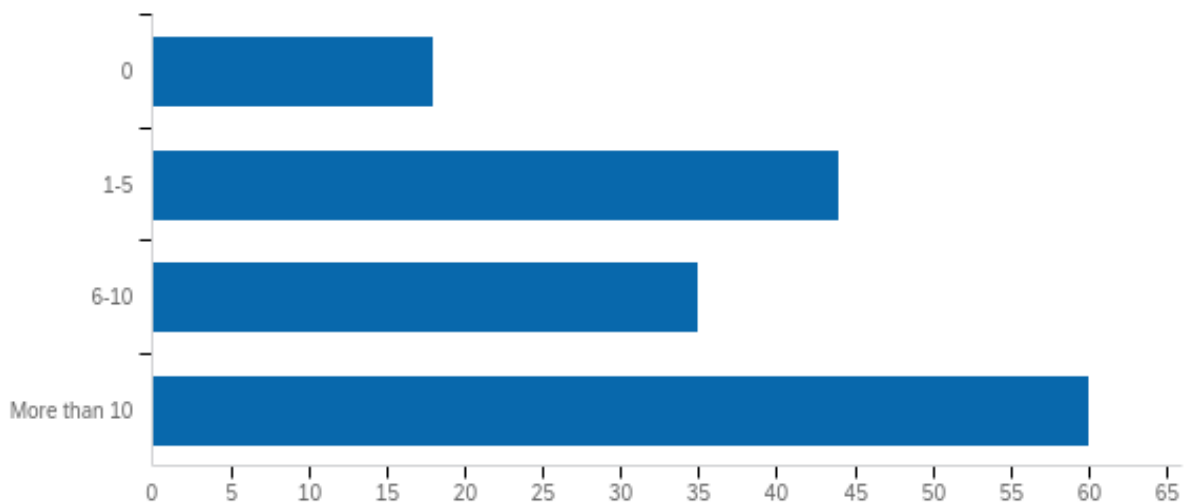
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How many influencers do you follow on Instagram?	1.00	4.00	2.87	1.05	1.10	157

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0	11.46%	18
2	1-5	28.03%	44
3	6-10	22.29%	35
4	More than 10	38.22%	60
	Total	100%	157

Q4 - How many influencers do you follow on Tik Tok?
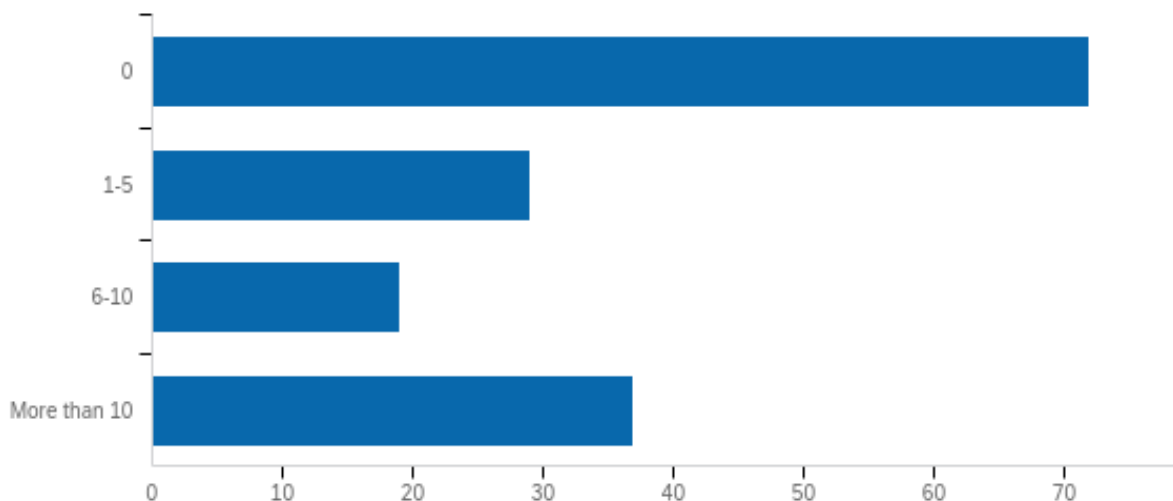
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How many influencers do you follow on Tik Tok?	1.00	4.00	2.13	1.23	1.50	157

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0	45.86%	72
2	1-5	18.47%	29
3	6-10	12.10%	19
4	More than 10	23.57%	37
	Total	100%	157

Q5 - How many of the influencers you follow share fashion content (such as hauls, unboxing or "get ready with me" videos)?
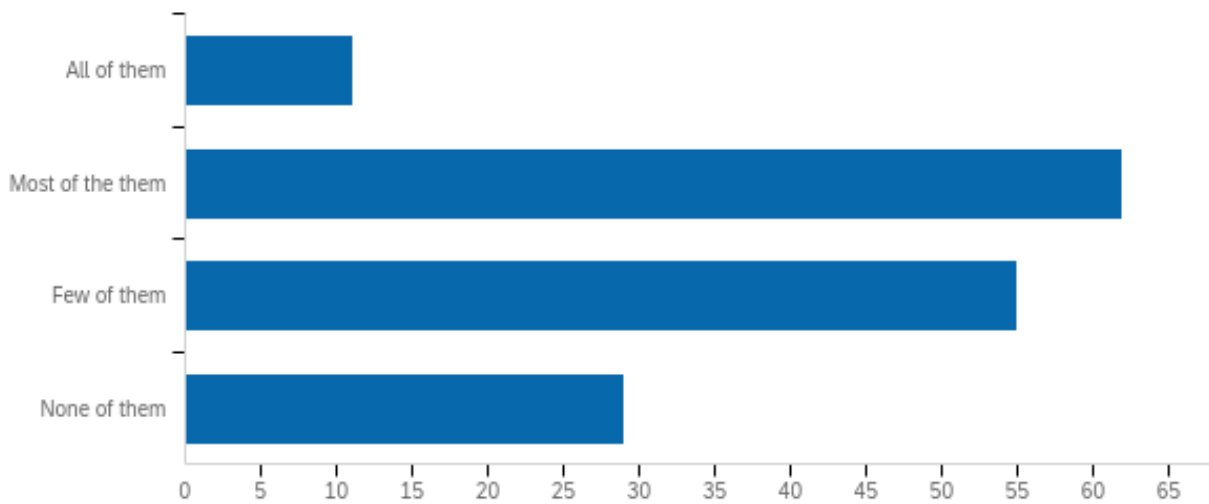
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How many of the influencers you follow share fashion content (such as hauls, unboxing or "get ready with me" videos)?	1.00	4.00	2.65	0.86	0.74	157

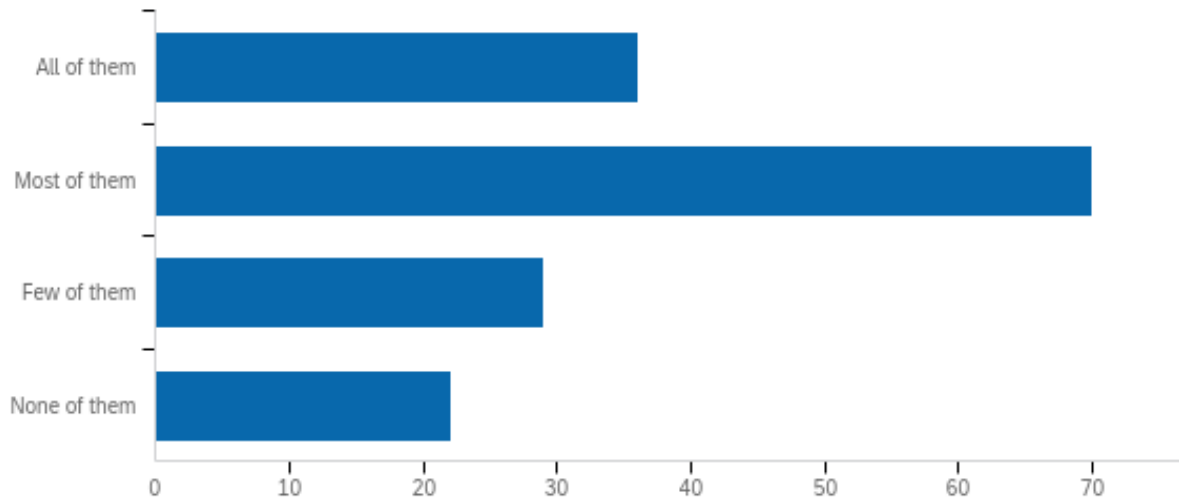| #	Answer	%	Count
1	All of them	7.01%	11
2	Most of the them	39.49%	62
3	Few of them	35.03%	55
4	None of them	18.47%	29
	Total	100%	157

Q6 - How many of the influencers you follow, who share fashion content, engage in paid collaborations with fashion brands (i.e. they share content and publicly say that it is an advertising, you may find written the hashtag #adv)?

