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## The Influence of Social Media and Influencers on Fashion Trends and Consumer Behavior in the GCC

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**The Influence of Social Media and Influencers on Fashion Trends and Consumer Behavior in the GCC**

**By:**

**Haya Al Saab**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree  
Bachelor in Marketing**

**College of Business**



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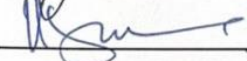
**Thesis Advisor: Dr. Rizwan Khan**


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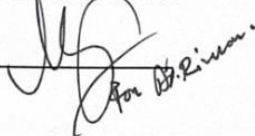
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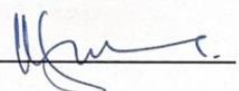
Supervisor's Name: Dr. Rizwan Khan

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Department Chair: Dr. Uzma Javed

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



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## Abstract

The rise of social media and influencer marketing has profoundly transformed the fashion industry, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where digital platforms play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior and fashion trends. This study investigates the influence of social media platforms and influencers on fashion trends and consumer behavior in the GCC, focusing on how these platforms have become central to fashion discovery and the purchasing decisions of consumers. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing a questionnaire distributed to fashion consumers across the GCC region to explore the role of social media and influencers in fashion trends. The findings reveal that social media platforms, especially Instagram and TikTok, are primary sources for discovering fashion trends, with 75% of respondents acknowledging these platforms as their main fashion inspiration. Furthermore, the study highlights the critical role of influencers in shaping consumer purchasing behavior, with 70% of respondents reporting that they had purchased a product based on influencer recommendations. Cultural factors, particularly related to modest fashion and the growing preference for micro-influencers, were also identified as key drivers in the region's fashion landscape. The study underscores the importance of authentic and culturally relevant content in influencer marketing, particularly in a region with distinct cultural norms. The research provides valuable insights for fashion brands and marketers looking to engage with consumers in the GCC and emphasizes the need for localized and personalized digital marketing strategies. Future research could explore the long-term impact of influencer collaborations on brand loyalty and examine the role of emerging technologies in shaping fashion marketing in the GCC.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Influencer Marketing, Fashion Trends, Consumer Behavior, GCC, Instagram, TikTok, Micro-Influencers, Modest Fashion, Digital Marketing.

## Introduction

Over the past decade, the rise of digital technology has profoundly reshaped the global fashion industry. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube have not only democratized fashion communication but have also redefined how trends emerge, spread, and are consumed. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, comprising Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman, this transformation has been particularly notable. The region's young, tech-savvy population—coupled with increasing mobile internet penetration and a cultural inclination toward luxury and modern fashion—has made the GCC a fertile ground for digital fashion consumption. In this context, influencers have emerged as key mediators between fashion brands and consumers, shaping not only what people wear but also how they perceive fashion and identity in a rapidly changing cultural landscape (Alalwan, 2018). The convergence of fashion, social media, and influencer culture has created a new ecosystem in which individuals with large followings can dictate trends, spark consumer interest, and even impact the reputations of multinational brands. This development is particularly relevant in the GCC, where cultural values intersect with global consumerism. Influencers, often considered more relatable and authentic than traditional celebrities, have gained significant traction as opinion leaders in the fashion domain. Their influence spans the spectrum of fashion engagement, from trend discovery to final purchase decisions. This shift marks a departure from traditional advertising strategies and has introduced a more personalized, peer-driven model of brand communication (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). The fashion landscape in the GCC is uniquely positioned due to its blend of conservative social norms and a deep appetite for global fashion trends. In Saudi Arabia, for example, fashion has become a key medium of self-expression, especially among young women who navigate the balance between modesty and modernity. With the loosening of social restrictions and the increasing participation of women in the workforce and public life, fashion has evolved into a vehicle for both personal identity and cultural negotiation (Al-Otaibi & Al-Harbi, 2020). Social media plays a central role in this evolution, offering a space where curated styles, modest fashion, and luxury aesthetics coalesce. Influencers—both local and international—are at the forefront of this change, acting as taste-makers and cultural intermediaries. Despite the apparent influence of social media and digital influencers on consumer behavior, academic studies focusing specifically on the GCC context remain limited. Most existing literature on social media marketing and fashion influencers has been conducted in Western contexts, often overlooking the cultural, religious, and economic nuances that characterize consumer behavior in the Arab Gulf states. While global trends do influence GCC consumers, the process is mediated by local values, religious

considerations, and regulatory frameworks. For example, content regulations, modesty norms, and gender dynamics influence how fashion is marketed and consumed online in these societies (Mahrous & Hassan, 2017). As such, there is a growing need for empirical research that investigates how social media platforms and influencers shape fashion trends and consumer decisions specifically within this regional context. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the multifaceted impact of social media and influencers on fashion trends and consumer behavior in the GCC. The research focuses on how digital content disseminated through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube informs consumer preferences, brand perceptions, and purchase behavior. In addition, the study will examine the role of influencers in curating fashion narratives and guiding consumption, while also addressing how cultural and religious values shape the way consumers interact with fashion content online. By focusing on GCC countries, this research hopes to provide a nuanced understanding of the social and digital dynamics at play in the region's fashion ecosystem. The rise of influencer marketing can be attributed to the shift in consumer trust from traditional media to peer-generated content. Influencers are perceived as more authentic and relatable, often creating content that resonates with niche audiences. This perceived authenticity significantly affects consumer trust and buying behavior (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Particularly in fashion, influencers often provide styling tips, product reviews, and behind-the-scenes insights that enhance consumer engagement. Their use of visual storytelling and personal branding helps establish strong parasocial relationships with followers, leading to higher brand affinity and increased purchase intentions. This pattern is observable in the GCC, where influencers enjoy celebrity-like status and often collaborate with both local and international brands to promote products. Consumer behavior in the fashion industry is also influenced by several psychological and social factors. Theories such as the Social Influence Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior help explain how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control impact consumer intentions. In the context of social media, these theories suggest that online interactions, peer influence, and exposure to curated lifestyles shape not only fashion preferences but also individual identity and social status aspirations (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). This is especially relevant in GCC societies, where image, luxury branding, and social standing are closely intertwined. The digital realm thus becomes a stage where social comparisons and aspirational consumption play out through the lens of fashion. Fashion consumption patterns in the GCC reflect broader socio-economic trends, such as urbanization, increased disposable income, and a growing middle class. The UAE and Saudi Arabia, in particular, have positioned themselves as regional hubs for luxury retail and fashion innovation. The popularity of fashion weeks, influencer events, and e-commerce platforms highlights the changing dynamics of consumer engagement. In this rapidly evolving market, brands must understand the unique



interplay of social media, cultural values, and influencer dynamics to effectively reach and engage with consumers (Wang & Yu, 2017). Failure to do so may result in culturally inappropriate messaging or misaligned brand positioning. The objectives of this research are threefold. First, to examine how social media platforms contribute to the emergence and dissemination of fashion trends in the GCC. Second, to analyze the role of digital influencers in shaping consumer attitudes, preferences, and purchase decisions. Third, to assess the impact of cultural and demographic variables—such as gender, age, and religious considerations—on consumer interaction with fashion content online. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews, the study will generate insights that are both statistically robust and contextually rich.

### **Literature review Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the influence of social media platforms and influencers on fashion trends and consumer behavior in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region necessitates applying several theoretical models. These frameworks provide foundational insights into how individuals interact with media content, adopt new trends, and make consumption decisions under the influence of digital environments and social cues. One of the most relevant theories in this context is the Social Influence Theory. This theory posits that individuals are significantly influenced by others in their social environment, particularly when it comes to adopting behaviors, values, or preferences (Kelman, 1958). Within the domain of social media, influencers act as reference figures who shape audience perceptions of what is fashionable and desirable. Their curated images, lifestyle displays, and product endorsements create a sense of aspirational identity for followers. In the GCC, where cultural norms and collective identity often play a pivotal role, social influence may be even more pronounced. Influencers are often viewed not only as trendsetters but also as culturally relevant opinion leaders, especially when they incorporate regional values such as modest fashion or religious appropriateness in their content. Closely linked to Social Influence Theory is the Diffusion of Innovations Theory developed by Rogers (2003). This framework explains how new ideas and practices spread through societies and become widely adopted over time. The theory categorizes adopters into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. In the context of fashion trends within the GCC, social media platforms function as the medium through which fashion innovations such as emerging brands, styles, or aesthetics are introduced and disseminated. Influencers, particularly those with large followings, act as the innovators or early adopters who showcase novel fashion choices. These styles are then gradually adopted by the broader audience as they

gain traction across social media channels. The speed at which trends diffuse in the digital age is accelerated by the immediacy and visual appeal of platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which allow users to instantly view, replicate, and share fashion content. Another useful framework for this study is the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). This theory shifts the focus from media effects to audience motivations, proposing that consumers actively select media to satisfy specific needs such as entertainment, social interaction, or identity formation (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). In the context of fashion-related social media use in the GCC, consumers may follow influencers to satisfy their desire for inspiration, trend updates, and social connectedness. These gratifications are particularly important in a region where digital connectivity is high, and youth populations seek both individual expression and communal affiliation. Influencers who reflect the cultural values, lifestyles, and aspirations of their followers can effectively fulfill these needs, thereby enhancing their persuasive power. For example, Saudi and Emirati influencers who balance global fashion aesthetics with local traditions often attract substantial engagement by resonating with the lived experiences of their followers. Consumer behavior models also provide essential insight into the psychological mechanisms driving fashion-related decisions influenced by social media. One such model is the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which suggests that behavior is driven by behavioral intentions formed through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the case of influencer-driven marketing, a consumer's positive attitude toward a fashion product, coupled with the normative pressure of seeing peers and influencers endorse it, can significantly impact their purchasing intention. This is especially relevant in the GCC context, where community and family norms exert a strong influence on decision-making. Influencers who align with these norms often enjoy higher levels of trust, thereby increasing the effectiveness of their content. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) offers a dual-process perspective on how messages influence attitudes. According to the model, persuasion can occur through two routes: the central route, which involves thoughtful consideration of the message, and the peripheral route, which relies on superficial cues such as attractiveness, credibility, or emotional appeal. Influencers in the GCC often capitalize on the peripheral route by using high-quality visuals, culturally resonant language, and celebrity-like status to persuade followers. However, when combined with informative content such as fashion tips or reviews, the central route may also come into play, leading to more enduring attitude change and brand loyalty.

