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**How Social Media Marketing and Word-of-Mouth Can
Influence the Buying Behavior of Consumers in The
Indian Fashion Industry?**

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ABSTRACT

With the advances in social media, the fashion industry has been significantly affected. Social media has not only transformed the way in which people interact with one another but had also impacted customers' purchasing patterns. This new way of communication is helping advertisers to reach more customers. The research was aimed to understand how social media marketing and word-of-mouth can influence the buying behaviour of consumers in the Indian fashion industry.

Prior to conducting primary research, secondary research was done to collect information. Both qualitative and quantitative research was executed. Three interviews (qualitative) and a questionnaire (quantitative) were the data collection methods that were used for this research.

The exploration demonstrates that designers actively use social media platforms to communicate with their customers. Depending on their presence in the industry, these designers choose social media marketing and word-of-mouth to influence their customers' buying behaviour. As the designers are using social media regularly, a lot of information related to fashion is available online for the consumers. These consumers acknowledge that social media marketing and word-of-mouth are increasingly credible than traditional marketing.

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Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their constant support and encouragement throughout the process. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, this work is my own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of others, is indicated as such. I have identified all material in this dissertation which is not my own work through appropriate referencing and acknowledgement. Where I have quoted or otherwise incorporated material, which is the work of others, I have included the source in the references. Any views expressed in the dissertation, other than referenced material, are those of the author.

Signed: Harika Rudraraju

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background – The changing face of marketing

In today's technology-driven world, retailers are able to market their products and reach more customers using social networking sites (Jindoliya, 2017). With the advancement in social media, the marketing scenario has completely changed. The age where marketers reach their customers through one-way communication came to an end (Parker, 2011). The traditional marketing approaches have radically changed during this specific technical revolution, and it carried marketers to a completely new era (Lee, 2013).

These days advertisements do not work any longer in reality as there are an excessive number of them and they intrude the consumers inappropriately (Brown & Hayes, 2008). In comparison with traditional media, social media has extraordinarily changed connections among customers and organizations by permitting two-way communication. Today, without the use of technology and internet, most business procedures cannot be accomplished. Basically, most organizations are expected to think beyond advertising and traditional ways of marketing and are expected to accept change (Doyley, 2013). This led to the emergence of a new marketing activity called 'social media marketing' (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010).

Social media deals with individuals to express and share thoughts, beliefs and sentiments with others (Fotis, 2015). It also enables companies to reach large populations. Moreover, social media is currently an essential part of everyone's lives (Jindoliya, 2017). Customers can use a wide range of platforms, types and tools, with various qualities and results that empower them to be associated with each other. Word-of-mouth has a significant role in social media. It is exceptionally known for decades in the marketing area. However, today word-of-mouth seems considerably more crucial than ever before in impacting consumers' decision-making process. Undeniably, social media can convey and spread word-of-mouth between many people, like no other channels have had the option to do as of recently (Henri Gros, 2012).

One industry which exquisitely and naturally fits social media is the fashion industry. Using the latest social networking technology, online social networking platforms empower the fashion industry to connect with their customers (Ahmad et al., 2015).

With the introduction of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat, the fashion industry appears to be changing. A culture is built around these platforms, which is alluded as Insta-culture (Jandér & Andersson, 2016). With social media, the information related to fashion is now available to the general public which was initially only available to elite insiders (McCarthy, 2013). From fashion blogs to shopping, consumers have a wide range of information available on social networking sites which enables them to learn more about fashion. Consumers are no longer confined to groups of nearby neighbourhoods, road corner shops or clubs, their decisions are currently influenced by a pool of several online companions and friends of friends that exist on social sites. The present fashion trends depend on regularly changing network programs and social networking. Earlier, where the print media was relevant has now changed with the shift of power to the customer preferences (Ahmad et al., 2015).

