

VIRTUAL CONTENT AND THEIR REAL-LIFE IMPLICATIONS- ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM REELS ON THE FASHION CHOICES, PURCHASING BEHAVIOR AND SELF-IMAGE OF URBAN GENZ WOMEN IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT:

The transformative impact of technology on contemporary fashion, notably through Instagram, is evident, particularly among GenZ. Instagram Reels, in particular, have become a cultural phenomenon, shaping behaviors and perceptions considering their mobile-centric information consumption. However, challenges such as heightened peer pressure and distorted body image norms exist. This research in Kerala explores the effects of Instagram Reels on GenZ women, examining its influence on fashion choices, purchasing behavior, and self-image perception. Through a mixed-method approach, including video analysis, focus groups and surveys, the study reveals the evolving role of Instagram features and their impact on brand communication strategies. In conclusion, this study unveils the significant influence of Instagram Reels on Gen Z women's preferences and behaviors, shedding light on the intricate interplay between age, content consumption, and self-perception. Brands leveraging emotional appeal and genuine inclusivity emerge as key drivers in shaping trusted purchasing behavior among this demographic. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of how Instagram Reels shape fashion trends and influence behaviors among GenZ women in Kerala's psycho-social landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Fashion choices and following trends among GenZ women in India

According to D'Arpizio et al. (2020), the luxury market has maintained its 5% annual growth rate, with sales reaching €1.3 trillion globally in 2019. Online sales, which increased from €33 billion in 2019 to €49 billion in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, set the pace for the luxury market's recovery in 2020 (D'Arpizio & Levato). The rise and growth of extravaganza have been fuelled by the new generations, especially millennials (1981 – 1995) and Gen Z (1996 – 2010) (D'Arpizio et al., 2020). By 2025, millennials and Gen Z are expected to account for more than fifty percent of the worldwide luxury segment (D'Arpizio et al., 2020).

According to one's own personal choices, each consumer makes purchases of luxury items (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016). Some people purchase well-known luxury goods like Louis Vuitton, while others buy highly exclusive luxury labels like Moynat. Consumers buy luxury goods for their symbolic value, according to research on luxury spending in general. According to Eastman et al. (2018), this value is seen as a way for people to demonstrate



their individuality or social position through group membership or difference. The exclusivity of luxury brands can satisfy customers' demand for individuality by putting them apart from others, yet at the same time, the 'keeping up with the joneses' effect fosters a feeling of community among those who buy the same luxury brands (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

For the aim of self-improvement in a social situation, the demand for exceptionality echoes social discrepancies, ostracized selections, and a desire to avoid similarity (Ruvio, et al., 2008) (Pasricha, Jain, & Singh, 2020). Contrarily, consumers adopt trendy trends or fashion in order to achieve social acceptance, which boosts the appeal of upscale goods (Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). People's attitudes play significant inner roles that affect their aim to occupy themselves in certain habits (Grewal et al., 2004). These mental roles include hedonic, utilitarian, value-expressive, and social-adjustive ones (Schade et al., 2016). Previous research has indicated that millennials' reasons for purchasing luxury goods are different from those of their forebears. According to studies, millennial luxury consumers are very visible, awkward, brand-conscious, and self-critical (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Park, 2015). According to Park et al.'s (2008) study, millennials' intentions to buy luxury clothing were influenced by their need for individuality as well as their want to fit in with their peer group. Gen Z customers are the primary drivers of the luxury market's expansion, and they are more likely to pursue group conformity or the bandwagon effect than individuality or originality (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2020; Kang & Ma, 2020).

2. How Instagram is changing fashion industry and purchasing decisions

Gen Z is the first generation to have grown up in the digital age (Adeola et al., 2020; Reinikainen et al., 2020). This audience spends more than any other age group, around 11 hours per day consuming and disseminating information (Adobe, 2018). In addition to consistent use of social media they are likely to be susceptible to its influence (Chen, 2018; Emmanuel, 2019; Vitelar, 2019). Unlike the generation before them, who communicates through words and seeks out innovative content, this target population prefers to communicate through images (Prakashyadav & Rai, 2017; Priporas et al., 2017). They seek direct gratification (Passport, 2018), and value social media brand communication (Vitelar, 2019), especially when it involves superstars since they perceive them as more genuine (Wolf, 2020). These qualities make it interesting to examine this group's impulsive purchasing habits.

Since GenZ is the largest generation (Miller & Lu, 2018), it is critical to conduct research on this generational cohort since it has the potential to be very influential (Wolf, 2020). With the graphic component playing an important part in advertising style merchandises, Instagram is especially crucial for fashion firms (Venus Jin et al., 2020). Multiple stimuli, including promotional advertisements (Lyer et al., 2020), images or reels posted on a brand's Instagram account (Handayani et al., 2018), and references from personal networks and influencers (Zhu et al., 2020), have been found to cause such purchases in research on the impact of Instagram on impulse buying behavior.

According to Khanom (2018) and Handayani et al. (2018), the Instagram shopping service, which allows shops to tag product photographs and sell directly to followers, has also significantly increased impulse buys. Perhaps as a result of their upbringing in a highly commercialized environment, Generation Z is now accepting Instagram as a significant component of marketing (Chen, 2018).

3. Digital marketing through Instagram – strategies and success criteria

The design and implementation of marketing initiatives using electronic media (e-marketing) is referred to as "digital marketing" and "electronic marketing." Digital marketing can be defined as the use of technology and digital tools to accomplish marketing objectives (Chaffey, 2009). Most importantly, social media enables communication between brands and customers in ways that weren't previously feasible (Kaplan & Michael, 2014).