## Evolution of Fashion Marketing

Fashion marketing has experienced a dramatic transformation over the past two decades, evolving from traditional promotional methods to a dynamic and interactive digital landscape. Traditionally, fashion brands relied heavily on print media, television advertisements, fashion shows, and celebrity endorsements to influence consumer behavior and drive trends. These approaches were largely one-directional, with limited opportunities for direct engagement between brands and consumers. In this model, fashion marketing was predominantly about broadcasting messages to a mass audience, relying on the exclusivity and glamour of high-end fashion editors and runway events to shape public perception (Okonkwo, 2007). The advent of digital technology, particularly the rise of social media, has revolutionized the way fashion brands communicate with their audiences. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube have emerged as vital tools for real-time marketing, enabling brands to interact directly with consumers in a more personalized and engaging manner. Social media has also democratized fashion influence, shifting power away from traditional gatekeepers toward everyday individuals with strong digital followings. This shift has allowed micro and macro influencers to become central figures in shaping trends and consumer perceptions (Abidin, 2016). Rather than waiting for seasonal campaigns or editorials, consumers now discover fashion ideas through daily posts, stories, and videos shared by influencers and peers. This digital evolution has also enabled brands to adopt more agile and responsive marketing strategies. Data analytics, influencer collaborations, and user-generated content have allowed marketers to assess real-time feedback, measure campaign performance, and tailor their messaging to specific audience segments. Fast fashion retailers such as Zara, H&M, and Shein have particularly capitalized on this agility, using social media to monitor trending styles and launch new products with unprecedented speed. In contrast to the months-long cycles of traditional fashion calendars, digital platforms allow for trend adoption and dissemination in a matter of days, if not hours. The rise of influencer marketing represents one of the most significant developments in digital fashion promotion. Influencers, who range from fashion enthusiasts with small niche audiences to globally recognized personalities, provide authentic and relatable content that resonates more deeply with consumers than traditional advertising. Unlike polished advertisements, influencer content often reflects real-life usage and personal styling, which contributes to higher perceived trust and credibility (Freberg et al., 2011). Consumers increasingly look to influencers for inspiration, product recommendations, and fashion advice, creating a more organic path to brand discovery and loyalty. This evolution is particularly noteworthy. The region has witnessed rapid digital adoption, with high internet penetration rates and widespread use of smartphones and

social media platforms. Countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates rank among the top globally in terms of daily social media usage. This digital readiness has accelerated the shift from traditional fashion marketing to influencer-driven campaigns. Influencers from the GCC often integrate regional cultural elements such as modest fashion, luxury aesthetics, and national identity into their content, making their influence particularly potent among local audiences. Brands that collaborate with these influencers benefit from both authenticity and cultural relevance, two factors that are crucial for success in the GCC's diverse markets (Alalwan, 2018). Fashion consumers in the GCC are becoming more informed and demanding, seeking not only aesthetic appeal but also alignment with their values, lifestyle, and identity. This consumer shift has encouraged brands to focus on storytelling, interactivity, and personalization in their digital strategies. The increasing emphasis on sustainability, ethical fashion, and local craftsmanship further demonstrates the evolving expectations of GCC consumers. Social media provides a space for brands to communicate these values effectively, often with the help of influencers who champion specific causes or niche markets.

### **Role of Social Media in Fashion Trend Formation**

Social media has become one of the most influential forces in shaping fashion trends, transforming how styles emerge, gain popularity, and become embedded in consumer behavior. Unlike traditional fashion cycles, which were driven by designers, magazines, and seasonal runway shows, contemporary fashion trends are increasingly generated and popularized through digital platforms where content is produced, shared, and consumed at an accelerated pace. This shift has redefined the dynamics of trend formation, making it more participatory, immediate, and responsive to consumer feedback. One of the core aspects of social media's impact is its ability to create a space for real-time trend development. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow users to share fashion looks instantly with a global audience. As a result, fashion trends now emerge from a variety of sources—not only from designers and celebrities, but also from everyday users, influencers, and niche communities. These platforms have given rise to what some scholars describe as a “bottom-up” approach to fashion, where trends are often born within digital subcultures and later adopted by mainstream brands (Rocamora, 2017). This democratization of trendsetting has allowed for a wider diversity of styles, cultural influences, and voices in fashion, challenging the exclusivity of the traditional fashion elite. Influencers play a central role in this process, acting as key agents in identifying, showcasing, and accelerating fashion trends. Their consistent content creation, engagement with followers, and use of strategic hashtags contribute to the viral spread of specific styles or aesthetics. Unlike traditional models or fashion editors,

influencers often provide personalized commentary, context, and tutorials on how to style trends, making fashion more accessible and relatable. Their ability to set and propagate trends lies in the trust and authenticity they build with their audiences. When influencers repeatedly showcase a particular item or aesthetic, it creates a perceived norm that encourages imitation and reinforces the trend cycle (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). Social media algorithms also amplify trend formation by prioritizing content that garners high engagement. When users like, comment on, or share a fashion-related post, it is more likely to appear in others' feeds, thereby increasing its visibility and influence. This algorithmic curation plays a critical role in turning individual style expressions into widespread trends. In some cases, brands monitor these trends closely and adjust their production and marketing strategies accordingly, highlighting the feedback loop between social media users, influencers, and companies. The visual nature of social media is another critical factor in trend formation. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest are image-driven, making them ideal for showcasing fashion. The emphasis on aesthetics encourages users to create visually appealing content, often featuring curated outfits, professional photography, and stylized settings. This visual culture fosters aspiration and emulation, as followers seek to recreate the looks they see online. Additionally, fashion content on social media is often accompanied by direct links to purchase items, closing the gap between trend discovery and consumer action. This has contributed to the rise of "see now, buy now" behavior, where consumers act immediately on fashion inspiration (McCormick, Cartwright, & Perry, 2014). The role of social media in trend formation is especially pronounced due to the region's high digital engagement and youth demographics. Fashion-conscious consumers in the GCC rely on social media not only for trend discovery but also for cultural validation. Influencers from the region often integrate traditional and modern fashion elements, reflecting local tastes while participating in global trends. This blend creates unique regional styles that resonate deeply with local audiences and influence the broader fashion landscape in the Arab world. Furthermore, the rise of modest fashion—driven in part by influencers from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait—demonstrates how social media can be a powerful platform for shaping culturally specific trends that challenge Western fashion norms (Lewis, 2015). The interactive features of social media platforms allow users to engage with trends more actively. Through likes, comments, shares, and reposts, users contribute to the visibility and legitimacy of trends. Hashtags and challenges, particularly on TikTok and Instagram, create viral movements that encourage mass participation and accelerate trend diffusion. In this environment, fashion is no longer solely about consumption but also about expression, creativity, and community engagement.