1.2 Research question and objectives

There were many researchers who concentrated on the factors that may impact a customers' decision-making process in the Indian fashion industry. But there is a significant absence of research clarifying what is the accurate role of social media and word-of-mouth in this process. Hence, this dissertation is governed by one focal research question *“How social media marketing and word-of-mouth can influence the buying behaviour of consumers in the Indian fashion industry?”*

The objective of this research is to uncover the advantages of utilizing social media marketing and the effect it has on the buying behaviour of the consumers. Specifically, this research is interested in the role of social media marketing and word-of-mouth in the Indian fashion industry and how the designers are making the change to embrace online networking channels. The research attempts to find:

- How are fashion designers influencing the buying behaviour of customers using social media and word-of-mouth?
- How are the customers perceiving the information available to them?

1.3 Significance and scope of the research

The research is basically centred around the role played by social media marketing and word-of-mouth in influencing the customers buying behaviour in the Indian fashion industry.

Considering the objectives, initiating the study from the customer's and the designer's perspective would be fundamentally an appropriate methodology.

The expansion of online networks altogether made a new encounter for customers regarding information gathering, comparing products and prices, and so on. Hence, it is crucial for marketers to comprehend the customer's behaviour on the internet. To anticipate the consumer behaviour, marketers need to perceive how, where and why consumers act a certain way on the internet. This study seeks to explore the effect of social media on consumer behaviour. The examination will provide a better understanding of consumers experiences and their buying decision making process.

The research can be further useful in providing strategies for social media marketing and provide a powerful way to serve them better thereby guaranteeing future visits and purchases. The research findings will help in drawing a generalized conclusion regarding the influence of social media marketing on consumers.

1.4 Research report structure

The first chapter proposes and focuses on the research background, questions and objectives. This chapter also includes the structure of the research. The next chapter explores the literature in the field of interest, while also explaining definitions of fundamental ideas to have a solid foundation of the topic. The purchasing behaviour of customers in the Indian fashion industry is discussed. Different social media platforms frequently used by customers and the relation between the decision-making process and social media is also mentioned. Finally, a summary is presented stating the research gap and the two questions that help in analysing the gap.

The third chapter discusses the research methodology along with the philosophies, sampling methods utilized to precisely answer the research questions. Hence, the way in which the data is collected and analysed is presented. Further, this chapter is concluded with the ethical issues that were under concern for writing this paper. Chapter four analyses the results and findings of the study. The findings from the research are cited and discussed. Chapter five includes the conclusion of the research, followed by the practical implications, limitations, scope for further research and personal reflection.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social media marketing and Word-of-mouth

As consumers are being more socially active, they are participating in various activities including consuming content, taking part in discussions, offering information about their purchases to different shoppers, and so on. With the tremendous enthusiasm for online networking and user-generated content on platforms like Facebook and YouTube, customers are believed to be effectively adding to the marketing content (Hienonen, 2011). One-way communication has been changed into intuitive two-way communication by evacuating all the limitations identified with time, place, medium and so on. Accordingly, brands and customers are communicating for shared benefits (Gautham & Sharma, 2017).

Social media is referred to as “*online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content*” (Universal Maccann International, 2008). Miller, Fabian, and Lin (2009) considered the significance of online networks and reasoned that it lies in the connection between customers and the community. Further, the authors explained that social media enables intuitive, less expensive and compelling communications. In the present technological-driven and profoundly informative world, blogs, internet communities, social networks have become increasingly essential for individuals universally. Consequently, social media is used as an alternative communication tool to support existing connections and activities that enlarges users’ experience. Additionally, it is also a platform for brands and helps in influencing the buyer’s choices.

The spread of social media has completely changed the buying and selling procedures in the last few years (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). From learning about the product to post purchase behaviour, social media influenced the behaviour of the customer (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

According to Golden (2011 as cited in Ramsunder, 2011), social media marketing has the subsequent factors:

- **Tone:** social media is about loyalty and accuracy. Customers need to be assured by the marketers that the information given to them is reliable and credible.
- **Conversation:** social media allows two-way communication where the consumer also plays a crucial role. Consumer opinions also impact the marketing strategy.