Social interaction consists of "tasks" that influence other people's decisions and routines through dialogue or uninvolved observation. 2019 (Muller & Peres). People's perceptions of and level of trust in brands are significantly impacted by social media marketing. Instagram enables consumers to advertise themselves online and share visual content with others (Prasetya, 2020; Octaviana & Susilo, 2021). Instagram is a social media platform that emphasizes photos and videos. Users can edit their posts by adding comments, hashtags, and captions. This is usable on PCs and mobile devices. But it was developed especially for mobile devices. (McNely, 2012; Susilo, 2021).

Instagram, one of the most popular social media sites, promotes users' comparisons to others' appearances and feelings of body dissatisfaction, both of which can negatively affect how someone views their own body (Tiggemann et al., 2018). In order to express brand associations and personalities, Instagram is employed more frequently than Facebook in branding strategies (Watkins & Lee, 2017). Instagram is a smartphone application that lets users take pictures and videos, share them with others, and participate in collective schmoozing.

Millions of people use Instagram as a resource for finding stunning photos, as a place to get creative inspiration, and as a way to express their creative impulses. Users are drawn to Instagram because it is an attractive platform with enthralling and moving content.

Because of this, it frequently lacks recognition compared to older types of social networking. On the other hand, Instagram now has the most users among the social media platforms. It has a lot more users who are active every day than Twitter, and they are focusing on building it as a visual-centric business platform. This degree of social dispersion should not be disregarded when it comes to endorsing internet vendors. Changes in how people perceive the information they encounter are one way that media exposure affects how they feel about their bodies, often affecting negatively and creating a sense of displeasure.

These feelings of discontent with one's appearance are greatly influenced by the disparity between one's expectations of how their body should look and how it actually does (Grieve et al., 2007). In actuality, there is a strong correlation between sexual characteristics and the features determining the situation for changing levels of physique frustration. The best way to predict women's body dissatisfaction is through abstract thought. According to Rivière et al. (2018), the highest rise in female body dissatisfaction is predicted by abstract contemplation. To preserve overall look, individual actions like hairstyling, exercise, and nutrition are all instances of appearance control (Reilly & Rudd, 2007).

Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that people actively engage with media to satisfy particular needs and enjoy the media consumption process. Urban Gen Z women's needs for fashion are satisfied through Instagram

Reels. Consuming content on Instagram Reels gives them satisfaction in the form of entertainment, escapism, social engagement, learning about fashion, and self-improvement.

4. Beauty consciousness through Instagram's Influence – Social, cultural and psychological effects on GenZ women

Generation Z is very active on social media and open to interacting with technologies like chatbots and augmented reality because they were raised in a "tech native" environment (Ameen et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2019). Female Generation Z customers spend an average of \$368 per year on beauty goods, making them the largest cohort of beauty spenders (In Cosmetics, 2020). Generation Z is one of the most health-conscious generations currently in existence. Its members like tracking their well-being using a range of tools (Egolf, 2018).

Prior research has found a connection between women's self-esteem and their usage of cosmetics and beauty goods (Dickman, 2010). Women of Generation Z are active consumers of beauty brands; they see these brands as an integral aspect of their self-identity and associate beauty products with self-esteem (of Cosmetics, 2020). This aspect is in line with the **personal schema theory that elaborates on how people create distinctive and subjective mental models, or personal constructs, to analyze and to make connection with what they've experienced.**

Beauty firms such as Mac, Sephora, and L'Oréal have developed virtual make-up try-on programs, which allow customers to put on makeup virtually. An application provides customers with access to integrated, AR-enabled virtual makeup try-on services.

Several beauty companies have begun to invest in and implement AI-powered chatbots in order to reach customers more rapidly and effectively. To help consumers make decisions about the buying behaviour, these brands' customer journeys no longer rely just on one technology but now incorporate a variety of cutting-edge technologies (Ameen et al., 2021).

In order to understand how GenZ's interactions with beauty brands and their services through various technologies affect this consumer group's body image, purchasing patterns, and sense of self, it is crucial to examine these interactions. Research on Gen Z's use of modern technologies and the developmental psychology components of this interaction is lacking (Kesharwani, 2020).

5. Ethical marketing and responsible use of social media

Ethical marketing entails transparent, honest, and socially responsible promotion of products or services, respecting both company and customer moral values. It helps build trust, maintain brand reputation, comply with legal standards, and foster a more honest and responsible business environment. Businesses need to consider ethical marketing practices and social media usage responsibly as it allows them to build quality relationships with consumers, marketing ethics emphasizing values of honesty, fairness, and social responsibility. (Patel, n.d.) In the era of social media, consumers want brands to be transparent about their products' preparation, materials' source, and underlying motivations. People make better decisions if they have more information about a product (Out-Smarts Marketing, n.d.). Collecting and using personal data are often considered ethical considerations in social media marketing (Saleem,n.d). While there are a lot of online articles on ways to utilize social media advertising and digital marketing, there needs to be more resources on how to use these tools and how data can

be used ethically (Grandics, 2023). Social media platforms strive to gather and aggregate information that is helpful to advertisers because social media is funded by advertising (Miller, 2023). Several nations have passed laws and regulations that impact marketers and necessitate efforts to assure compliance.

Hence, social media marketing must ensure the appropriate usage of user data to keep customers' trust. One must be more purposeful and responsible as a social media consumer by limiting usage, being conscious of their participation, and the reasons for their usage (Epic Publications, 2023).