#### Digital Influencers as Fashion Trendsetters

Digital influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries between fashion brands and consumers, especially within the context of social media marketing. They are often considered modern-day trendsetters who drive fashion consumption by sharing curated content that reflects their personal style, lifestyle, and values. Unlike traditional celebrities, digital influencers gain their status through consistent engagement, authenticity, and relatability, often cultivating niche audiences with whom they build strong trust. Their influence on fashion trend formation is multidimensional, affecting not only what consumers choose to wear but also how trends are adopted, adapted, and communicated within specific cultural contexts, including the GCC region. The rise of influencer culture can be understood within the broader shift from mass marketing to personalized, peer-driven communication. Influencers act as micro-celebrities whose power lies in their ability to humanize brands and connect with audiences in ways that feel organic rather than transactional. Studies have shown that consumers perceive influencers as more trustworthy and credible than traditional advertising sources, especially when influencers present themselves as authentic and accessible (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). This perceived authenticity plays a critical role in how consumers respond to fashion trends introduced by influencers, with engagement levels and purchase intent significantly influenced by the influencer's reputation, perceived expertise, and relatability. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of digital influencers is their ability to translate high fashion into accessible, everyday styles. Through outfit-of-the-day posts, styling videos, and shopping hauls, influencers interpret trends for their audiences, offering practical advice and inspiration. This interpretation is particularly valuable in the fashion sector, where aspirational content can often feel out of reach for everyday consumers. Influencers bridge the gap between aspiration and reality, providing a roadmap for followers to replicate looks within their own budgets and cultural frameworks. In this way, they democratize fashion by making trends more understandable and attainable. The distinction between micro-influencers and macro-influencers further illustrates how influence operates on social media. Macro-influencers, with large follower counts, often have broader reach and are typically used by major fashion brands to achieve visibility on a global scale. However, micro-influencers, who have smaller yet highly engaged audiences, often exert deeper influence because of their closer relationship with followers. Research suggests that micro-influencers are more effective in driving purchase behavior due to the higher levels of trust and perceived intimacy they foster (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In the GCC context, where cultural alignment and social credibility are highly valued, micro-influencers who reflect local identities and norms are especially impactful. The GCC region presents a unique landscape for



influencer-driven fashion. Influencers from countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait have garnered substantial followings by curating content that blends international fashion trends with regional cultural sensibilities. For example, many female influencers showcase modest fashion that aligns with religious and societal expectations while still engaging in global fashion conversations. These influencers act not only as trendsetters but also as cultural negotiators, shaping how fashion is consumed and interpreted in a way that resonates with local audiences (Al-Olayan & Karande, 2020). Their role extends beyond style to identity formation, especially among young women who look to these figures for cues on how to balance modernity with tradition. Influencers also play a crucial role in the branding strategies of fashion companies. By collaborating with influencers, brands gain access to targeted segments and benefit from the credibility that influencers lend to their products. Influencer marketing campaigns often result in increased brand visibility, higher engagement, and stronger consumer loyalty. These collaborations can take many forms, including sponsored posts, brand ambassadorships, affiliate links, and even co-designed collections. In the GCC, luxury and high-end fashion brands frequently partner with regional influencers to enhance brand image and tap into affluent, fashion-conscious markets. These partnerships are carefully curated to ensure cultural relevance and maximize brand resonance. The impact of influencers extends beyond individual purchase decisions to broader fashion narratives and consumption patterns. Influencers often set the tone for what is considered fashionable, desirable, or socially acceptable. By consistently featuring specific styles, brands, or aesthetics, they help to normalize certain trends and exclude others. Their content contributes to the creation of digital fashion communities where trends are discussed, contested, and co-created. These communities foster a sense of belonging and shared identity among followers, further reinforcing the influence of digital fashion leaders. Technological advancements have also amplified the reach and effectiveness of influencers. Features like Instagram Reels, TikTok videos, and YouTube Shorts allow influencers to produce dynamic, engaging content that captures attention quickly and encourages interaction. Live streaming and real-time Q&A sessions enable influencers to communicate directly with their followers, building deeper connections and providing immediate feedback. This interactivity enhances the persuasive power of influencers, making their endorsements more compelling and memorable.

### **Consumer Behavior and Purchase Decisions**

Consumer behavior in the fashion industry has undergone a profound transformation due to the increasing influence of social media platforms and digital influencers. Traditionally driven by brand loyalty, product quality, and price, fashion purchase decisions are now significantly shaped by social cues, peer

recommendations, and the digital personas of influencers. In the GCC region, where a youthful, tech-savvy population is highly engaged online, social media has become an essential channel through which consumers discover trends, evaluate brands, and make buying decisions (Alalwan, 2018; Alghizzawi, 2019). At the core of this transformation is the psychological mechanism of social proof, whereby individuals look to others to determine appropriate behavior, especially under conditions of uncertainty (Cialdini, 2001). Influencers serve as trusted sources of social proof, modeling consumption behaviors that followers are likely to emulate. Their perceived authenticity, relatability, and domain expertise enhance their persuasive power. As a result, followers often consider influencers' endorsements as credible, even more so than traditional advertisements (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). This phenomenon is particularly salient in fashion, where visual representation and aspirational lifestyles strongly appeal to consumers' emotions and identity formation. One of the most notable effects of social media on consumer behavior is the rise of impulse buying. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are designed to stimulate instant engagement through algorithms that prioritize visually appealing, trend-driven content. When influencers showcase outfits with direct links to purchase, it creates a seamless path from inspiration to acquisition. This environment fosters impulsivity, especially when combined with time-limited promotions and the fear of missing out (FOMO) (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017). In the GCC, where disposable income is relatively high among youth and young professionals, this impulsivity is often supported by financial means, enhancing the effectiveness of social media as a channel for fashion sales (Alalwan, 2018).

Trust plays a pivotal role in determining whether an influencer can sway a consumer's decision. Factors such as content quality, transparency in sponsored posts, and perceived authenticity contribute to the influencer's credibility (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). When influencers are viewed as genuine in their preferences and endorsements, followers are more likely to consider their product recommendations. Trust also intersects with perceived expertise; fashion influencers who regularly share styling tips, trend forecasts, or behind-the-scenes access to fashion shows are seen as more knowledgeable, increasing their influence over consumer choices (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In the GCC context, trust is further shaped by cultural alignment. Consumers are more receptive to influencers who share their values, religious beliefs, and linguistic or national identity, particularly with modest fashion or luxury consumption (Hamdan, 2021). Social media also supports an environment where consumer decisions are influenced by peer interactions. Comments, likes, and shares serve as public endorsements that reinforce product desirability. User-generated content such as reviews, unboxing videos, and try-on hauls adds a layer of participatory validation that supports or challenges influencer messaging. This participatory culture creates a sense of community among



fashion consumers, blurring the lines between content creators and audiences (Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002). In the GCC, where communal values and social cohesion are emphasized, these online peer-to-peer interactions hold significant persuasive power (Alghizzawi, 2019). The visual-centric nature of platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat magnifies the emotional and psychological impact of fashion content. These platforms are optimized for high-resolution imagery and short videos that instantly convey a sense of style, brand identity, and emotional appeal. Influencers utilize these tools to craft aesthetically pleasing, curated feeds that align with their personal brand and audience expectations (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Consumers are drawn to this visual storytelling, often forming emotional attachments to the influencer's lifestyle and product choices. In the GCC, fashion consumption among women, in particular, is not just a matter of practicality but a mode of cultural expression, self-identity, and modern femininity (Al-Saggaf, 2020). Another significant factor is the development of parasocial relationships—one-sided emotional bonds that followers form with influencers. These relationships create feelings of closeness, admiration, and loyalty, making followers more open to influencers' suggestions (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Labrecque, 2014). Consumers may feel as though they personally know the influencer, which heightens trust and emotional investment. In the context of the GCC, where personal networks and family values are highly regarded, parasocial relationships can mimic real social dynamics, further enhancing the influence of digital figures. The integration of social commerce into platforms like Instagram and TikTok has shortened the path from discovery to purchase. Tools such as shoppable posts, swipe-up links, and in-app checkout capabilities eliminate friction from the buying process, catering to a digital generation that values speed and convenience (Chen, Lu, & Wang, 2022). In the GCC, mobile commerce is rapidly expanding, particularly in countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, making social media an ideal space for fashion-related transactions (Statista, 2024). Cultural values and religious norms also shape fashion-related consumer behavior in the GCC. While many users admire global fashion trends, local consumers often seek styles that are aligned with Islamic values such as modesty and decency. Influencers who successfully localize global trends—by incorporating abayas, hijabs, or modest styling—are often more effective at engaging their audiences (Mirza & Syed, 2013). This reflects a growing demand for content that blends global aesthetics with local sensibilities, and highlights the importance of cultural fluency in digital fashion marketing.