- **Validation:** Like an advertiser's brand highlights and benefits, buyer and customer surveys also seem to be impressive, leading the brand to relate to its customer's desires.
- **Reach:** social media marketing enables marketers to approach a larger group of spectators with progressively sensational outcomes effectively and efficiently.
- **Control:** The web enables the whole world to report what they see through their eyes, while making the information accessible anytime. This information is not constantly precise, neither can be regulated by the marketer. Moreover, it's the marketer's responsibility to react to these messages in a proficient way.

Considering the above variables, it is assumed that social media marketing empowers marketers to enhance relations among consumers and attract potential customers in unique ways. Buyers need to like the purchased products and reveal their judgements of the purchase. Apart from quality and reliability, purchasers expect a prudent and intuitive association with the brand. Thereafter, these purchasers share their opinions by welcoming or "alluding" their "companions" which results in word-of-mouth (Ramsunder, 2011).

According to Anderson (1998) & Mangold et al. (1999) (as cited in Elli, 2017), *“Word-of-mouth is the activity of sharing experiences and spreading information among the customers, whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with products or services.”* With the entry of the Internet age, consumers are ready to give and get product and service-related guidance online, which prompted the commencement of electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) communication (Anastasiei & Dospinescu, 2019). A few researchers have recognized word-of-mouth's strength of interpersonal impact and contemplated this to be cost-effective, influential and convincing type of promotion (Elli, 2017).

There are three attributes of word-of-mouth stated by Kotler et, al., (2008):

- **Credible:** People believe the individuals who they know and regard. They are persuaded by the ones they admire. Subsequently, word-of-mouth demonstrates to be a valid and trustworthy source of information.
- **Personal:** When individuals speak with others, they share their encounters and point of views. Thus, word-of-mouth mirrors an agreeable sentiment or potential proposal.
- **Timely:** word-of-mouth develops when individuals are keen on sharing their understanding or knowledge, which contains substantial information, occasions, and encounters.

In the initial stages in order to build good relations with others, consumers shared their feelings and experiences. This relationship creates trust among the people (Hossain et al, 2017). According to Lau and Lee (1999), the positive behaviour like positive word-of-mouth, intention to buy are formed based on the factor of trust. Subsequently, a positive and solid conviction in a brand turns into a fundamental constituent of a consumer relationship (Gautham & Sharma, 2017). Word-of-mouth gives satisfaction to the consumer and builds the brand and trust among customers. When word-of-mouth is developed and used properly, the organization can attain long term customers and furthermore any brand can have a solid picture through that intensity of word-of-mouth. Over 90% of the buyers trust the product or service that is recommended by other people (Hossain et, al, 2017 & William, 2017).

In their article Hanna et al. (2011), talks about the manner in which social media controls the lives of the customers and how consumers initiated to participate in formulating a marketing strategy for the company. They additionally highlight how companies have begun to understand that they must be dynamic in social media. These authors also depict the significance of understanding that platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are an incorporated framework or as they put it, in an ecosystem, with regards to marketing. According to Bento et al. (2018), in order to increase brand awareness and create engagement, marketers are progressively using social media within their brand strategy. Brodie et al. (2013), in their research stated that trust, satisfaction, commitment, emotional connection and loyalty can rise from customer engagement. They also mentioned that loyalty, commitment and empowerment are primarily related to online brand community.

2.2 Negative word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth has both positive and negative impact on customer buying behaviour. Positive word-of-mouth happens when buyers give good reactions towards the product or service. When a negative response regarding a product is made, it leads to negative word-of-mouth. Negative word-of-mouth is more dominant than positive word-of-mouth and this negative information is more heavily weighted in their purchase evaluation (Hossain et, al, 2017 & William, 2017).