RESEARCH GAP

Research on Gen Z women in Kerala holds significant importance, addressing gaps in existing studies that often overlook their unique characteristics and influences. With one of the highest women populations and significant urban presence in India, this demographic's distinct context warrants exploration. The impact of Instagram's feature, Instagram Reels, on fashion choices, purchasing behavior, and self-image remains largely unexplored, highlighting the need for ethical considerations in social media content. Bridging these gaps is essential for a deeper understanding of their digital engagement and guiding ethical marketing practices to promote their well-being in this constantly evolving social media landscape.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to examine the impact of Instagram reels on Urban Gen Z women's fashion choices, purchasing behavior, and self-image. The research will have a mixed method approach, consisting of quantitative and qualitative study. The data collection techniques used in this study consists of focus group discussion, content analysis, survey and in-depth interviews.

Sampling – The study is conducted on the target population of GenZ between the age group 13-23 as it is the first generation to have grown up using social media, and Instagram is where they are most active. (Salpini, 2017). In India, Gen Z accounts for the majority of social media usage. (Indian Digital and Social Media Landscape, 2022). Gen Z prefers Instagram above other social media sites. The country with the most Instagram users, India, also has more than 230 million users. (McLachlan, 2022). Not surprisingly therefore, GenZ uses social media without much qualm. Due to Kerala's high literacy rate and reputation for progressive social policies, which may have an impact on its citizens' attitudes and behaviors, the state was chosen by the researcher for this study. (Guha, 2013).

Guha (2013) also mentioned Kerala's high rate of urbanization, with more than 47% of the state's people residing in cities. Urban locations are more likely to be subjected to social media and fashion trends, which could influence how Instagram Reels affect fashion choices and self-image. Kerala uses social media and technology more than other Indian states (Wray, 2021). Kochi was designated as one of the first 20 Indian cities to be developed as part of PM Modi's flagship Smart cities Mission, therefore the researcher chose the metropolis to reflect the study's target population (Wray, 2021). Due to its dense urbanization, Kochi attracts business investment across a wide range of industries. George (2018). The study's focus was on women because they are a crucial segment of the fashion business and frequently the main purchasers of fashion goods. (Guha,2013). A sample size of 1000 is used.

METHOD

For the pilot study, a focus group of 25 women aged 13-23 discussed influential brands and influencers in India across clothing, accessories, and lifestyle categories, evaluating their impact on purchasing behavior, trust, and self-image. Subsequently, ten brands from each category were selected for video content analysis, examining their Instagram accounts and reels to understand persuasive selling strategies and body-image perceptions among GenZ women in Kerala. Additionally, a survey using convenience sampling was conducted in Kochi among GenZ women aged 13-23, with 1000 samples collected (from an estimated population of 3 Lakh women in this age group) to assess the impact of Instagram reels on their fashion choices, purchasing behavior, and self-image. Next, the researcher carried over the results into a spread sheet for documentation. The results showed the persuasive selling strategies, and body-image perception applied by the brands in influencing fashion concepts and perceptions among GenZ women in Kerala

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three important questions that are addressed by these following theories form the foundation of the investigative research: Uses & Gratifications Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and Schema Theory.

1) Theory of Personal Schema

The study on the effect of Instagram Reels on the clothing preferences, spending habits, and self-image of urban Gen Z women in Kerala can be connected to personal schema theory, also known as personal construct theory. According to the personal construct theory, people create distinctive and subjective mental models, or personal constructs, to interpret and make sense of their experiences. Unique Schema Theory emphasizes that people create their own unique constructions or schemas to interpret and comprehend fashion. This is known as individual interpretation of fashion. Every person has their own conceptions regarding self-perception, aesthetic standards, and idealized body types. Instagram Reels may affect these individual structures by exposing users to various fashion and beauty representations. Personal Construct Theory unveils the unique mental models individuals construct to interpret their online experiences, offering insights into the intricate dynamics of subjective perceptions in the digital realm (V.J. Barnes, 2003). Urban Gen Z women in Kerala have distinctive fashion perspectives, likes, and beliefs that affect their choices in clothing, spending habits, and self-perception. Gen Z women who interact with Instagram Reels analyze and explore meaning from the fashion-related information.

Examining emotional vulnerability through the lens of Personal Construct Theory reveals the intricate interplay between personal constructs and emotions, shedding light on the subjective nature of emotional experiences and the individualized pathways to emotional well-being (Hammond L & Mandler, 1995). Self-image and perception of one's body are both influenced by personal constructs. The study can investigate how the distinctive personal constructions of Gen Z women in Kerala influence how they evaluate fashion-related information on Instagram Reels by taking Personal Schema Theory into account. In the context of virtual fashion content, it enables a greater comprehension of how people create their own meanings, preferences, and self-perceptions.

2) Media Dependency Theory - According to the media dependence theory, urban Gen Z women in Kerala may become dependent on Instagram Reels for fashion-related news and material. They depend on Instagram Reels to meet their demands in terms of fashion, including learning about new trends, looking for fashion inspiration, maintaining connections with the fashion world, and avoiding FOMO and peer pressure.