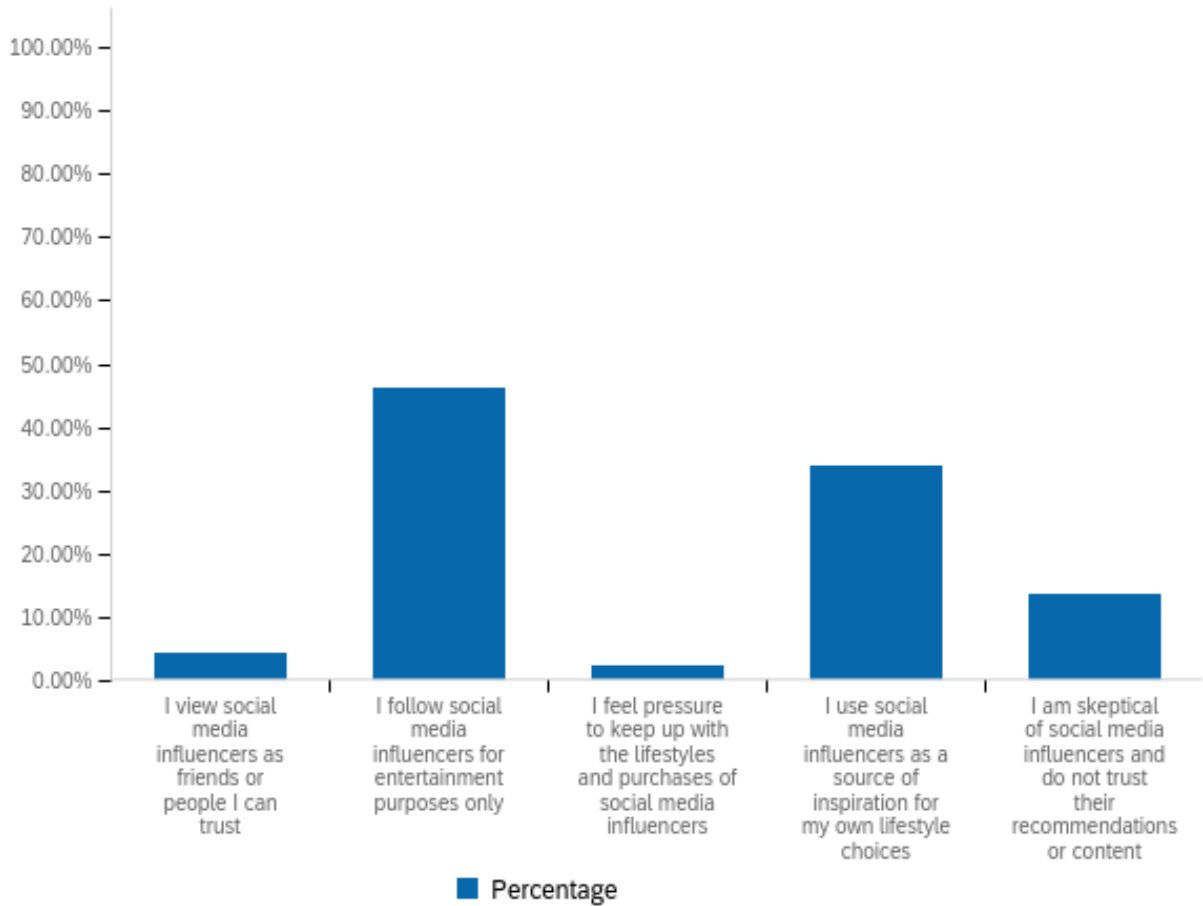| #	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How many of the influencers you follow, who share fashion content, engage in paid collaborations with fashion brands (i.e. they share content and publicly say that it is an advertising, you may find written the hashtag #adv)?	1.00	4.00	2.24	0.96	0.92	157

#	Answer	%	Count
1	All of them	22.93%	36
2	Most of them	44.59%	70
3	Few of them	18.47%	29
4	None of them	14.01%	22
	Total	100%	157

Q7 - How do you view your relationship with social media influencers?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How do you view your relationship with social media influencers?	1.00	5.00	3.06	1.23	1.51	139

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I view social media influencers as friends or people I can trust	4.32%	6
2	I follow social media influencers for entertainment purposes only	46.04%	64
3	I feel pressure to keep up with the lifestyles and purchases of social media influencers	2.16%	3
4	I use social media influencers as a source of inspiration for my own lifestyle choices	33.81%	47

| 5 | I am skeptical of social media influencers and do not trust their recommendations or content | 13.67% | 19 |
| | Total | 100% | 139 |

Q8 - Specifically, why do you follow fashion influencers on social media?
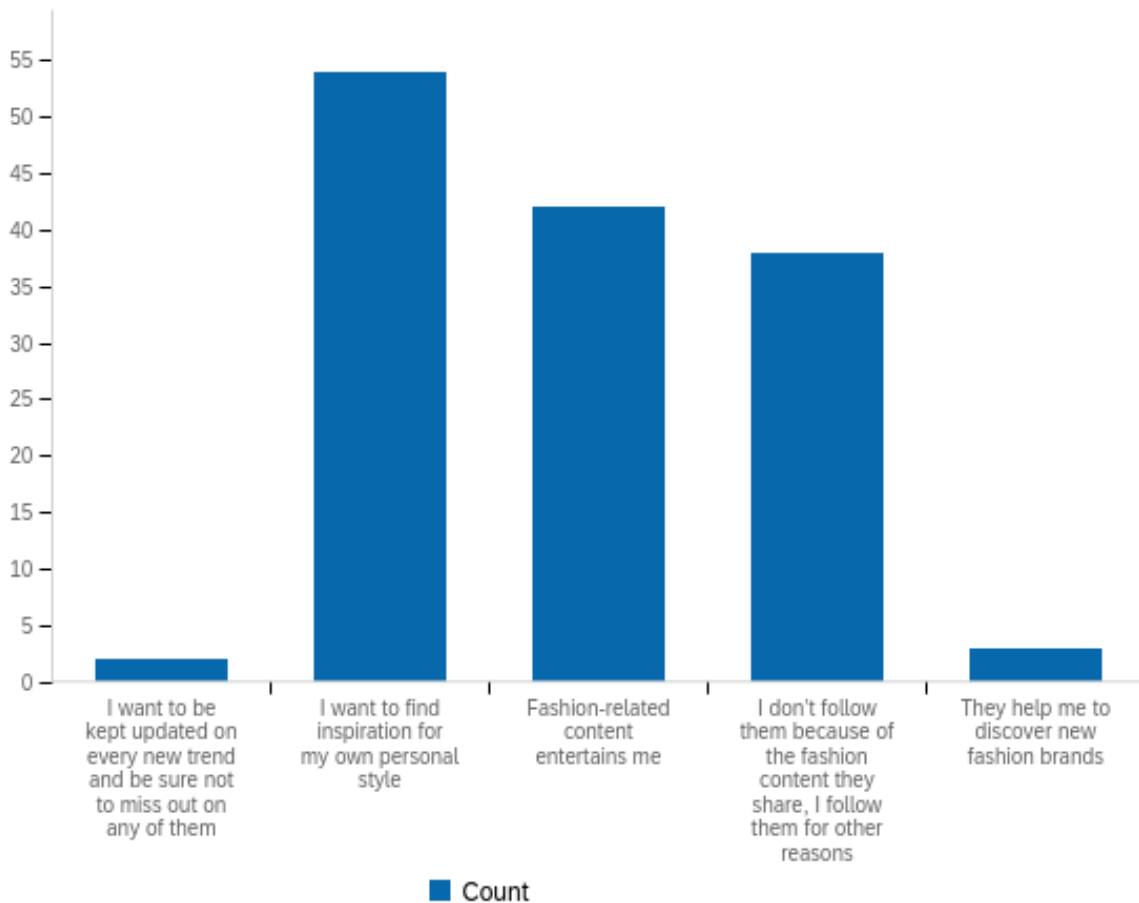
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Specifically, why do you follow fashion influencers on social media?	1.00	5.00	2.90	0.89	0.80	139

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I want to be kept updated on every new trend and be sure not to miss out on any of them	1.44%	2
2	I want to find inspiration for my own personal style	38.85%	54
3	Fashion-related content entertains me	30.22%	42

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4	I don't follow them because of the fashion content they share, I follow them for other reasons	27.34%	38
5	They help me to discover new fashion brands	2.16%	3
	Total	100%	139

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Q9 - What is the thing that makes you trust the most an influencer and, consequently, follow his/her lead in fashion consumption?
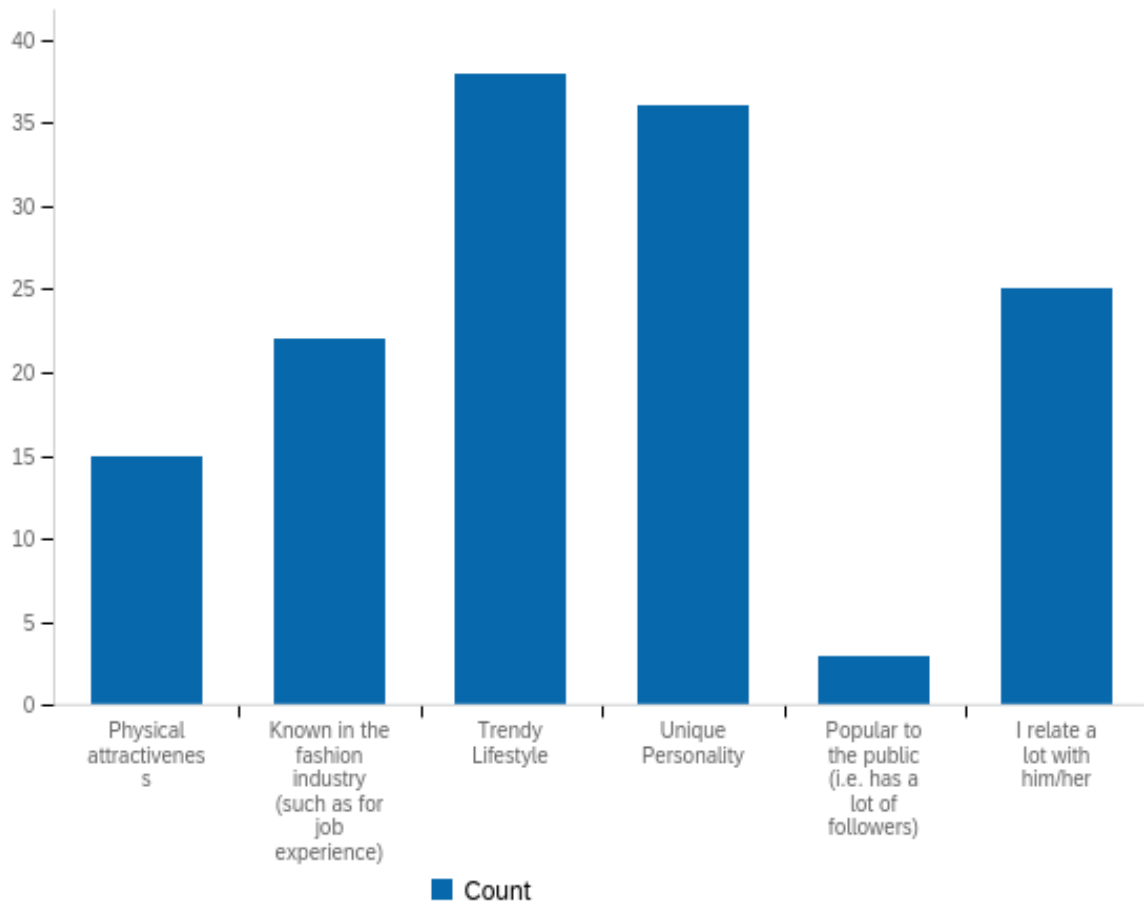
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is the thing that makes you trust the most an influencer and, consequently, follow his/her lead in fashion consumption?	1.00	6.00	3.47	1.53	2.34	139