### **Social Media Consumption in the GCC**

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—comprising Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman—have witnessed an exponential rise in social media usage over the past

decade. With high internet penetration, a youthful demographic, and increasing smartphone usage, social media has become deeply embedded in everyday life across the region (Statista, 2024). This growing reliance on digital platforms is transforming not only communication patterns but also consumer behavior, brand engagement, and the fashion industry's marketing strategies. Social media penetration in the GCC is among the highest globally. For instance, as of 2023, the UAE recorded a penetration rate of over 99%, while Saudi Arabia and Qatar followed closely with rates exceeding 90% (Datareportal, 2023). These figures reflect the central role of platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Twitter (now X) in daily life. Among these, Instagram and Snapchat are particularly popular for fashion-related content due to their visual formats and integration with influencer culture (Kemp, 2023). Instagram's visual appeal aligns closely with fashion consumption, where imagery, aesthetics, and lifestyle play a key role in brand perception and consumer inspiration. The demographic composition of social media users in the GCC is also significant. The majority are young adults aged between 18 and 34, a segment that is not only digitally native but also more receptive to global fashion trends and influencer marketing (Alghizzawi, 2019). This group actively engages with influencers, fashion bloggers, and lifestyle content creators who offer style tips, promote new collections, and model the latest trends. Their engagement is not passive; it includes liking, commenting, sharing, and purchasing, making them both consumers and contributors in the digital fashion ecosystem. In terms of time spent online, GCC users rank among the most active globally. According to Global Web Index data, users in the region spend an average of three to four hours daily on social media (We Are Social, 2023). This intense level of engagement presents a fertile ground for brands and influencers seeking to promote fashion products. Users frequently browse platforms not only for entertainment but also for inspiration, self-expression, and to remain connected to fashion trends both locally and globally. Consequently, brands in the GCC are shifting their focus from traditional advertising to influencer partnerships and digital storytelling to capture consumer attention in these spaces (Alalwan, 2018). Another defining characteristic of social media consumption in the GCC is the cultural integration of digital content. While users are highly globalized in their consumption of international fashion content, there is also a strong appetite for localized, culturally resonant content. Influencers who incorporate elements of Gulf identity, such as traditional garments, Arabic language, or Islamic values, tend to foster stronger connections with audiences (Hamdan, 2021). For example, modest fashion influencers in Saudi Arabia and the UAE often gain prominence by blending global aesthetics with cultural values, thereby appealing to a wide audience that desires both fashion-forward and culturally appropriate styles (Mirza & Syed, 2013). Gender dynamics also play a significant role in shaping social media use in the region. In many GCC countries, women are among the most active social media users, especially

on platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Al-Saggaf, 2020). This trend is closely linked to fashion consumption, as women often seek content related to beauty, styling, and clothing. For many female users, social media is not only a source of inspiration but also a platform for entrepreneurship and personal branding. The emergence of female fashion influencers across the region reflects this dual role of consumer and content creator, contributing to a dynamic and participatory digital fashion landscape. Social media consumption in the GCC is increasingly intertwined with e-commerce. With the rise of shoppable content and in-app purchasing features, platforms like Instagram and TikTok have transformed into digital marketplaces. Consumers in the region are becoming more comfortable with buying directly through social media, encouraged by influencer promotions, exclusive offers, and seamless payment options (Chen, Lu, & Wang, 2022). This integration of content and commerce aligns well with the fast-paced lifestyle of many GCC consumers, who seek convenience and immediacy in their shopping experiences. Trust and credibility continue to be essential in shaping how social media influences fashion consumption. Given the high exposure to both authentic and sponsored content, GCC consumers are developing a more critical approach to influencer endorsements. Transparency in brand partnerships, consistent content quality, and cultural sensitivity are key factors that affect whether influencers can sustain follower loyalty and effectively promote products (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As a result, micro-influencers—who typically have fewer followers but higher engagement and perceived authenticity—are gaining popularity among fashion brands targeting the GCC market.

### **Role of Influencer Marketing in Shaping Brand Loyalty in Fashion**

Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for fashion brands seeking to build awareness, drive engagement, and foster brand loyalty, particularly in the context of the GCC region. Social media influencers, who curate and share content across various platforms, have developed unique relationships with their followers, often blurring the lines between celebrities and everyday consumers (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). This dynamic makes influencers especially potent in shaping brand loyalty, as their recommendations often carry more weight than traditional advertising. In the GCC, the use of influencers to promote fashion products is not just a marketing strategy but a cultural phenomenon. Fashion influencers are seen not only as style icons but also as trusted advisors who reflect the lifestyle and values of

their audience. In this region, where fashion is closely tied to identity, social status, and cultural values, influencers who resonate with local tastes and norms can significantly influence consumer perceptions of fashion brands (Mirza & Syed, 2013). Through their personal branding, influencers craft authentic narratives around fashion products, which fosters a sense of loyalty among their followers. One of the key ways influencers shape brand loyalty is by creating aspirational lifestyles that align with their audience's desires. Influencers often post content showcasing themselves in fashionable outfits, exotic locations, and luxury settings, which are aspirational for many consumers in the GCC. These portrayals of idealized lifestyles help followers develop emotional connections with both the influencer and the brand being promoted (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2010). As consumers begin to associate a particular brand with the influencer's image and lifestyle, they are more likely to engage with that brand, creating a foundation for brand loyalty. The authenticity of influencers plays a critical role in their ability to foster loyalty. In the GCC, where brand trust is a significant driver of consumer behavior, followers are particularly sensitive to the perceived authenticity of influencers (Alalwan, 2018). Consumers in the region tend to favor influencers who maintain a genuine connection with their audience, rather than those who appear overly commercialized or disconnected from their followers' experiences. When influencers are seen as authentic, their endorsements of fashion products are viewed as more trustworthy, leading to higher levels of consumer engagement and brand loyalty (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Another vital aspect of influencer marketing in the GCC is the cultural alignment between influencers and their followers. Unlike in Western markets, where influencers might simply be seen as individuals who endorse products for financial gain, influencers in the GCC are often regarded as local figures who embody and advocate for regional values (Hamdan, 2021). For example, in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, influencers who promote modest fashion—clothing that adheres to Islamic principles of modesty—are highly influential, as they cater to a significant demographic that values fashion while maintaining cultural and religious standards. These influencers bridge the gap between global fashion trends and local cultural values, making them key figures in shaping brand loyalty among followers who are also navigating these dual influences. The relationship between influencers and fashion brands in the GCC is also facilitated by the growing prevalence of social commerce, which combines social media engagement with e-commerce (Chen, Lu, & Wang, 2022). Platforms like Instagram and TikTok now offer features that allow influencers to directly link to fashion items they feature in their posts, making it easier for followers to purchase products immediately. This seamless integration of content and commerce further strengthens the bond between consumers and brands, as followers can act on their impulse purchases more easily when they trust the influencer's endorsement. Moreover, exclusive collaborations between influencers and brands, such as

limited-edition collections or personalized product lines, create a sense of scarcity and exclusivity, which can enhance brand loyalty by making consumers feel they are part of a select group (Liu, Li, & Hu, 2021). In terms of consumer behavior, the impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty is particularly pronounced in the fashion sector. Fashion is inherently subjective, and many consumers make purchasing decisions based on personal style preferences, trends, and emotional connections with brands (Carter, 2017). Influencers who provide styling tips, product reviews, and behind-the-scenes content foster a deeper connection with their audience by helping them navigate the often overwhelming array of fashion choices. In the GCC, this is especially important given the rapidly changing trends in the fashion industry, which are influenced by both global fashion movements and local cultural shifts. Influencers serve as guides, helping their followers navigate this complex landscape by promoting brands they trust, thus reinforcing loyalty through consistent, meaningful interactions. Influencer collaborations with both local and international fashion brands can drive consumer preferences and contribute to long-term brand loyalty. These partnerships allow consumers to engage with familiar influencers while being exposed to new fashion labels and products. Research has shown that influencer collaborations significantly increase consumer interest in new brands and products, with many followers demonstrating a stronger intent to purchase items endorsed by influencers they admire (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). The authenticity and relevance of these partnerships, particularly when they involve influencers who resonate with regional tastes and values, play a significant role in shaping long-term loyalty to fashion brands.

### **Gender and Demographic Factors**

In the context of fashion, gender and demographic factors play a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences and the effectiveness of influencer marketing. In the GCC region, these factors significantly influence how fashion trends are disseminated, received, and adopted by various consumer groups. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, have become powerful tools for fashion brands to engage with specific demographic groups, including youth, women, and different socioeconomic segments. The role of gender in fashion consumption is complex, influenced by cultural norms, religious values, and personal preferences, all of which are key to understanding how influencer marketing operates in the GCC.

## Gender and Fashion Consumption in the GCC

In the GCC, gender plays a significant role in shaping fashion trends. Women, particularly young women, are the primary consumers of fashion-related content and products, as they are more likely to engage with fashion influencers on social media platforms (Alalwan, 2018). Fashion for women in the GCC is intricately tied to both global trends and local cultural practices. While global fashion influences such as Western-style clothing are popular, there is also a strong demand for modest fashion that aligns with Islamic principles of modesty, which has led to a unique fusion of traditional and modern styles in the region (Hamdan, 2021). Influencers who represent modest fashion such as hijab-wearing influencers or those who promote clothing with a conservative aesthetic are highly influential in shaping consumer behavior among women in the GCC. Women in the GCC are also more likely to participate in the influencer economy, as they actively follow and engage with fashion content online. This is particularly evident in countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where social media platforms are used as key spaces for self-expression and personal branding. Female influencers, who often serve as role models, not only shape fashion trends but also influence perceptions of beauty, luxury, and lifestyle. These influencers, through their personal styling and curated content, guide consumer purchasing decisions and establish a direct line of influence over fashion trends among women (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

## Youth Demographics and Social Media Engagement

The youth demographic in the GCC plays a crucial role in the shaping of fashion trends. The region boasts a young population with a high level of digital engagement, where social media platforms are central to daily life. A large percentage of the population in countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia is under the age of 30, which makes them a prime target for fashion influencers. These young consumers are particularly active on social media, and their purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by the influencers they follow. The interactive and engaging nature of social media allows influencers to build close connections with their followers, particularly younger audiences who are looking for guidance on how to express themselves through fashion. TikTok and Instagram have become key platforms for youth-driven fashion trends in the GCC. Shortform videos, fashion hauls, styling tips, and "get ready with me" (GRWM) content resonate with young consumers, who are more likely to trust the recommendations of influencers they follow closely. These platforms foster peer-to-peer influence, where youth consumers are motivated by influencers they perceive as relatable and aspirational. As young people in the GCC are often keen to align themselves with the latest



trends, influencers act as conduits for global and local fashion trends that reflect both their digital engagement and cultural values (Carter, 2017).