Chiosa & Anastasiei (2017), in their article mentioned that negative word-of-mouth changes the brand perception and has a critical effect on switching intentions in relation to purchasing the products of that brand later on. Customers who experience negative feelings towards a brand more than once, might tend to separate from that brand. They may consider it does not mirror

their character and will likewise decline that they are associated with the brand items. Sen & Lerman (2007), concluded that customer's attitude towards a product is affected by the reviews (positive or negative). Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011), found brand equity dilution takes place as negative reviews affect consumer-based brand equity. Additionally, Chatterjee (2001), sealed that customer patronizing a recognizable retailer is less open to negative word-of-mouth and customer-retailer familiarity mitigates the significance of negative comments on the perceived reliability and purchase intention. Similarly another research states that positive and neutral messages online result in similar brand evaluation and attitude while negative and low-image brand reduce consumer brand evaluation and attitude (Chiou & Cheng, 2003).

However, Nielsen's global trust in advertising report of 2015, verified that word-of-mouth is one of the best advertising models as 83% of customers trust others judgements regarding a product over any other form of advertising (Elli, 2017). Word-of-mouth has a better impact than traditional marketing, hence marketers emphasize more on this. One of the key components in the consumer decision making process is word-of-mouth (Hossain et, al, 2017 & William, 2017).

2.3 Types of social media platforms frequently used by consumers:

Miller & Lammas (2010), discovered that 70% of social media platforms are used by more than 11 million buyers in order to gain knowledge about the products and services, purchase them and provide their feedback and suggestions. The growth in social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram has empowered customers to interact with brand-related word-of-mouth. It has been recorded that marketers are collaborating with their customers and creating long haul connections through social media (Chu & Sung, 2015). This study will focus only on Facebook and Instagram.

FACEBOOK: One of the largest social networking platforms, has an average of 864 million daily users. In April 2011, Facebook propelled another entry for marketers to enable them to create brand promotions. More than 6 million customers are enrolled to purchase and share information about products and services (Oyza & Agwu, 2015). An investigation demonstrates 60% of people using Facebook state that upon following a brand on social media platforms, a product or service is recommended to others (Parsons, 2013). Facebook enables organizations to increase their word-of-mouth marketing to customers who use online networks or mobile phones (Oyza & Agwu, 2015).

INSTAGRAM: With active users sharing and uploading different pictures, Instagram is spreading across widely having more than 800 million active users and 25 million business profiles. At least one business profile is followed by half of Instagram users and through this platform 60% of them have acquired knowledge regarding a product or service. Instagram also enables in developing brand awareness and helps in introducing new products to its potential customers. 70% of Instagram users also spend time searching for a brand on this platform (Collins, 2019). As Instagram has an asset of visual storytelling it has moved into the fashion forefront, even when there have been different platforms for the fashion labels. This photo-sharing application is an ideal platform as fashion intensely depends on graphics and visuals (Amarnath, 2018).

Guidry et al., (2015), research analysed that among all the social networks, Instagram has had a quick development rate. It is indicated through their results that, as a challenge to their social media strategy, advertising experts should put Instagram before Facebook and Twitter. According to these experts, to create brand personality and loyalty, Instagram appears to be a viable method. The effect of word-of-mouth on Instagram grows exponentially. With the developing popularity of social media, various platforms have attracted customer socialization. This encourages customers to communicate and demonstrate a new type of customer socialization that influences word-of-mouth (Wang et al., 2012). While a few researchers analysed word-of-mouth patterns, it is quite unclear as to what makes customers willing or hesitant to take interest in brand discussions on Instagram (Park et al., 2016).

However, according to Saravanakumar & Suganthalakshmi (2012), research, they stated that the frequently used social media platforms that enable users to comment and share on pictures are Facebook and Instagram. It is also observed to communicate with their customers, retailers use these platforms.

2.4 Consumer decision making process and social media.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2005), *“A consumer decision making process incorporates five phases to procure a product or service.”* In the initial stage the consumer recognizes the need, then gathers the necessary information. He later evaluates the various alternatives and finally settles down to take a decision. These authors also studied that customer can avoid a couple of steps in the decision-making process and routine purchase. However,

when a customer thinks about purchasing another product and is in a complex purchase circumstance, these five phases would be utilized to finish the purchase procedure.



Figure 1: Consumer decision making process.