Their preferences are shaped, their fashion-related judgements are influenced, and their fashion choices are guided by the information they consume on Instagram Reels, such as fashion trends, style advice, and company promotions. They might develop brand preferences and make different purchasing decisions as a result of the product recommendations, endorsements, and sponsored material they see on Instagram Reels. They might do this by comparing themselves to influencers or idealized fashion depictions on Instagram Reels, which could alter their opinions of themselves, their bodies, and their self-worth. The present study found that the relationship between browsing through the looks of others on Instagram and body dissatisfaction, measured by the lack of body appreciation, is fully mediated by upward appearance comparison with social media influencers (Pedalino, F., & Camerini, A. L., 2022).

3) Uses & Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that each person engages with media to meet certain specific needs and achieve fulfillment from the media ingesting manner. Urban Gen Z women's needs for fashion are satisfied through Instagram Reels. Consuming content on Instagram Reels gives them satisfaction in the form of entertainment, escapism, social engagement, learning about fashion, and self-improvement. Teletext and video text were more personalized than non-interactive electronic media. Media gratification theory is vital for future research into new media, which "might best occur within the context of an individual's total media environment" (Cowles, 1989). Their interests in and aspirations for the fashion industry are satisfied by Instagram Reels. They interact with fashion-related content on Instagram Reels to improve how they exhibit themselves, highlight their individual styles, and get approval from their social networks. Instagram Reels gives users a place to define and express their fashion identities, which influences their self-perception and self-image.

DATA ANALYSIS:

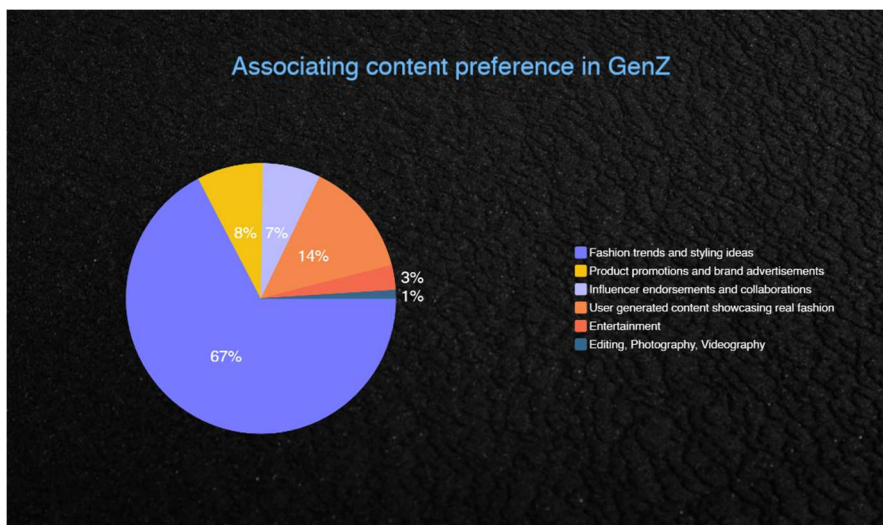
1. DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Table 1:

Age (Years)	Frequency (n=792)	Percent
13-16	144	18.2
16-19	136	17.2
19-23	512	64.6
Education		
High school	168	21.2
Diploma	4	0.5
UG	372	47.0
PG	248	31.3

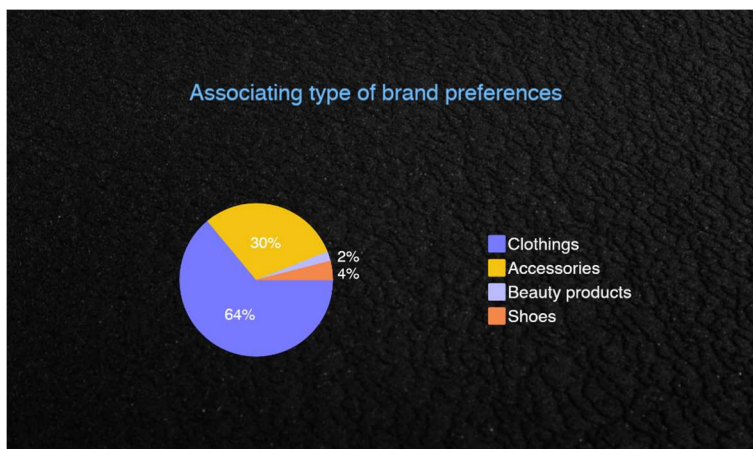
TABLE 1: Out of 792 women participants, the majority belonged to a young age (64.6%, 19-23 years old) and have completed at least a graduation degree (78.3%).

CHART 1 : Associating (Age, Educational Qualification) and their content preferences



These participants mostly spent more than 1 hour (61.6%) on Instagram and followed fashion trends and styling ideas (68%). Followed by 14% on User-generated content with real fashion. 8% on product promotions and brand advertisements and 7% on influencer endorsement and collaborations

CHART 2:



64% of the participants preferred clothing brands, 30% preferred accessories, only 2% preferred beauty and 4% preferred shoes. (Chart 2)

2. Association of age and Type and level of influence by Instagram

Association between age and other variables						
	Age					
	13-16	16-19	19-23	Total	Chi square	p