### **Cultural Influences on Fashion Consumption**

The cultural landscape of the GCC is unique, as it blends Islamic traditions with rapid modernization. Gender roles, cultural values, and religious beliefs are central to fashion consumption patterns. While fashion for men in the region has traditionally been more standardized, with a focus on modest and formal attire such as the kandura or thobe, recent trends have seen an increase in fashion diversity and experimentation. Male influencers are now becoming increasingly prominent in the GCC fashion scene, especially among younger audiences. These influencers promote both traditional and modern styles, and their influence is gradually shifting perceptions of masculinity and fashion in the region (Freberg et al., 2011). However, fashion for men is still more conservative compared to women's fashion, with less emphasis on fast-changing trends. The influence of cultural and religious values is evident in how fashion trends are consumed by different demographic groups. While women in the GCC are more likely to embrace international fashion trends, they also seek clothing that is culturally appropriate, such as modest wear or "abaya" designs that cater to local customs. Male consumers, on the other hand, may prioritize luxury and brand prestige, as well as functional clothing that adheres to cultural norms. In both cases, social media influencers who promote culturally appropriate, yet trendy, items are particularly influential in shaping fashion choices.

### **Socioeconomic Factors and Fashion Consumption**

Socioeconomic factors also contribute significantly to how fashion trends are adopted in the GCC. The region's wealth disparity means that luxury fashion is often highly sought after among affluent consumers, while more budget-conscious individuals turn to fast fashion and more affordable options. Influencers who collaborate with high-end fashion brands are able to generate aspirational value, drawing the attention of consumers who wish to emulate the lifestyles of the affluent (Alalwan, 2018). Conversely, influencers promoting affordable, everyday fashion are just as influential, as they offer consumers an accessible way to participate in trends. The distinction between luxury and mass-market fashion is blurred on social media, where influencers of various socioeconomic backgrounds collaborate with brands that cater to both ends of the market. In the GCC, where social stratification is apparent, influencers are able to connect with different audience segments by showcasing diverse fashion brands that cater to varying income levels (Carter, 2017).

This ability to represent both luxury and budget-friendly options makes influencers an effective tool for brands looking to reach broad consumer demographics.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to explore the influence of social media and influencers on fashion trends and consumer behavior in the GCC region. The primary data collection method involves a structured questionnaire, which is designed to capture insights regarding participants' social media usage, engagement with influencers, and fashion consumption patterns. A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining quantitative data obtained from structured questions and qualitative insights derived from open-ended responses. This will enable a comprehensive analysis of the topic, as it allows for both the measurement of trends and the understanding of personal experiences with social media influencers.

### Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consists of young adults aged 18 to 35 years, who are active users of social media platforms, particularly Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. These platforms are known to significantly influence fashion trends and consumer behavior in the GCC. The sampling method used will be stratified random sampling to ensure a representative sample, taking into account key demographic factors such as age, gender, and country of residence. The target sample size will be 500 respondents, equally distributed across the six GCC countries: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain. By ensuring a balanced representation across countries, the study can offer comparative insights into the impact of social media and influencers on fashion trends in the GCC region.

### Data Collection Tools

The data for this study will be collected using a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire will consist of a variety of question types, including Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended



questions. These different question formats will allow for the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative insights. The questionnaire will assess several key aspects, such as social media usage, frequency of engagement with fashion influencers, perceptions of fashion trends, and how social media content influences purchasing decisions. This mix of question types is designed to ensure that diverse perspectives are captured, ranging from general trends in fashion to specific behaviors influenced by influencers on social media platforms.

### Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is divided into several sections that target specific aspects of the research. The first section will gather demographic information, such as age, gender, location, and preferred social media platforms. This information will help contextualize the data and ensure that the respondents are representative of the population being studied. The second section will focus on social media usage, asking respondents about the frequency of their social media activity, the platforms they use most frequently for fashion-related content, and the types of content they engage with. The third section will examine influencer engagement, measuring how often respondents follow fashion influencers, how they interact with influencer content, and their level of trust in influencer recommendations. The fourth section will explore fashion awareness and preferences, assessing how social media influences respondents' awareness of fashion trends and changes in their fashion preferences. Finally, the fifth section will investigate purchase behavior, asking respondents whether influencer recommendations on social media impact their actual purchasing decisions, the types of fashion products they buy, and the frequency of such purchases.

### Data Collection Process

The survey will be distributed online, using social media platforms that are widely used by the target demographic. Influencers who are active in the fashion sector in the GCC will be engaged to promote the survey to their followers, increasing its reach and ensuring a higher response rate. The survey will be open for a period of four to six weeks, allowing sufficient time for respondents to participate. Anonymity and confidentiality will be prioritized throughout the data collection process, and all participants will provide informed consent before completing the survey. Ethical considerations will be adhered to, including ensuring that respondents understand the purpose of the study and how their data will be used.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Once the data is collected, it will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine the demographic profile of the respondents and their social media usage habits. This will include the calculation of frequencies, means, and standard deviations for the closed-ended questions. To explore the relationships between different variables, such as influencer engagement and purchasing behavior, inferential statistics, including regression analysis, will be conducted. This will help to identify significant patterns and correlations between social media engagement, influencer trust, and consumer behavior. For the open-ended questions, thematic analysis will be used to extract common themes and insights related to respondents' personal experiences with social media influencers and their impact on fashion consumption.

### Limitations of the Study

While this study aims to provide valuable insights, there are several limitations to consider. One limitation is the potential sampling bias, as the survey will be distributed primarily through social media, which may exclude individuals who are not active on these platforms. Additionally, the study relies on self-reported data, which could introduce biases such as social desirability bias, where respondents may overstate their level of engagement with influencers or their purchasing behaviors. Another limitation is that the study may not be fully representative of the entire GCC population, as it focuses on a specific age group and may not capture the perspectives of older or younger individuals. Furthermore, cultural and economic differences across the GCC countries could influence the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the study will provide valuable insights into the influence of social media and influencers on fashion trends and consumer behavior in the region.

### Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the results of the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire designed to investigate the influence of social media and influencers on fashion trends and consumer behavior in the GCC region. The analysis encompasses demographic information, social media usage patterns, influencer engagement, fashion preferences, and consumer purchase behaviors. The findings are based on a sample of 70 respondents from various GCC countries, with data analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The sample consisted of 70 respondents, with the majority (58.6%) falling in the 18-24 age group, followed by 34.3% in the 25-34 age range. This indicates a predominantly young demographic, which is highly engaged with digital media. The gender distribution was heavily skewed toward female respondents, with 97.1% female and 2.9% male. In terms of education, 54.3% of respondents were undergraduates, and 41.4% had completed high school. This reflects the educational background of the sample, mostly consisting of individuals who are still in school or have completed their basic education. The majority of respondents were from Saudi Arabia (98.6%), with only a few participants from Qatar.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PATTERNS

The data revealed that social media usage is widespread across the respondents, with 38.6% spending 1-2 hours on social media daily, and 47.1% spending 3-4 hours. Instagram (84.3%) and TikTok (80%) emerged as the most popular platforms for discovering new fashion trends, followed by Snapchat (57.1%) and YouTube (57.1%). This indicates that fashion discovery is heavily influenced by these platforms, especially among younger audiences. Respondents engaged with fashion-related content frequently, with 44.9% encountering new fashion trends on a weekly basis. In total, 65.7% of the respondents reported that social media influences their fashion choices to some extent.

#### INFLUENCER ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST

A significant portion of respondents (84.3%) indicated that social media platforms influence their fashion choices. Micro-influencers (10k - 100k followers) were preferred by 69.6% of respondents, followed by macro-influencers (100k - 1M followers) at 76.8%. Trust in influencers' fashion recommendations was moderately high, with 42.9% of respondents stating that they trust influencers' suggestions to some extent. Notably, 40.0% of respondents indicated they trusted influencers' fashion recommendations "moderately," while 34.3% expressed "strong" trust. A notable cultural preference emerged, with 88.6% of respondents indicating they preferred influencers whose fashion aligns with local culture and values.

#### FASHION AWARENESS AND PREFERENCES

A substantial 75.7% of respondents reported discovering new fashion trends through social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok. When asked if social media influences their personal style, 65% of respondents indicated that it does to some extent. Many respondents mentioned incorporating fashion trends

from social media into their wardrobes, particularly in clothing styles and accessories. However, 30% of the respondents mentioned that they only adopt trends that fit their personal style and cultural norms. This suggests that while social media exerts influence, it is filtered through individual preferences and cultural values, particularly in conservative regions like the GCC.