Fauser et al. (2011), studied the effect of social media on touch points throughout the customer's purchase decision process. He concluded that.

- In order to support continuous communication, customers felt that it is significant to share information, establish relationships and collaborate with others.
- Social media marketing helps the organizations to provide customers with more information about the product including its benefits and features. It also helps in giving real time feedback to its customers.
- During the initial stages of the purchase process, customers are increasingly dependent on social suggestions. Hence, social networks like Facebook were observed to be an appropriate platform for sharing information.
- For information regarding the products, advice and suggestions, customers used means like Facebook reviews and ratings.

Summarising the above points, the authors concluded that social networks were viewed as powerful and termed as an 'All purpose' means which connects customers at different stages of the purchase process. The outcome of their study demonstrated that social media marketing might influence consumer decisions at different stages of the purchase process (Fauser et al. 2011).

Cuming (2008) studied the relationship between the customers and social media websites in America. This research incorporated the buyers view of online brand information. His research concluded that:

- Social media is utilized by 60% of users as a channel to suggest or comment on products through word-of-mouth.
- 70% of buyers collect information and conduct research through social media sites.

- Depending on the information collected from online networking, 49% of these buyers make their final decision (Ramsunder, 2011).

Evan (2010) stated that customers share their experiences through social media after their purchase process. These experiences are linked by social media to the social feedback cycle. When a customer buys a product or service, he uses it and develops a positive or negative opinion towards it. Through social media platforms, he will share his experiences with his friends and his loved ones. This discussion that the customer is having will be viewed by other customers who are aware of that product or service. In the next stage of consumer decision making process, information related to the product or service can be easily located online based on the experiences shared by the customer. As the source of information is reliable and credible, the customers will believe the experienced customer's evaluation. If the product or service has positive feedback and is recommended by the previous customers, the present customers will consider this product, but negative feedback will surely refrain them from purchasing the item and search for another alternative (ARCA, 2012 & Ramsunder, 2011).

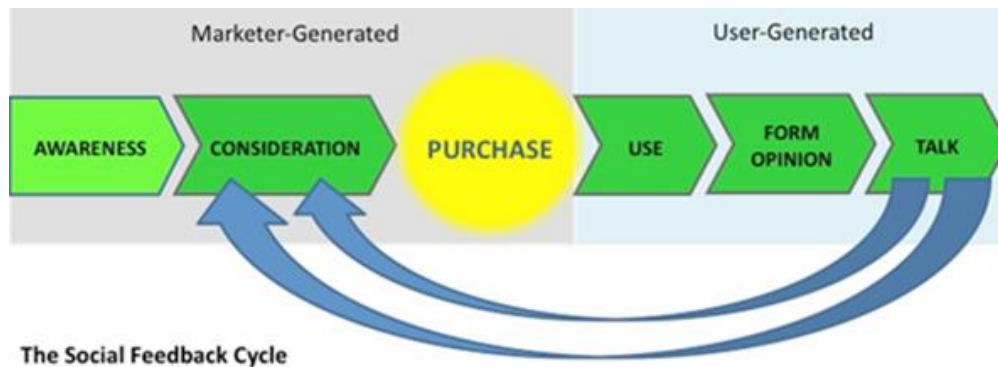


Figure 2: Social Feedback Cycle

According to Mangold & Faulds (2009), social media provides an impeccable opportunity for consumers to share their feedback, thus enabling them to be more engaged with the brands. Zailskaite et al. (2013), in their research stated that consumer engagement is becoming increasingly applicable as social media has the ability to influence the final purchase. Therefore, consumer engagement on social media was evaluated using different perspectives. Mollen & Wilson (2010) defined the interactive association and experience among consumers and brands as consumer engagement. Similarly, Haven (2007), mentioned that customer engagement on social media is the influence, communication, intimacy and involvement a person creates with the brand. His framework suggests a more integrated understanding of the shopper's activity, underlining the significance of individuals' conduct and influencing powers.