Feelings after watching fashion content						
Excited and inspired	4 (2%)	40 (19.6%)	160 (78.4%)	204	132.33	0.00 0
More confident about my fashion choices	48 (21.1%)	44 (19.3%)	136 (59.6%)	228		
Pressure / urge to follow certain trends	88 (40%)	28 (12.7%)	104 (47.3%)	220		
Indifferent	4 (2.9%)	24 (17.1%)	112 (80%)	140		
Trust on fashion influencers and brand promotions						
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	8 (33.3%)	16 (66.7%)	24	286.77 3	0.00 0
Disagree	0 (0%)	4 (12.5%)	28 (87.5%)	32		
Neutral	0 (0%)	68 (22.7%)	232 (77.3%)	300		
Agree	12 (6.8%)	28 (15.9%)	136 (77.3%)	176		
Strongly agree	132 (50.8%)	28 (10.8%)	100 (38.5%)	260		
Purchase decision influenced by content						
No, never	4 (4%)	16 (16%)	80 (80%)	100	280.64	0.00 0
Rarely	0 (0%)	48 (22.6%)	164 (77.4%)	212		
Yes, occasionally	8 (3.6%)	40 (18.2%)	172 (78.2%)	220		
Yes, frequently	132 (50.8%)	32 (12.3%)	96 (36.9%)	260		
Feel more conscious about personal appearance						
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	8 (22.2%)	28 (77.8%)	36	334.34	0.00 0
Disagree	0 (0%)	4 (4.8%)	80 (95.2%)	84		
Neutral	0 (0%)	44 (22.9%)	148 (77.1%)	192		
Agree	12 (5%)	52 (21.7%)	176 (73.3%)	240		
Strongly agree	132 (55%)	28 (11.7%)	80 (33.3%)	240		
Comparing the appearance or fashion choices to influencers						

Never	0 (0%)	32 (17%)	156 (83%)	188	262.86	0.00 0
Rarely	8 (5.9%)	28 (20.6%)	100 (73.5%)	136		
Sometimes	4 (2%)	48 (24.5%)	144 (73.5%)	196		
Often	132 (48.5%)	28 (10.3%)	112 (41.2%)	272		
Self-image and body perception impacted by Instagram reels						
Boosted my confidence	4 (8.3%)	32 (66.7%)	12 (25%)	48	263.69	0.00 0
Made me more conscious of my appearance	128 (38.1%)	36 (10.7%)	172 (51.2%)	336		
Helped me embrace my unique style	0 (0%)	40 (22.2%)	140 (77.8%)	180		
Influenced me to strive for an idealized appearance	12 (21.4%)	8 (14.3%)	36 (64.3%)	56		
No impact on my self-image	0 (0%)	20 (11.6%)	152 (88.4%)	172		

Chi square tests conducted to understand the association between age and different variables are illustrated in Table 2. It showed that age is highly and significantly associated with the feelings of the participants after watching fashion content ($\chi^2=132.33$, $p<0.01$). Those who are in the age range between 19-23 years mostly feel excited watching fashion content (78.4%), feel more confident about their fashion choices (59.6%) and these age ranges also feel more pressure to follow certain trends (47.3%). Trust on fashion influencers and brand promotions also found to be highly associated with the age of the participants ($\chi^2=286.773$, $p<0.01$). The result of Chi square tests showed that purchase decisions influenced by the content are also significantly associated with age ($\chi^2=280.64$, $p<0.01$). While the participants in the age range between 13-16 years old purchase more frequently based on the content, other older age groups, especially those who belong to 19-23 years never make purchase decisions based on content. On the other hand, being conscious about personal appearance showed significant association with age ($\chi^2=334.34$, $p<0.01$). While the more matured population (19-23 years old) show less consciousness about personal appearance, the younger population (13-16 years old) feel more conscious about it. Similar trend is noticed in comparing appearance or fashion choices to influencers where the mature population (19-23 years old) do not compare much with the influencers. Age showed to be highly associated with self-image and body perception impacted by Instagram reels ($\chi^2=263.69$, $p<0.01$). Self-image and body perceptions impacted by Instagram reels mostly boosted the confidence of the girls in the age range between 16-19 years old (66.7%) and made the respondents between 19-23 years old to be more conscious about their appearance, helped them to embrace unique style, influenced them to strive for an idealized appearance and have no impact on their self-image.

2. Association of Time spent on Instagram and Type and level of influence by the contents.

Association between time spend on Instagram and other variables							
	Time spend on Instagram Reels						
	Less than 30 Min.	30 Min. to 1 hour	1 to 2 Hours	More than 2 Hours	Total	Chi square	p value
Feelings after watching fashion content							
Excited and inspired	44 (21.6%)	60 (29.4%)	60 (29.4%)	40 (19.6%)	204	222.19 2	0.00
More confident about my fashion choices	32 (14%)	56 (24.6%)	40 (17.5%)	100 (43.9%)	228		
Pressure / urge to follow certain trends	8 (3.6%)	8 (3.6%)	40 (18.2%)	164 (74.5%)	220		
Indifferent	40 (28.6%)	56 (40%)	28 (20%)	16 (11.4%)	140		
Trust on fashion influencers and brand promotions							
Strongly disagree	12 (50%)	4 (16.7%)	4 (16.7%)	4 (16.7%)	24	402.25 3	0.00
Disagree	8 (25%)	16 (50%)	8 (25%)	0 (0%)	32		
Neutral	56 (18.7%)	88 (29.3%)	84 (28%)	72 (24%)	300		
Agree	32 (18.2%)	68 (38.6%)	60 (34.1%)	16 (9.1%)	176		
Strongly agree	16 (6.2%)	4 (1.5%)	12 (4.6%)	228 (87.7%)	260		
Purchase decision influenced by content							
No, never	20 (20%)	32 (32%)	44 (44%)	4 (4%)	100	380.39 3	0.00
Rarely	56 (26.4%)	80 (37.7%)	52 (24.5%)	24 (11.3%)	212		
Yes, occasionally	40 (18.2%)	60 (27.3%)	52 (23.6%)	68 (30.9%)	220		
Yes, frequently	8 (3.1%)	8 (3.1%)	20 (7.7%)	224 (86.2%)	260		
Feel more conscious about personal appearance							
Strongly disagree	16 (44.4%)	8 (22.2%)	4 (11.1%)	8 (22.2%)	36	437.55 1	0.00