### SOCIAL MEDIA AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

Approximately 70% of respondents reported purchasing fashion products after seeing them recommended by an influencer. The most common purchases were clothing (72.9%), followed by beauty products (64.3%) and shoes (55.7%). Price promotions, credibility of the influencer, and alignment of style with personal preferences were identified as significant factors influencing purchase decisions. A key finding was the influence of live-streamed events, with 40% of respondents having made a purchase during an influencer-led live stream, highlighting the effectiveness of real-time interaction in driving consumer behavior.

### COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS ACROSS GCC COUNTRIES

The analysis revealed some regional differences in influencer preferences. Respondents from Saudi Arabia and Qatar preferred local influencers who promoted modest fashion, while those from the UAE showed a greater tendency to follow international influencers, particularly those promoting high-fashion trends. This aligns with the varying cultural norms across the GCC countries, where modest fashion is highly valued in Saudi Arabia, while luxury and global trends dominate in the UAE.

### KEY FINDINGS AND PATTERNS

1. **Social Media as a Fashion Discovery Tool:** Instagram and TikTok are key platforms for discovering new fashion trends in the GCC, with 75% of respondents reporting that they discover trends via social media.
2. **Influencers Drive Consumer Purchases:** The study highlights the significant impact of influencers on consumer purchasing behavior, with 70% of respondents having bought fashion products based on influencer recommendations.
3. **Trust and Authenticity:** Micro-influencers were preferred due to their perceived authenticity and personal connection with followers. Trust in fashion recommendations was moderate to high, with many respondents trusting influencers whose style aligns with their own preferences.

4. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Cultural influences were important, with 88.6% of respondents emphasizing the importance of influencers promoting fashion aligned with local cultural values, particularly regarding modest fashion in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries.

## Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that social media platforms and influencers play in shaping fashion trends and influencing consumer behavior in the GCC. While these results align with global research on the impact of social media and influencer marketing, they also offer unique insights into the cultural dynamics of the GCC region, particularly in relation to fashion preferences and influencer perceptions. One of the most striking findings is the central role social media plays in fashion discovery in the GCC. With 75% of respondents reporting that they discover new fashion trends through social media, platforms like Instagram and TikTok are the dominant sources of fashion inspiration. This is consistent with global trends, where social media has become an essential component of the fashion ecosystem, serving not only as a promotional tool for brands but also as a platform for consumers to engage with and discover the latest trends (Koch et al., 2021). The widespread use of these platforms in the GCC highlights the importance for fashion brands to adopt digital strategies to effectively target this tech-savvy and trend-conscious demographic. Another key finding of the study is the powerful influence of social media influencers on consumer purchase behavior. Approximately 70% of respondents indicated that they had purchased a fashion product after seeing it recommended by an influencer. This result highlights the effectiveness of influencer marketing in the GCC and supports the findings of previous studies demonstrating that influencers, particularly those with high levels of engagement, can significantly drive sales and influence consumer behavior (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers curate content that aligns with their followers' tastes, preferences, and values, positioning themselves as trusted intermediaries between brands and consumers. This shift from traditional advertising to more authentic, personalized marketing strategies is key to fostering trust and loyalty among consumers.

The study also identified the critical role of cultural factors in shaping fashion preferences in the GCC. Cultural norms, particularly those related to modesty, significantly impact fashion choices. Respondents from Saudi Arabia, for example, exhibited a clear preference for influencers who promote modest fashion, reflecting the region's conservative social and religious values. This finding highlights the need for brands to develop marketing strategies that are culturally sensitive and tailored to local norms rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. Influencers who promote fashion that aligns with cultural and social values are more likely to build trust and engagement with their audiences.

The study found a distinct preference for micro-influencers over macro-influencers. Although both types of influencers are common in fashion marketing, respondents expressed a stronger connection with microinfluencers, who tend to have smaller but more engaged followings. This preference for micro-influencers reflects a broader trend in influencer marketing, where relatability and authenticity are prioritized over reach (Casaló et al., 2018). Micro-influencers are perceived as more genuine and credible due to their closer, more personal relationships with followers. As such, fashion brands seeking to connect with their target audience in the GCC should consider collaborating with micro-influencers who are in tune with local cultural values and consumer preferences. The findings of this study emphasize the growing importance of social media and influencers in shaping fashion trends and driving consumer behavior in the GCC. By understanding the cultural context of the region and leveraging the power of micro-influencers, fashion brands can develop marketing strategies that resonate with their audiences and foster long-term brand loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the influence of social media and influencers on fashion trends and consumer behavior in the GCC region. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, are central to how consumers in the GCC discover and engage with new fashion trends. Influencers play a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences and driving purchase decisions, with micro-influencers proving to be particularly effective due to their authenticity and relatability. Additionally, cultural factors, especially those related to modesty, play an essential role in shaping fashion trends and influencer content preferences in the GCC.

The results suggest that fashion brands targeting the GCC must be aware of the cultural and social dynamics at play. Digital marketing strategies, including influencer collaborations, should be tailored to the values, tastes, and preferences of the region's consumers. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of building trust and authenticity in influencer partnerships, particularly when engaging with younger, digitally savvy audiences who prioritize transparency and personal connection over traditional advertising tactics.

#### **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

While this study provides valuable insights, it also opens several avenues for future research. One potential area for further investigation is the impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty in the GCC. Future studies could explore how long-term collaborations between brands and influencers affect consumer loyalty and brand perception, especially in a market as dynamic as fashion. Additionally, examining the role of influencer marketing across different types of fashion (modest fashion, luxury fashion, streetwear, etc.) could yield more nuanced insights into how influencers impact specific consumer segments. Another area for future research could be a deeper exploration of the gendered dimensions of fashion influence in the GCC. While this study briefly touched on cultural preferences regarding modest fashion, more in-depth research could examine how gender influences fashion consumption and the way influencers target male and female audiences in the region. This research could be especially useful in understanding the growing market for men's fashion in the GCC, which is increasingly being shaped by influencer marketing. Further studies could also investigate the impact of emerging technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI), on fashion marketing in the GCC. As these technologies become more integrated into social media platforms and shopping experiences, they could transform how influencers promote fashion products and how consumers engage with them. Understanding how these technologies are changing the influencer-consumer relationship could provide valuable insights for future marketing strategies. Lastly, a comparative study of influencer marketing across different regions in the Middle East could provide a broader understanding of how cultural and social contexts shape consumer behavior in the fashion industry. This would help to identify regionspecific trends and best practices for influencer marketing that could be adapted and applied in the GCC. This study contributes to the growing body of research on the role of social media and influencers in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the GCC context. It highlights the importance of understanding cultural, social, and technological factors when designing effective marketing strategies in the region. Future research should continue to explore these evolving dynamics, offering deeper insights into how fashion brands can navigate the rapidly changing landscape of digital marketing in the GCC.



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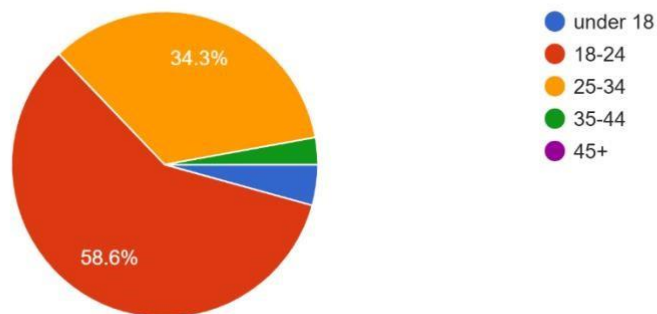
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### APPENDICES

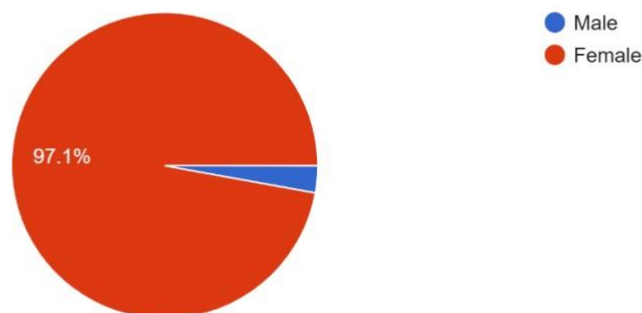
#### Appendix A: Questionnaire

### Influence of Social Media and Influencers on Fashion Trends and Consumer Behavior in the GCC

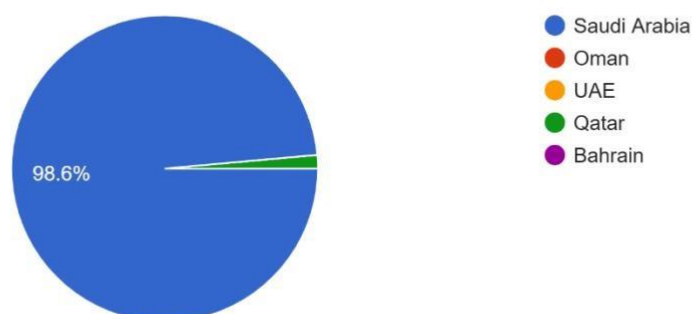
1. Age:  
70 responses



Gender  
70 responses



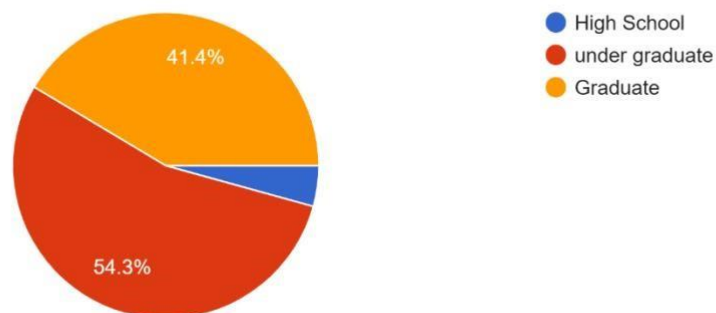
1. Country of Residence:  
70 responses



1.