2.5 Purchasing behaviour of customers in the Indian fashion industry.

In the past couple of years, India has seen an immense change in the fashion industry. With worldwide prominence of the Indian fashion designers, India is gradually turning into a powerhouse for fashion (Karthika, 2019).

According to Kuester et al. (2012), “*Consumer purchasing behaviour is the investigation of people and the techniques that are used to choose, secure, use and discard products, services, experiences that fulfil the needs and the effects that these procedures have on the buyer and the society*” (Shafi & Madhavaiah, 2014). Vikkraman & Sumathi (2010), investigated the consumer’s buying behaviour in the Indian Apparel industry and determined that factors like self-concept and need for uniqueness influenced the clothing interest directly and indirectly impacted the purchase intention.

In the past few years, due to increase in awareness and information technology among Indians, there has been a huge shift in their buying behaviour. The effect of financial and social conditions, cultural environment, education and occupation level along with media coverage dramatically transformed the rural consumer’s way of living. The rate of working women also increased after 1990’s which enables them to take their decisions while purchasing the required things. However, Indian customers still rethink their purchase decisions (Chakrapani, 2015). Many individuals search for suggestions from other individuals before purchasing something (Naz, 2014). With the boost in technology, the internet is allowing consumers to associate with each other, build relationships and share information with each other to take decisions (Ramsundar, 2011).

2.6 Summary

Social media marketing has turned into an exceptionally compelling and valuable two-way communication channel among marketers and customers. Marketing activities on social media enhance marketer’s communication to reach a more extensive group and build long haul viable customer associations. These activities also encourage customers to communicate virtually with different buyers over the globe (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). Fashion industry in India, which is growing expeditiously offline and online, social media is being used by customers to share information regarding the product or service to make quick decisions. Fashion immensely influences various facets of an individual’s life, and it is also considered as a medium through which people can communicate about themselves to the society. With rapid increase in social

media marketing, designers and marketers can influence the customers. Hence, it is essential to understand the customer's purchasing behaviour within this industry (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

There were many researchers who studied the factors that affect the consumer decision making process in the Indian fashion industry. Few of them concluded that blogs can significantly affect how consumers appreciate a liable source giving them suggestions and information. But a gap was identified where more research could be done. The following research questions were developed to analyse the gap:

Question 1: The extent to which fashion designers are using social media and word-of-mouth to influence the consumers buying behaviour.

Question 2: To understand the perception of customers towards word-of-mouth and social media marketing in the Indian fashion industry.

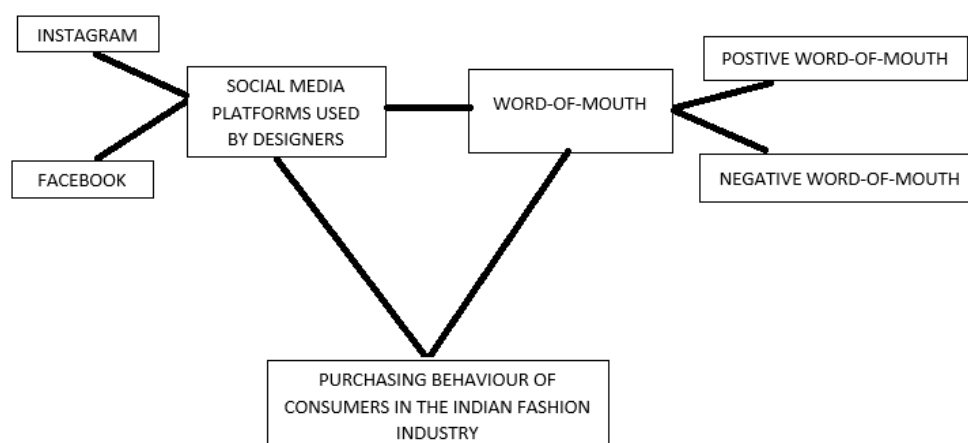


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

The following chapter lays out the research methodology. It provides a brief discussion about the research methods chosen and justification for choosing these methods.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy