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Physical attractiveness	10.79%	15
2	Known in the fashion industry (such as for job experience)	15.83%	22
3	Trendy Lifestyle	27.34%	38

4	Unique Personality	25.90%	36
5	Popular to the public (i.e. has a lot of followers)	2.16%	3
6	I relate a lot with him/her	17.99%	25
	Total	100%	139

Q10 - Do the influencers you follow have a fashion style similar to yours?
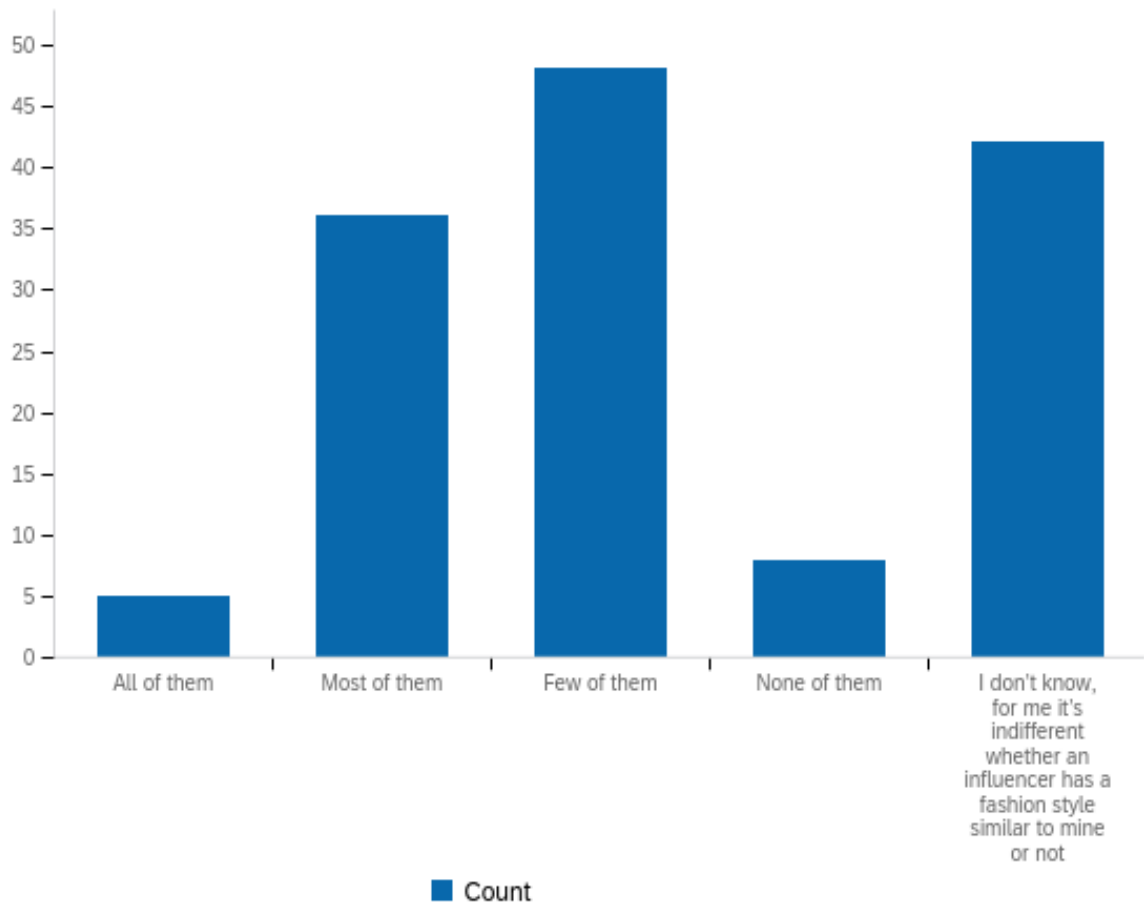
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do the influencers you follow have a fashion style similar to yours?	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.25	1.56	139

#	Answer	%	Count
1	All of them	3.60%	5
2	Most of them	25.90%	36
3	Few of them	34.53%	48
4	None of them	5.76%	8

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| 5 | I don't know, for me it's indifferent whether an influencer has a fashion style similar to mine or not | 30.22% | 42 |
| | Total | 100% | 139 |

Q11 - Do the influencers you follow have a fashion style that you aspire to have?
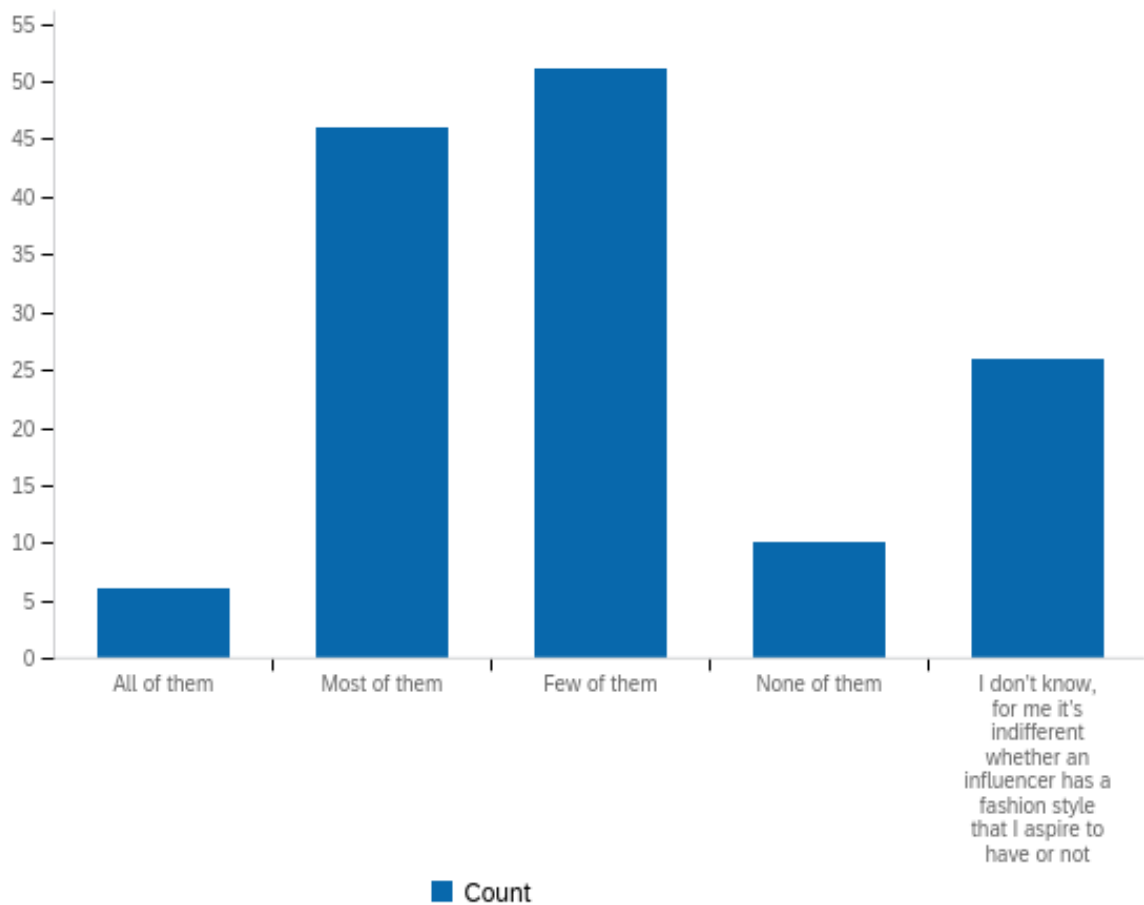
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do the influencers you follow have a fashion style that you aspire to have?	1.00	5.00	3.03	1.15	1.32	139

#	Answer	%	Count
1	All of them	4.32%	6
2	Most of them	33.09%	46
3	Few of them	36.69%	51
4	None of them	7.19%	10
5	I don't know, for me it's indifferent whether an influencer has a fashion style that I aspire to have or not	18.71%	26