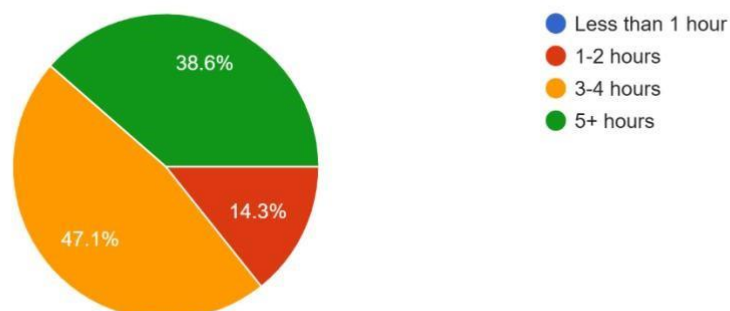
### Level of Education

70 responses



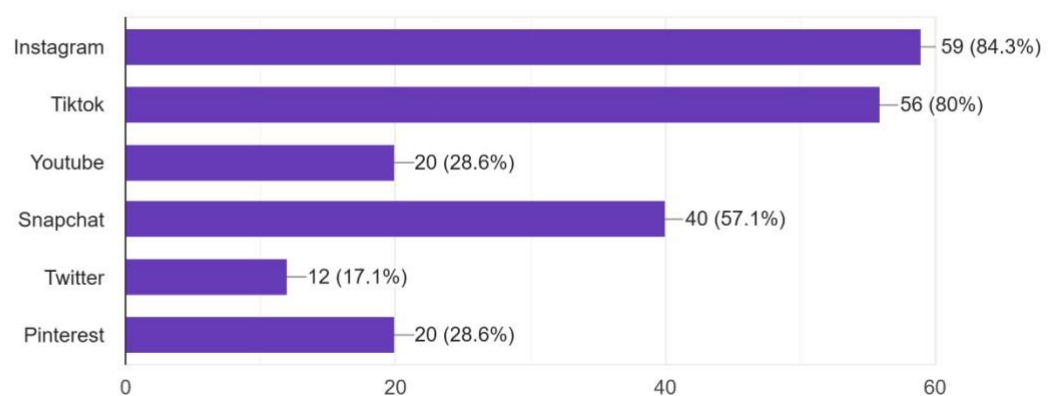
### How many hours per day do you spend on social media?

70 responses



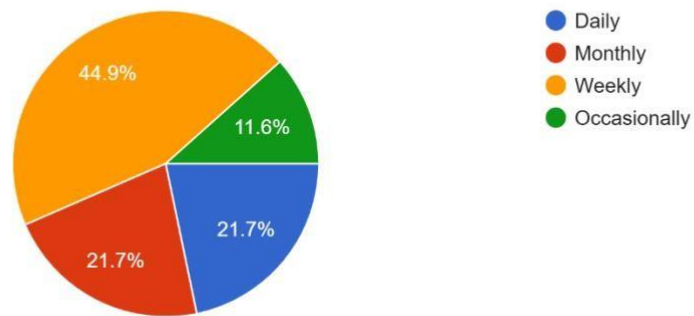
### 1. Which social media platforms do you use to discover new fashion trends? (Select all that apply)

70 responses



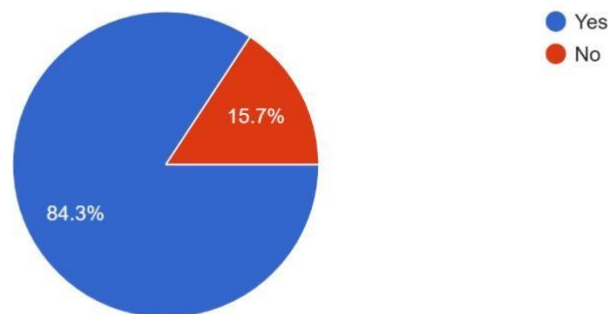
How often do you encounter new fashion trends on social media?

69 responses



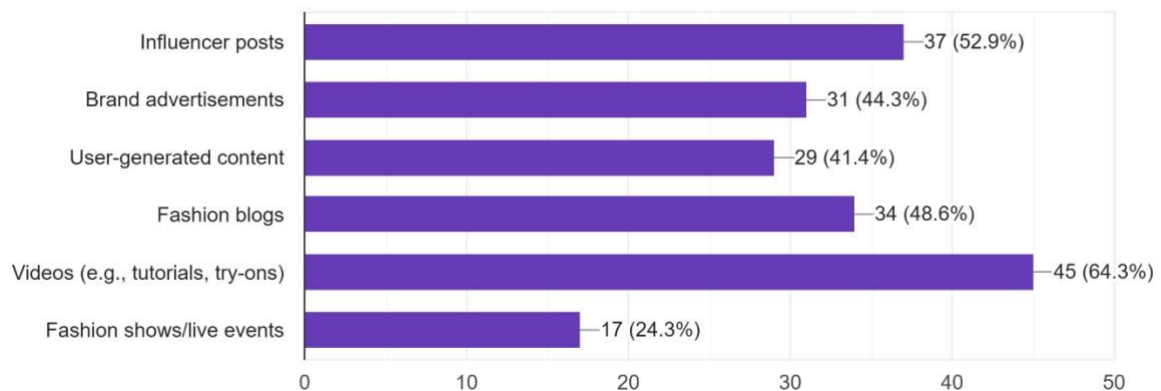
Do you feel that social media platforms influence your fashion choices?

70 responses

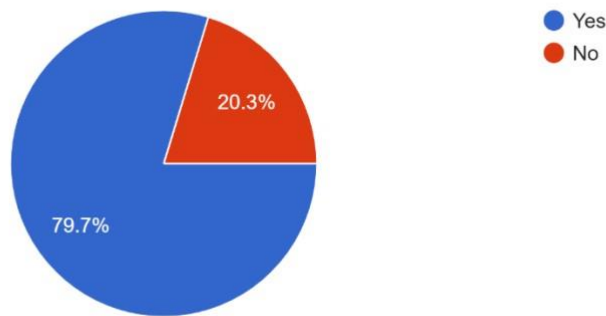


1. Which type of content on social media influences your fashion choices? (Select all that apply)

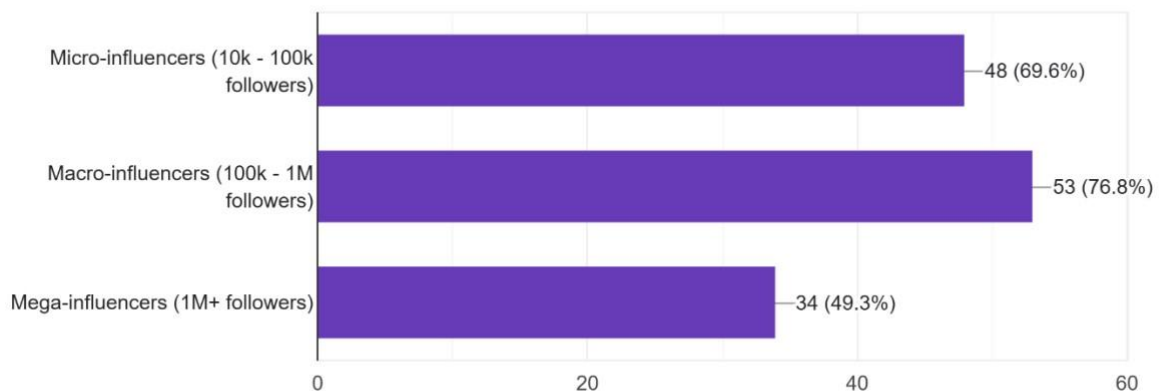
70 responses



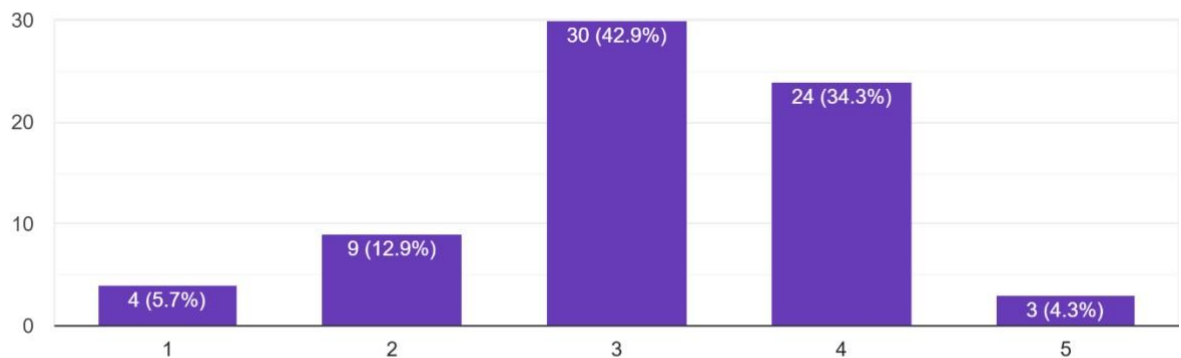
1. Have you ever purchased a fashion product after seeing it recommended by an influencer?  
69 responses