Association between time spend on Instagram and other variables							
	Time spend on Instagram Reels						
	Less than 30 Min.	30 Min. to 1 hour	1 to 2 Hours	More than 2 Hours	Total	Chi square	p value
Disagree	12 (14.3%)	36 (42.9%)	24 (28.6%)	12 (14.3%)	84		
Neutral	56 (29.2%)	52 (27.1%)	64 (33.3%)	20 (10.4%)	192		
Agree	28 (11.7%)	84 (35%)	68 (28.3%)	60 (25%)	240		
Strongly agree	12 (5%)	0 (0%)	8 (3.3%)	220 (91.7%)	240		
Comparing the appearance or fashion choices to influencers							
Never	36 (19.1%)	72 (38.3%)	48 (25.5%)	32 (17%)	188	349.735	0.00
Rarely	44 (32.4%)	44 (32.4%)	44 (32.4%)	4 (2.9%)	136		
Sometimes	32 (16.3%)	60 (30.6%)	44 (22.4%)	60 (30.6%)	196		
Often	12 (4.4%)	4 (1.5%)	32 (11.8%)	224 (82.4%)	272		
Self-image and body perception impacted by Instagram reels							
Boosted my confidence	8 (16.7%)	8 (16.7%)	8 (16.7%)	24 (50%)	48	209.533	0.00
Made me more conscious of my appearance	20 (6%)	48 (14.3%)	52 (15.5%)	216 (64.3%)	336		
Helped me embrace my unique style	40 (22.2%)	52 (28.9%)	52 (28.9%)	36 (20%)	180		
Influenced me to strive for an idealized appearance	0 (0%)	12 (21.4%)	20 (35.7%)	24 (42.9%)	56		
No impact on my self-image	56 (32.6%)	60 (34.9%)	36 (20.9%)	20 (11.6%)	172		

The association between the time spent on Instagram reels and other variables. Chi square test showed that the feeling after watching fashion content ($\chi^2=222.192$, $p<0.01$), trust on fashion influencers and brand promotions ($\chi^2=402.253$, $p<0.01$), purchase decision influenced by content ($\chi^2=380.393$, $p<0.01$), feeling of consciousness about appearance ($\chi^2=437.551$, $p<0.01$), comparison of the appearances or fashion choices to influencers and

self-image and body perception impacted by Instagram reels ($\chi^2=349.735$, $p<0.01$) are highly associated with the time they spend on Instagram.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ANALYSIS

Summary: Unveiling Instagram's Influential Landscape

In a lively discussion led by our dynamic moderator, Beena Mrunal, an advertising professional, 25 vibrant women aged 13-23 explored the Instagram universe. In a recent focus group study, we delved into the dynamics of fashion trends, self-image perception, and the influence of social media, brand messaging, and peer pressure. The aim was to understand how these factors intersect and impact the choices and perceptions of the participants. Delving into the categories of clothing, accessories, and lifestyle, the conversation revealed a rich tapestry of preferences.

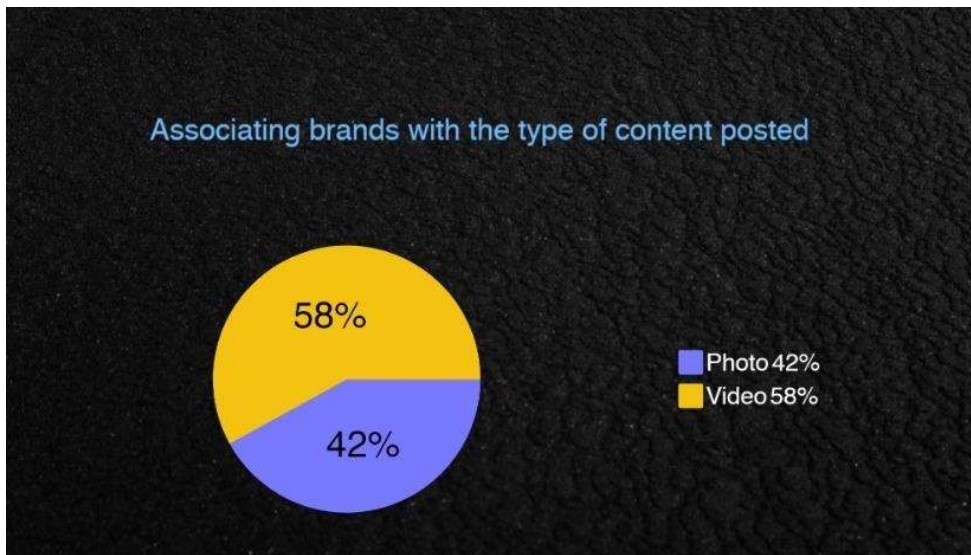
Following the discussion, 10 brands were meticulously chosen, considering repetition and preference across fast fashion, beauty, accessories, clothing, and global merchandise. The selected lineup boasts Zara, Zudio, FabIndia, H&M, Adidas, Tommy Hilfiger, Nykaa, Ray-Ban, Swarovski, and Bath and Body Works. Acknowledging the global impact on Instagram, 7 global brands were included for their cross-cultural appeal. The final curated list strikes a balance with 3 influential Indian brands—Zudio, FabIndia, and Nykaa—representing the diverse cultural landscape of Instagram influencers in India.