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Q12 - Rate your level of agreement with each statement
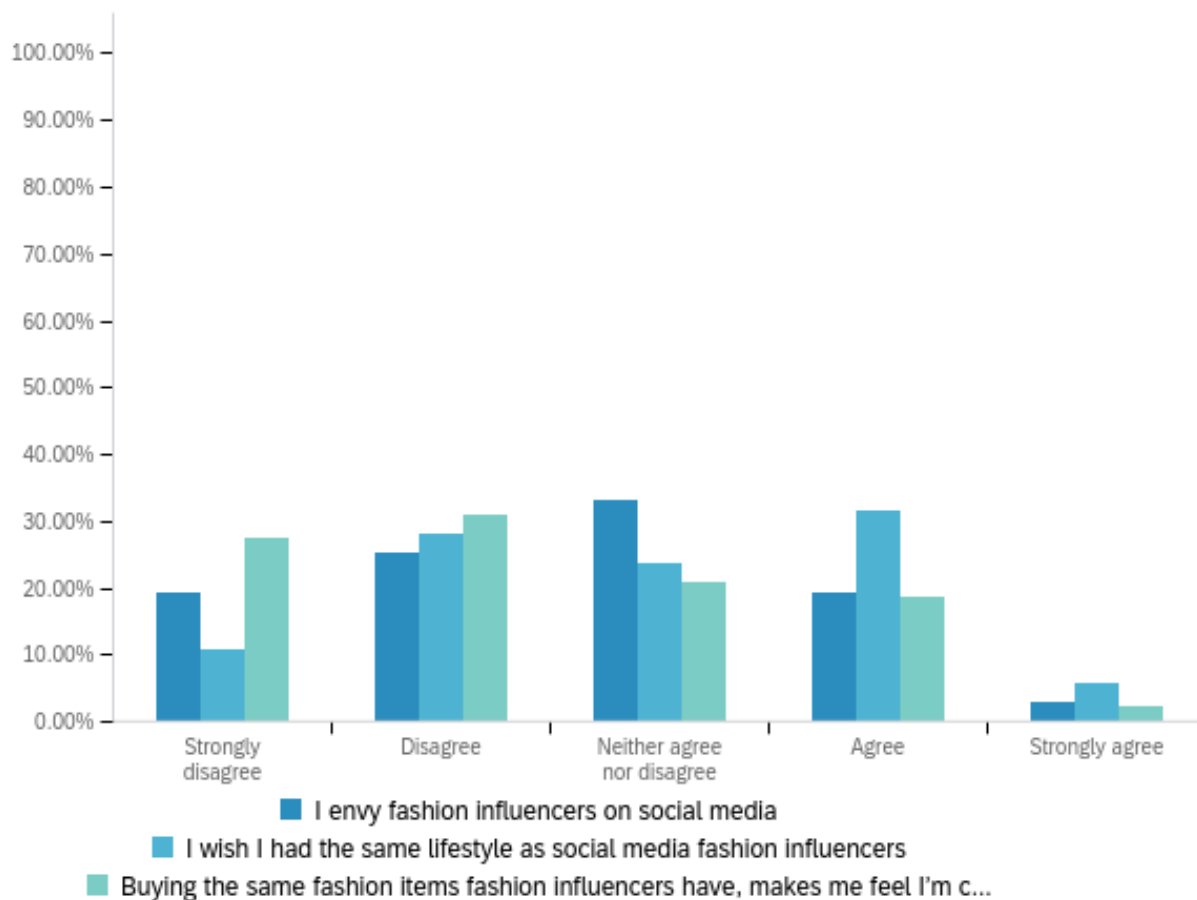
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I envy fashion influencers on social media	1.00	5.00	2.61	1.09	1.19	139
2	I wish I had the same lifestyle as social media fashion influencers	1.00	5.00	2.94	1.12	1.25	139
3	Buying the same fashion items fashion influencers have, makes me feel I'm closer to achieving my ideal lifestyle	1.00	5.00	2.37	1.13	1.28	139

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	I envy fashion influencers on social media	19.42%	27	25.18%	35	33.09%	46	19.42%	27	2.88%	4	139
2	I wish I had the same lifestyle as social media fashion influencers	10.79%	15	28.06%	39	23.74%	33	31.65%	44	5.76%	8	139
3	Buying the same fashion items fashion influencers have, makes me feel I'm closer to achieving my ideal lifestyle	27.34%	38	30.94%	43	20.86%	29	18.71%	26	2.16%	3	139

Q13 - How often do you purchase a fashion item you previously saw from an influencer's video, story or post, within 2 to 5 days after having seen it?
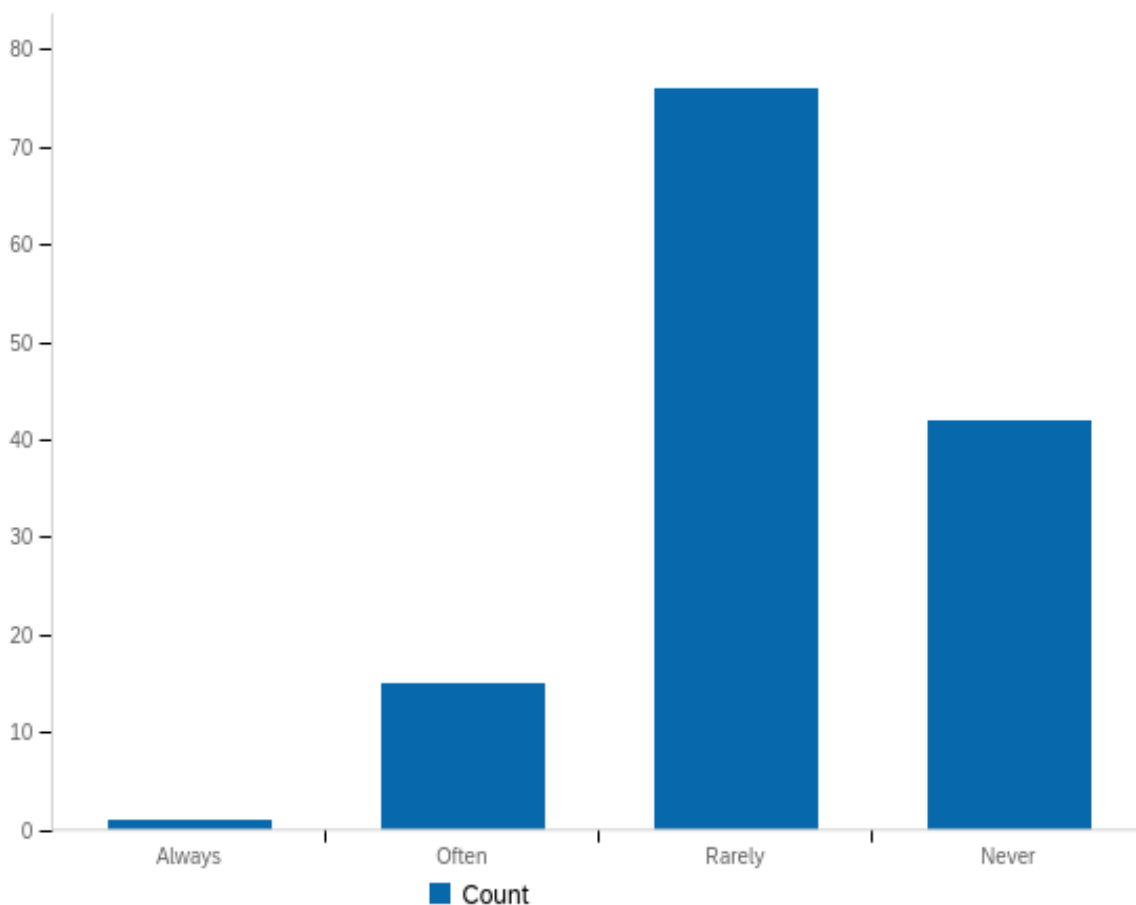
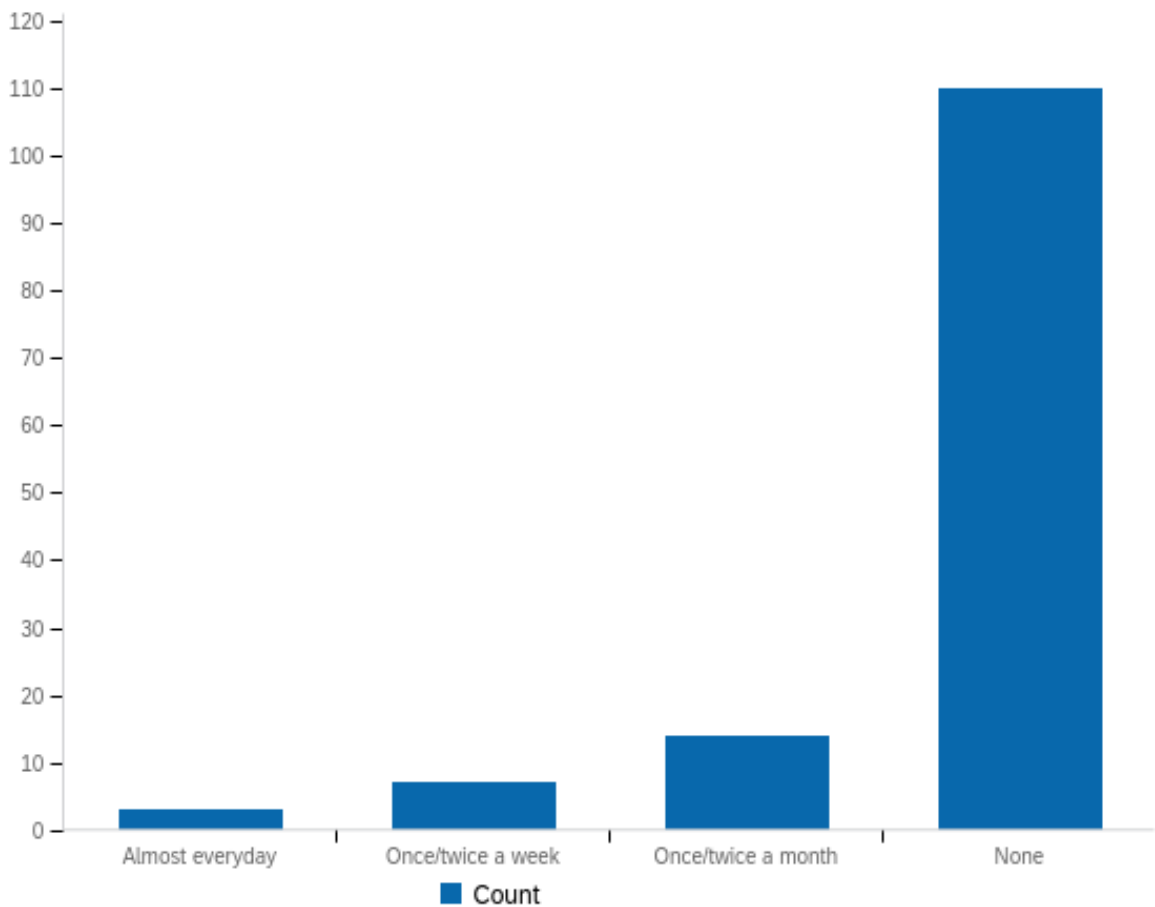| #	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How often do you purchase a fashion item you previously saw from an influencer's video, story or post, within 2 to 5 days after having seen it?	1.00	4.00	3.19	0.65	0.42	134