Which type of influencers do you follow for fashion inspiration? (Select all that apply)  
69 responses

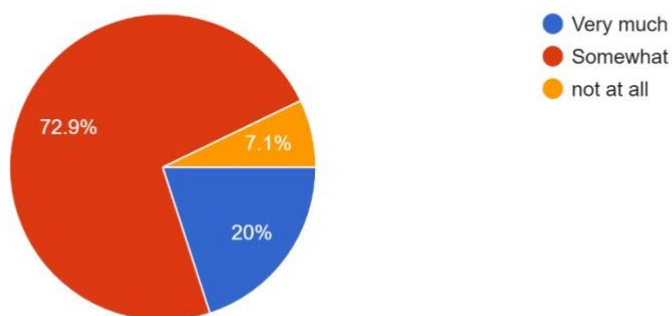


1. How much do you trust the fashion recommendations of influencers?  
70 responses



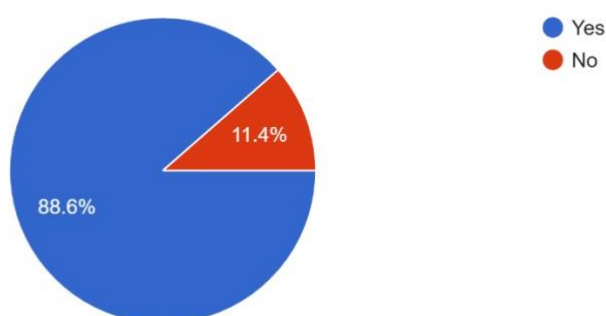
1. To what extent do you feel influencers' fashion recommendations align with your personal style?

70 responses



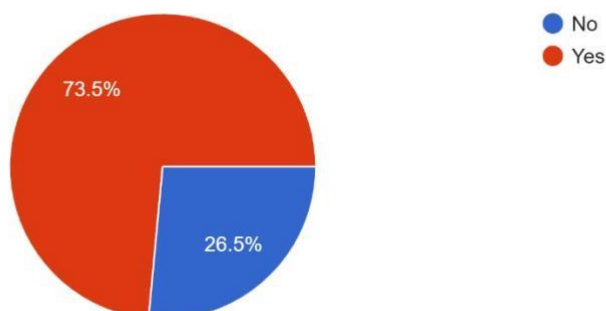
Do you prefer influencers who promote fashion aligned with local culture and values?

70 responses



Do you prefer influencers who promote modest fashion?

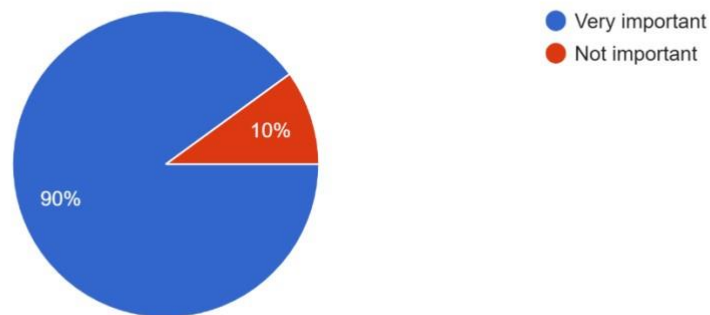
68 responses





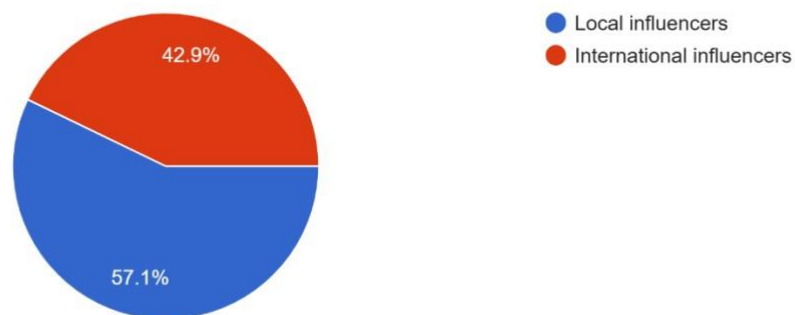
1. How important is it for you that fashion trends promoted by influencers respect cultural norms in your country?

70 responses



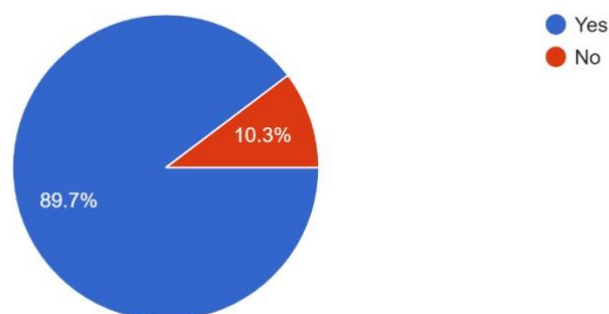
Do you think that fashion trends in the GCC are more influenced by local or international influencers?

70 responses



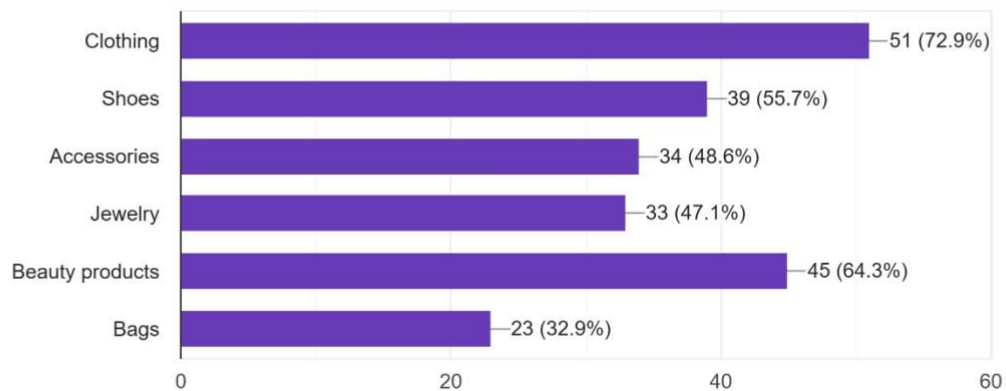
Would you say that social media platforms have helped you discover new regional fashion brands?

68 responses



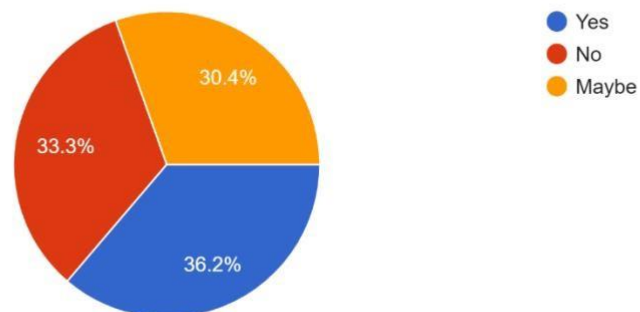
Which fashion items do you most frequently purchase based on influencer recommendations?  
(Select all that apply)

70 responses



Do you engage with influencers' posts (like, comment, share) related to fashion?

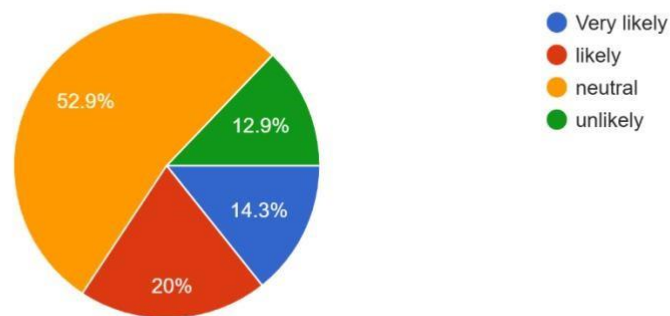
69 responses



2.

1. How likely are you to purchase a fashion product after seeing an influencer endorse it?

70 responses



1. What factors influence your decision to follow a fashion influencer? (Select all that apply)

70 responses