Participants were asked to articulate their views on how fashion choices contribute to their self-image. Insights revealed a strong correlation between clothing choices and participants' perception of self-worth and confidence. Many participants acknowledged being influenced by social media content, with specific attention to influencers and brand promotions. Participants shared experiences of feeling pressured to adopt certain fashion trends to fit into their peer groups. Peer approval emerged as a significant motivator for conforming to fashion norms. A notable finding was that 16 out of 25 participants expressed feeling the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) regarding current fashion trends. The fear was linked to the perceived social acceptance associated with being up-to-date with the latest styles. This selection not only reflects current Instagram trends, but it also provides invaluable insights into our target demographic's preferences, which will shape the future of influencer marketing.

Video Analysis

Based on the inputs from the quantitative analysis, a qualitative content analysis was carried out. In this extensive video analysis, we look at the digital visual narratives of ten different brands, strategically chosen to represent a balance of global and Indian brands in light of the growing cross-cultural influence. The brands picked are in a 7:3 ratio and represent a variety of sectors, including fast fashion, clothing, beauty, accessories, and global merchandise. This diversified collection tries to provide a comprehensive insight on how various firms use video content on Instagram.

CHART 3:



58% of the brand content was videos which makes instagram reels a predominant channel of influence. And there was no brand that doesn't follow the reels trend.

TABLE4:

	Aesthetic elements	USP of Brands	Affiliated Marketing/ Partnerships	Promotional Appeal	Promotional Campaigns
Zara	Minimalism, neutral tones, and clean compositions, dynamic urban settings.	Translating runway trends to affordable fashion. quality and timeless style.	Renowned designers and influencers for capsule collections, enhancing exclusivity.	Emotional appeal of Sophistication and timeless elegance, aspirational lifestyle	Exclusive seasonal sales, limited-time discounts, and occasional collaboration
Zudio	Vibrant, culturally infused aesthetic with clean compositions, reflecting a blend of modern trends and traditional elements.	Youthful and trendsetter. Affordability and blending current trends and cultural touch.	Engages in diverse influencer collaborations, showcasing clothing in real-life scenarios to connect with a broad audience	Resonate with the audience, blending cultural celebrations, everyday fashion.	Seasonal sales, discounts, and engaging campaigns, to foster excitement and community.

FabIndia	Traditional and contemporary. Colors are earthy and natural, and visuals often highlight craftsmanship.	Handmade and sustainable fashion rooted in Indian craftsmanship, authenticity and cultural diversity	Collaborates with local artisans and influencers. Partnerships focus on sustainable fashion and cultural heritage.	Celebrating diversity, sustainability, authenticity & stories behind handmade products.	Dynamic and global trends. Emotional appeal tied to inclusivity & self-expression.
H&M	Diverse and dynamic aesthetic, ranging from casual to high fashion. Focus on urban lifestyles and global trends.	Affordable and trend-driven fashion. Focused on inclusivity and democratization of fashion.	High-profile collaborations with global designers. influencers' collabs focus on the brand's diverse and inclusive ethos.	Sustainable collections, festive discounts, cultural-themed, heritage and artisan stories.	Global sales, high-profile designer collaborations, and campaigns aligned with fashion seasons.
Nykaa	Bright colors, clean compositions, and a focus on product details.	One-stop-shop for beauty needs and expert recommendations.	Beauty influencers and makeup artists collabs, exclusive product launches and tutorials.	Emotional appeal of self-expression, individual beauty & confidence.	Regular sales, exclusive product launches, and festive/beauty trend campaigns.
Bath & Body Works	Warm and inviting, soft pastel colors and floral compositions.	Emotive and sensorial experience of their products.	Influencer collaborations emphasizing the use of their products in daily life.	Emotional appeal relaxation and self-care, comfort and indulgent atmosphere.	Conducts seasonal sales, limited-time offers, festive seasons and occasions campaigns.

Ray-Ban	Sleek and classic aesthetic with bold contrasts, urban settings, and lifestyle shots.	Timeless and iconic eyewear. Emphasis on style, durability, and the brand's association with a rebellious spirit.	Collaborates with fashion influencers and celebrities. Partnerships on limited-edition collections and exclusive releases.	Emotional appeal is tied to individuality, self-expression, and the timeless allure and transformative power of iconic sunglasses.	Seasonal sales, limited-edition releases, and lifestyle themed campaigns, featuring iconic models and celebrity endorsements.
Swarovski	Luxurious and crystalline aesthetic. Visuals are sophisticated, featuring close-ups of accessories with sparkling details.	Renowned for precision-cut, high-quality jewelry, brand's heritage, craftsmanship, and luxury.	Partners with fashion designers and influencers, highlights the versatility and glamour of their crystal accessories.	Emotive and symbolic value of crystal jewelry, and personal expression	Festive seasons campaigns, product launches, and collaboration with aspirational and luxurious brand image.
Adidas	Dynamic and sporty aesthetic showcasing athleticism, street culture, and the versatility of Adidas products in various settings.	Known for sportswear, performance, and street-style fashion. Emphasis on innovation, collaboration with athletes, and a global community.	Collaborates with athletes, musicians, and fashion influencers for exclusive collections and campaigns emphasizing performance and style.	Promotional appeal centers around style, athleticism, inclusivity, empowerment, niche styling while pursuing an active and healthy lifestyle.	Product launches tied to major sports events, collaborations with influencers, and campaigns promoting sustainability & global sport culture.
Tommy Hilfiger	Classic and preppy aesthetic, clean compositions,	Classic American fashion, timeless style,	Collabs with fashion designers to create exclusive	Promotional stories on the brand's preppy and timeless	Seasonal sale, fashion events, & collaborations

	bold color contrasts, and lifestyle shots reflecting an american heritage	inclusivity, and the brand's association with pop culture.	collections & high-profile celebs/ individuals for brand's modern and culturally relevant image.	style and nostalgia of American fashion, celebrating individuality and confidence.	often featuring iconic Tommy Hilfiger motifs and a celebration of American heritage.
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CHART 4:

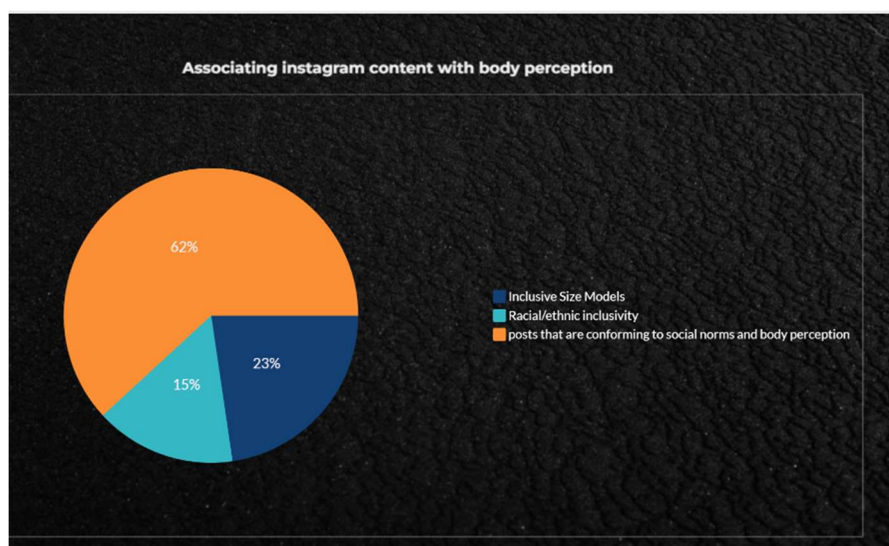


CHART4: : On analysing the ratio in which the inclusive community is 38% of which 23% of plus size models and 15% of models from other ethnicities are depicted.

FINDINGS & INTERPRETATIONS:

The quantitative survey highlighted significant associations between time spent on Instagram and preferences for fashion content, with clothing brands being the most preferred. Age and time spent on Instagram were also linked to feelings after viewing fashion content, trust in influencers, and self-image perceptions. Notably, 47.3% felt pressured to follow trends, and younger participants made more frequent purchase decisions based on content. Women aged 19-23 were more appearance-conscious but unaffected in self-image.

The focus group discussion revealed a strong link between clothing choices and participants' self-worth. Many acknowledged social media influence, particularly from influencers and brand promotions, with peer approval being a key motivator for conforming to fashion norms. Notably, 16 out of 25 participants expressed FOMO regarding current trends, driven by the desire for social acceptance. Additionally, 10 brands were selected for video analysis based on participant input.

The video analysis revealed that 58% of their content was in video format, indicating Instagram Reels as a predominant channel of influence. The analysis showed that 38% of the content depicted an inclusive community, with 23% featuring plus-size models and 15% showcasing models from various ethnicities. While over 55% of brand assets focused on aesthetic and product showcase, 45% utilized Instagram features to drive traffic for actual conversion. Additionally, distinct color palettes and compositions shaped brand identities, with communication tactics and influencer affiliations playing key roles in brand resonance. However, a majority of brands lacked inclusive community representation, highlighting the importance of commitment to inclusivity for brand differentiation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

"Instagram, a visually driven platform, serves as a potent tool for socialization and business development. It offers brands the opportunity to expand into new horizons, creating connections with potential customers through emotional appeal and collaborations with influencers. This strategy is notably effective among Gen Z women.

The strategic use of promotional appeal fosters a strong rapport between the brand and its audience, creating a psychological impact on customers. For Gen Z women, this impact translates into a trusted purchasing behavior, especially in the realms of fashion and lifestyle content. An illustrative example is the controversy surrounding Zara's "Love your curves" campaign, where the dissonance between the campaign message and featured models highlighted the importance of aligning marketing strategies with genuine inclusivity (CNN, 2022; David Williams, 2017). Gucci, fueled by the influence of social media, the brand aims for a broader audience to achieve success and differentiation. Gucci's emphasis on inclusivity across social platforms is setting a new trend in the luxury fashion industry (Pliakogianni & Dr. Derdaess, 2020). In the context of Gen Z women, the portrayal of inclusivity in branding plays a crucial role in balancing self-image and body consciousness. Brands that prioritize inclusivity as a key USP and strategy stand out, influencing purchasing behavior through the impulsive effects of peer pressure and FOMO, both driven by the trends set by these brands."

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS:

Further studies in the dynamic landscape of social media could delve into key areas such as body image and influencer marketing, the impact of social media filters, marketing responsibility for promoting inclusivity, and emerging platforms and trends. However, limitations were encountered during this research, including the novelty of inclusivity concepts in the fashion sector, unfamiliarity with certain brands among the Gen Z population in Kerala, and the need for more in-depth focus group discussions to gain comprehensive insights.

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