#	Answer	%	Count
3	Rarely	56.72%	76
2	Often	11.19%	15
4	Never	31.34%	42

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1	Always	0.75%	1
	Total	100%	134

Q14 - In this month, how many times have you purchased a fashion item directly from a fashion influencer's video, story or post, by pressing the "swipe up" button?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	In this month, how many times have you purchased a fashion item directly from a fashion influencer's video, story or post, by pressing the "swipe up" button?	1.00	4.00	3.72	0.66	0.44	134

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Almost everyday	2.24%	3
2	Once/twice a week	5.22%	7
3	Once/twice a month	10.45%	14

4	None	82.09%	110
	Total	100%	134

Q15 - Does seeing a fashion item on an influencer's video, story or post, make you more eager to buy it if you then see it at the store?
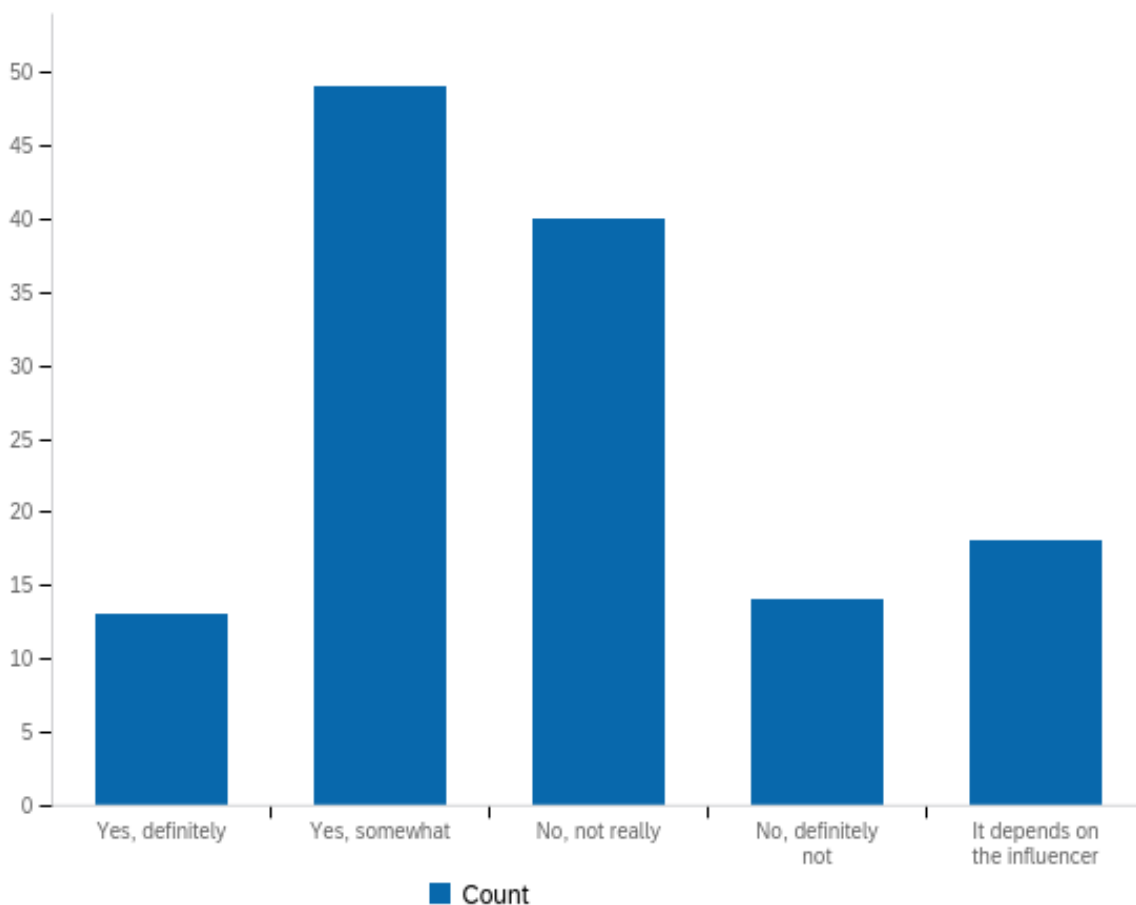
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Does seeing a fashion item on an influencer's video, story or post, make you more eager to buy it if you then see it at the store?	1.00	5.00	2.81	1.17	1.36	134

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, definitely	9.70%	13
2	Yes, somewhat	36.57%	49
3	No, not really	29.85%	40

4	No, definitely not	10.45%	14
5	It depends on the influencer	13.43%	18
	Total	100%	134

Q16 - Rate your level of agreement with each statement
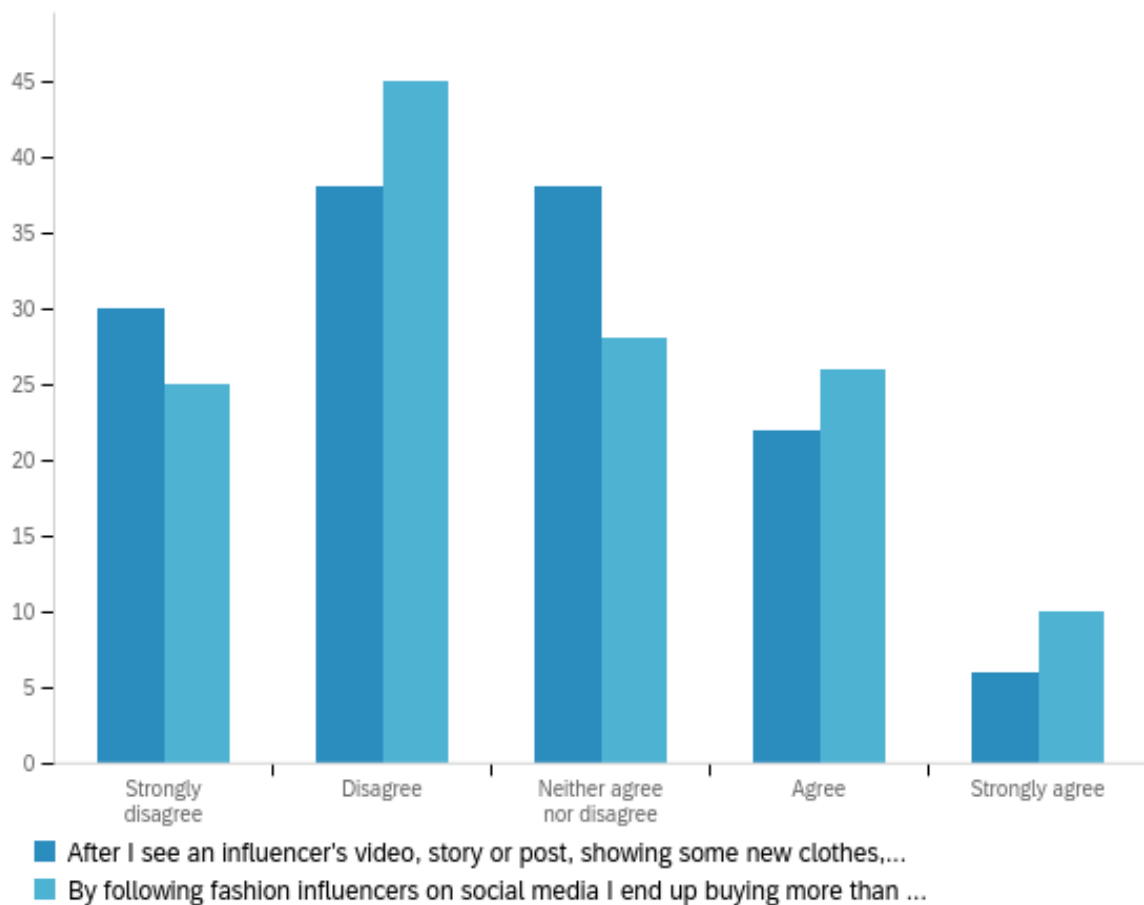
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	After I see an influencer's video, story or post, showing some new clothes, I feel the urge go shopping	1.00	5.00	2.52	1.14	1.29	134
2	By following fashion influencers on social media I end up buying more than I would if I did not follow any of them	1.00	5.00	2.63	1.20	1.44	134

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	After I see an influencer's video, story or post, showing some new clothes, I	22.39%	30	28.36%	38	28.36%	38	16.42%	22	4.48%	6	134

	feel the urge go shopping									131
2	By following fashion influencers on social media I end up buying more than I would if I did not follow any of them	18.66%	25	33.58%	45	20.90%	28	19.40%	26	7.46%	10	134

Q17 - Rate your level of agreement with each statament
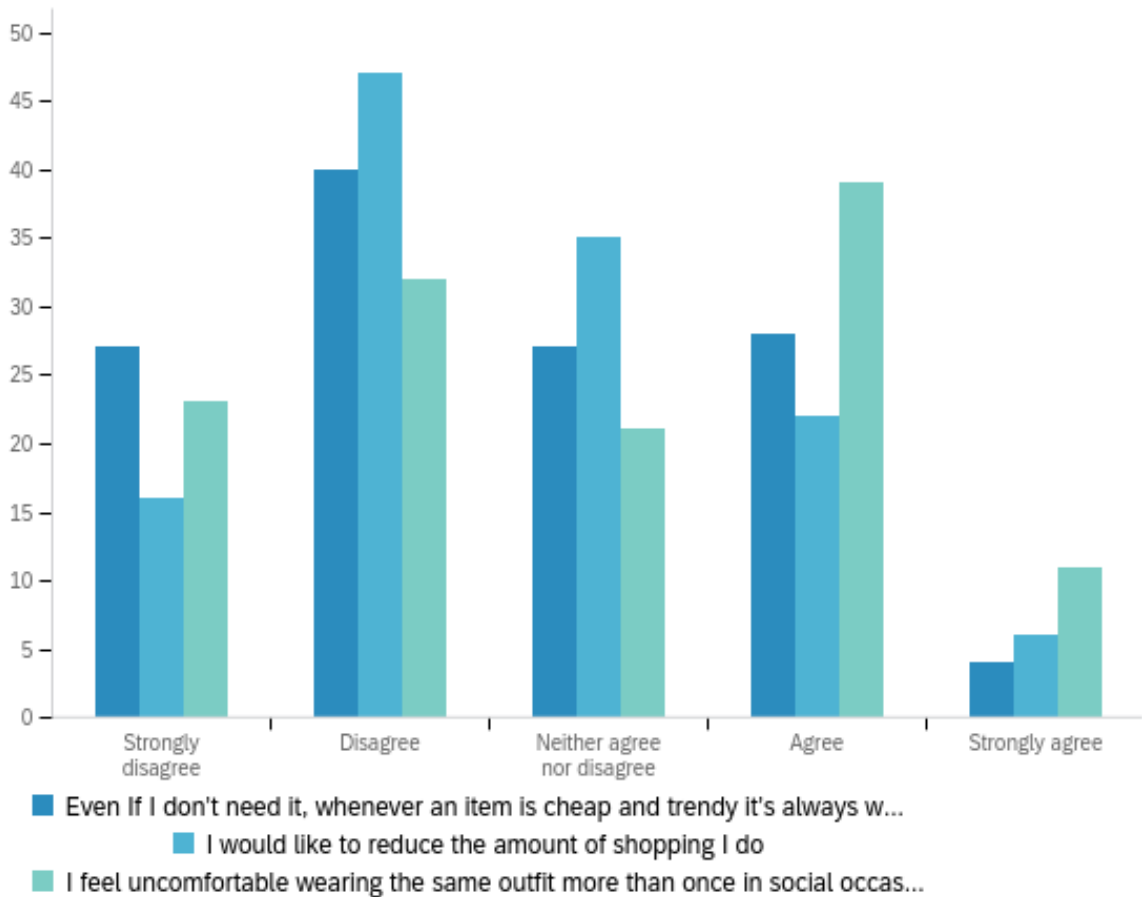
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Even If I don't need it, whenever an item is cheap and trendy it's always worth buying	1.00	5.00	2.54	1.15	1.31	126
2	I would like to reduce the amount of shopping I do	1.00	5.00	2.64	1.06	1.12	126
3	I feel uncomfortable wearing the same outfit more than once in social occasions	1.00	5.00	2.87	1.27	1.62	126

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	Even If I don't need it, whenever an item is cheap and trendy it's always worth buying	21.43%	27	31.75%	40	21.43%	27	22.22%	28	3.17%	4	126

| #											
2	I would like to reduce the amount of shopping I do	12.70%	16	37.30%	47	27.78%	35	17.46%	22	4.76%	6	126
3	I feel uncomfortable wearing the same outfit more than once in social occasions	18.25%	23	25.40%	32	16.67%	21	30.95%	39	8.73%	11	126

Q18 - Rate your level of agreement with each statement: If people see me wearing the same outfit more than once they will...

think I don't have enough financial resources to buy new clothes ■
think that I don't have a good style and that I don't know how to create ne... ■ value me less ■ exclude me ■
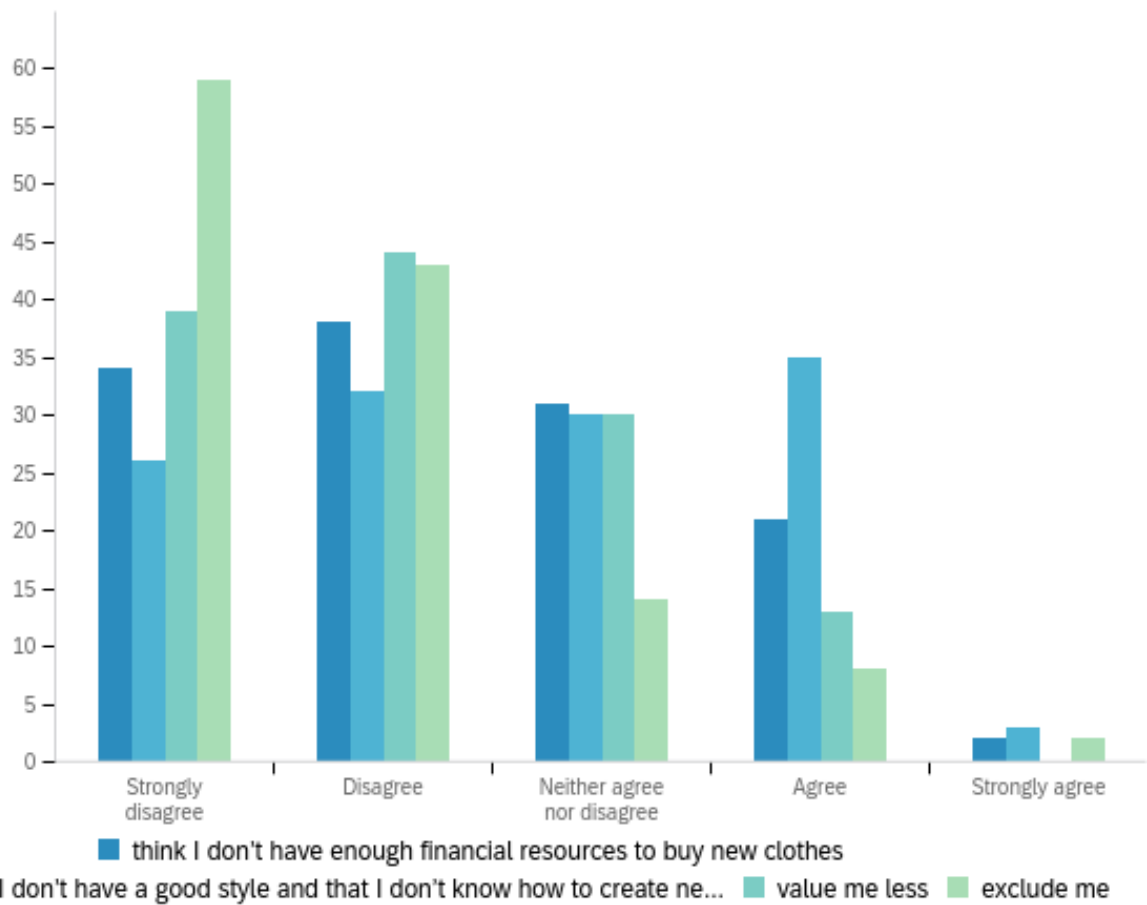
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	think I don't have enough financial resources to buy new clothes	1.00	5.00	2.36	1.09	1.20	126
2	think that I don't have a good style and that I don't know how to create new outfits	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.16	1.34	126
3	value me less	1.00	4.00	2.13	0.97	0.94	126
4	exclude me	1.00	5.00	1.82	0.97	0.94	126

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	think I don't have enough financial resources to buy new clothes	26.98%	34	30.16%	38	24.60%	31	16.67%	21	1.59%	2	126
2	think that I don't have a good style and that I don't know how to create new outfits	20.63%	26	25.40%	32	23.81%	30	27.78%	35	2.38%	3	126
3	value me less	30.95%	39	34.92%	44	23.81%	30	10.32%	13	0.00%	0	126
4	exclude me	46.83%	59	34.13%	43	11.11%	14	6.35%	8	1.59%	2	126

Q19 - Which one do you feel is the right amount of times to go shopping in a year?
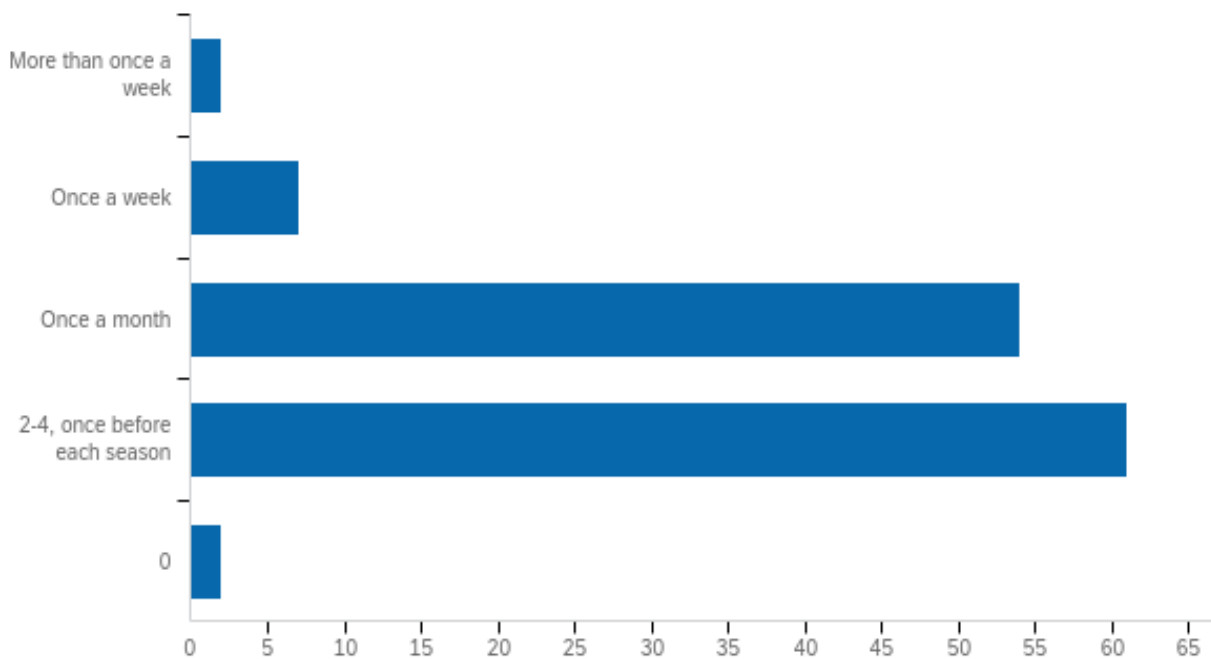
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Which one do you feel is the right amount of times to go shopping in a year?	1.00	5.00	3.43	0.69	0.48	126

#	Answer	%	Count
1	More than once a week	1.59%	2
2	Once a week	5.56%	7
3	Once a month	42.86%	54
4	2-4, once before each season	48.41%	61
5	0	1.59%	2
	Total	100%	126

Q20 - What motivates you the most to constantly buy new clothes?
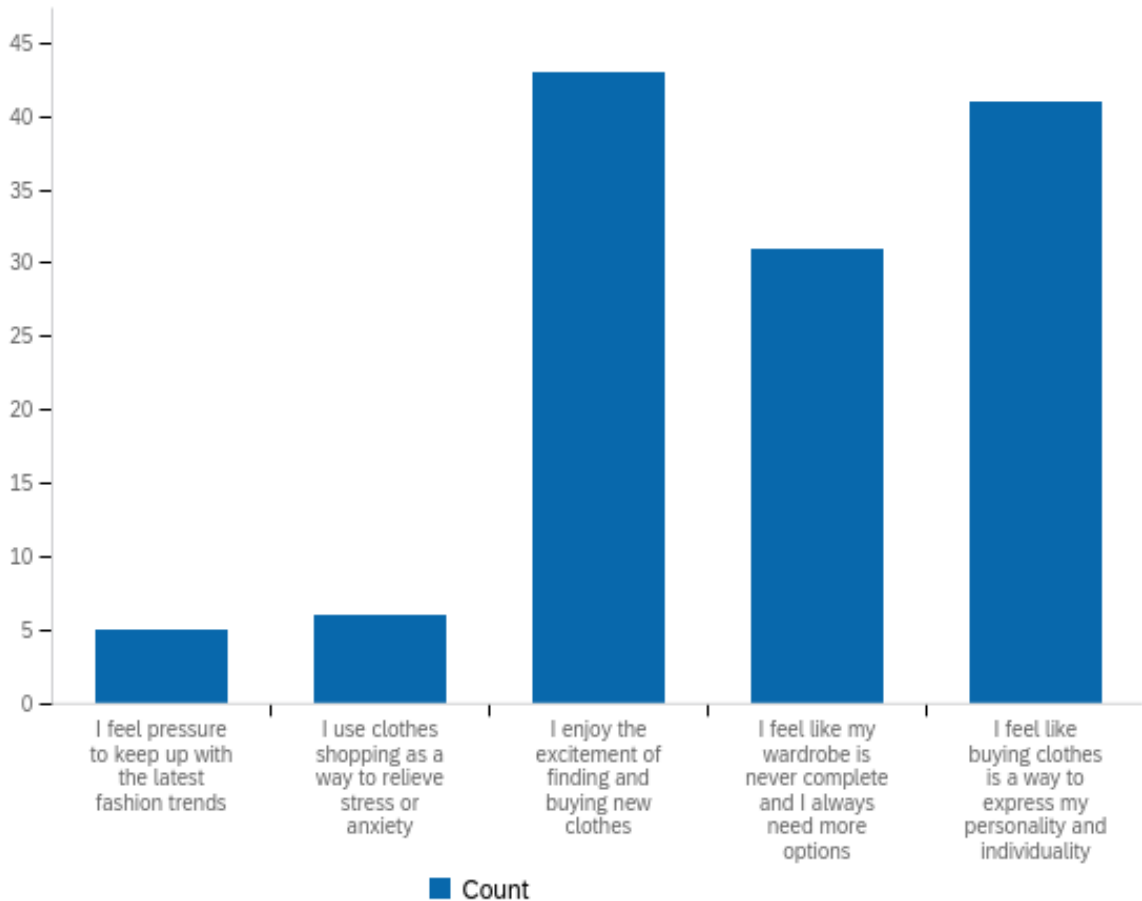
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What motivates you the most to constantly buy new clothes?	1.00	5.00	3.77	1.08	1.16	126

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I feel pressure to keep up with the latest fashion trends	3.97%	5
2	I use clothes shopping as a way to relieve stress or anxiety	4.76%	6
3	I enjoy the excitement of finding and buying new clothes	34.13%	43
4	I feel like my wardrobe is never complete and I always need more options	24.60%	31

| 5 | I feel like buying clothes is a way to express my personality and individuality | 32.54% | 41 |
| | Total | 100% | 126 |

Q21 - How many times do you reuse your clothes after buying them?
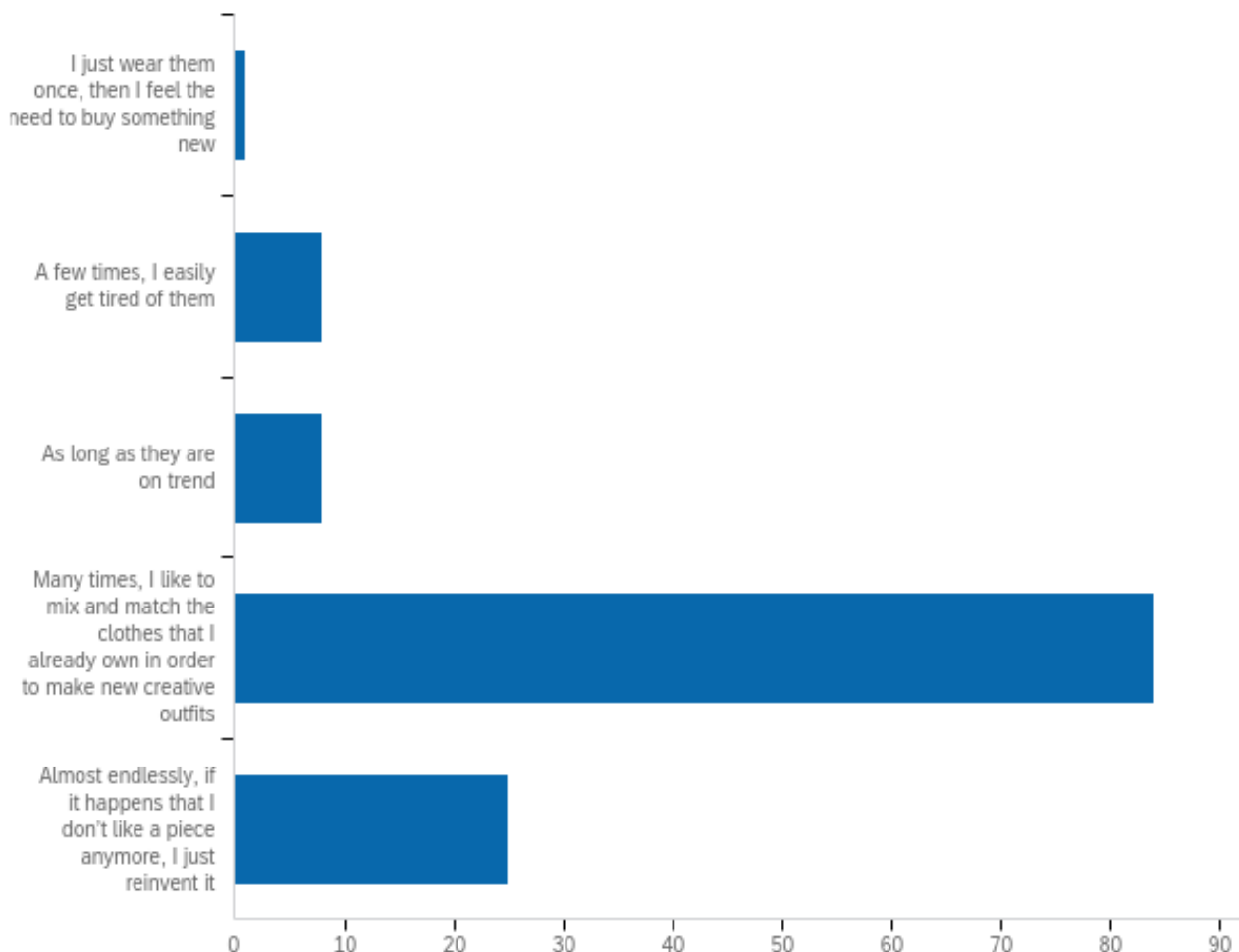
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How many times do you reuse your clothes after buying them?	1.00	5.00	3.98	0.77	0.59	126

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I just wear them once, then I feel the need to buy something new	0.79%	1
2	A few times, I easily get tired of them	6.35%	8
3	As long as they are on trend	6.35%	8
4	Many times, I like to mix and match the clothes that I already own in order to make new creative outfits	66.67%	84

| 5 | Almost endlessly, if it happens that I don't like a piece anymore, I just reinvent it | 19.84% | 25 |
| | Total | 100% | 126 |

Q22 - Rate your level of agreement with each statement
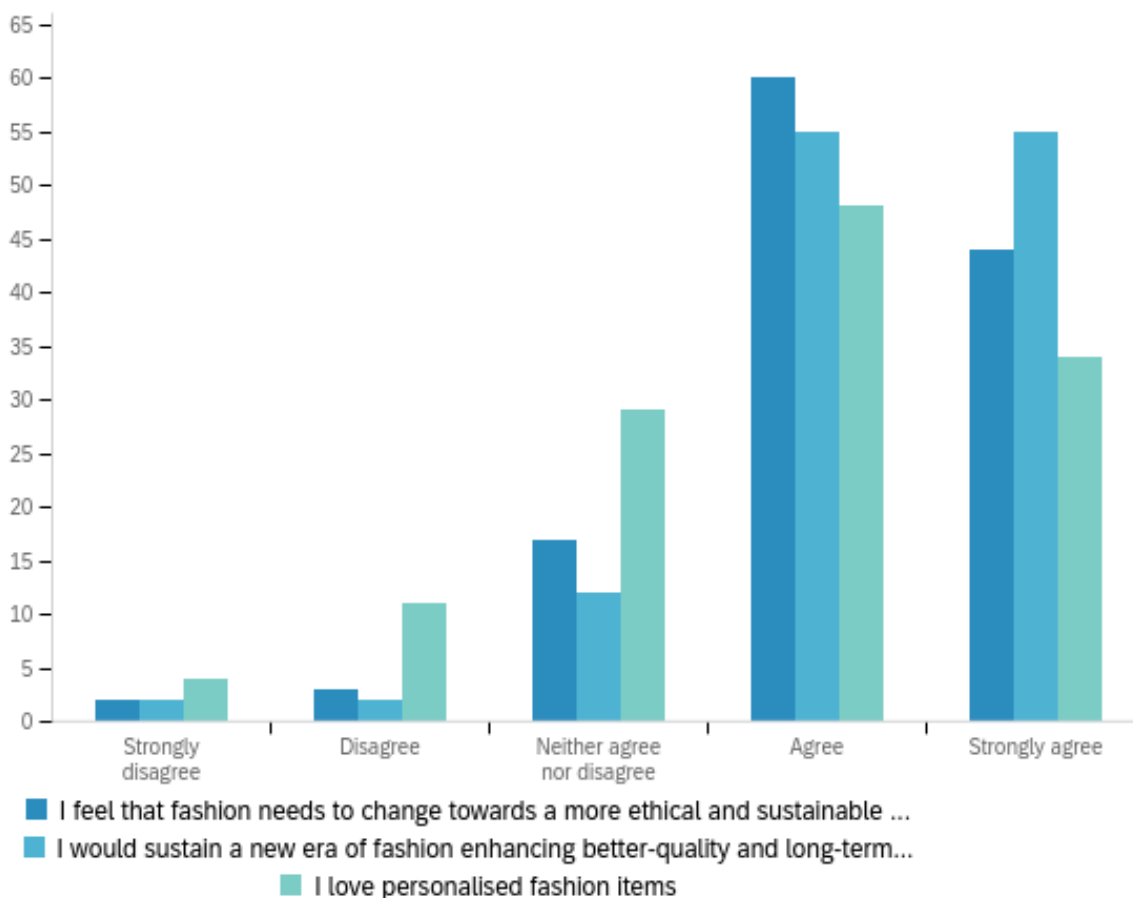
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I feel that fashion needs to change towards a more ethical and sustainable future	1.00	5.00	4.12	0.84	0.71	126
2	I would sustain a new era of fashion enhancing better-quality and long-term clothes	1.00	5.00	4.26	0.82	0.67	126
3	I love personalized fashion items	1.00	5.00	3.77	1.04	1.08	126

#	Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
1	I feel that fashion needs to change towards a more ethical and sustainable future	1.59%	2	2.38%	3	13.49%	17	47.62%	60	34.92%	44	126
2	I would sustain a new era of fashion enhancing better-quality and long-term clothes	1.59%	2	1.59%	2	9.52%	12	43.65%	55	43.65%	55	126
3	I love personalized fashion items	3.17%	4	8.73%	11	23.02%	29	38.10%	48	26.98%	34	126

Q23 - What do clothes mean to you?
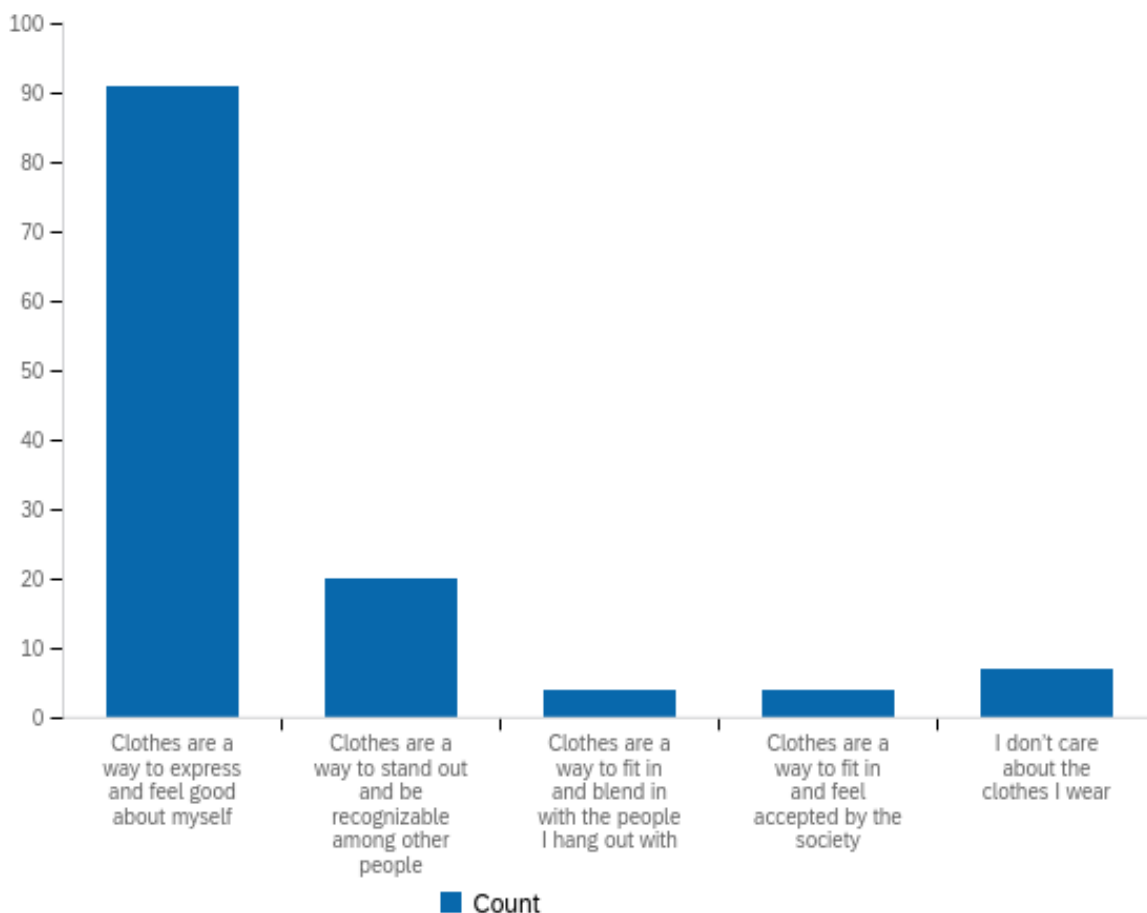
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What do clothes mean to you?	1.00	5.00	1.54	1.08	1.17	126

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Clothes are a way to express and feel good about myself	72.22%	91
2	Clothes are a way to stand out and be recognizable among other people	15.87%	20
3	Clothes are a way to fit in and blend in with the people I hang out with	3.17%	4
4	Clothes are a way to fit in and feel accepted by the society	3.17%	4

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5		I don't care about the clothes I wear	5.56%	7
		Total	100%	126