According to Saunders et al, (2009), “*Research philosophy is a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge*”. In every phase of research, different types of assumptions are made. These incorporate beliefs about human knowledge (epistemology)

and the truths experienced during research (ontology). These assumptions assess research questions, methods used and interpret findings (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.1.1 Ontology

According to Easterby-Smith et al, (2005), “*Ontology is about how researchers consider the idea of presence and reality.*” It is an arrangement of convictions that reflects a perception by a person about what comprises evidence (ResearchMethodology, 2019). There are two features of ontology: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism “*states that social phenomena and their implications have a presence that is free of social actors*”, while subjectivism “*sees that social phenomena is developed from perceptions and resulting activities of those social actors concerned with their existence*” (Bryman, 2012 & ResearchMethodology, 2019). The subjectivist aspect of ontology will be followed as this study examines how social media marketing and word-of-mouth are influencing the buying behaviour of customers in Indian fashion industry. Since the field of study is structured and dependent on the perspective of its participants, it is justified to use this aspect.

3.1.2 Epistemology

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2015), stated that “*Epistemology is about the concept of knowledge and through general presumptions, it enables the researchers to comprehend the ideal methods for enquiring into the idea of the world.*” They articulated that there are two different aspects: positivism and social constructionism. Positivism discovers sociology by applying methods of natural sciences. In order to comprehend real life phenomena, it must be computed and reinforced with evidence (Crotty, 1998 & Hammersley, 2013). Social constructionism advances that reality is developed by social connections in which social actors build partially shared implications and realities (Saunders et al, 2016). This includes utilizing approaches that are dependent on implications and learnings of researchers who translate components of the investigation, and their morals are built-in all aspects of the study. These researchers are increasingly intuitive and participatory (Chowdhury, 2014). As the objective of this dissertation is to pick up the experiences in the convictions and thoughts of the respondents to comprehend and analyse human behaviour, this research philosophy is justified.

3.2 Sampling method

The researcher should gather information from all cases to answer the research questions. Hence, there is a need to choose a sample. Researchers use sampling techniques as they don't

have enough time or resources to analyse the entire population (Taherdoost, 2016). There are two methods namely, probability sampling where all the members have equal chance to be chosen and non-probability sampling where a non-systematic process is chosen to select the sample that does not ensure equal chances (Elfil, 2017). This method is adopted when research objectives and questions do not intend to generalize its results (Saunders et al, 2016). Hence, non-probability method was opted for this research. Further, judgmental or purposive sampling technique was chosen, as this method relies on the researcher when requesting participants to take part to provide important information (HealthKnowledge, 2017). According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), *“Judgmental sampling is constrained as the capacity to sum up findings from a deliberately chosen sample to the general population is inaccurate”*. To overcome this, first all the designer outlets in Hyderabad, a city in India, were pinpointed, where the participants were selected to engage with. Depending on their accessibility and availability only 3 of them participated in the interview process.

For conducting the survey, the researcher used the same technique, where the questionnaire was sent to a network of contacts using social media. This ensured that the respondents knew social media platforms and tools. Thus, the sample was selected on personal bias, yet the researcher was positive about the respondent's statements and their potential to circulate the questionnaire. In order to complete the research and have more responses, snowball method was also considered. The participants were requested to forward the survey to their friends. Nonetheless, this technique would not have ensured that the members held the needed information and expertise (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). But by doing this, the researcher gathered more data to analyse.

To fulfil the objective of this study, 160 participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and 3 local Indian fashion designers were interviewed.

3.3 Research methods and Limitations

In this study, mixed methods research was undertaken which means embracing a research strategy using more than one type of research method (Brannen, 2005). By doing this, the researcher can take advantage of the strengths and adjust the drawbacks of each method (Bronstien & Kovacs, 2013). To complete this study, interviews and a survey were conducted to collect the data.

Local Indian designers were interviewed through telephone to interpret the usage of social media platforms and word-of-mouth to influence the purchase intentions of customers. A telephonic interview helps in acquiring information which enables interpersonal communication without personal interaction (Worth & Carr, 2001). This method is helpful as the respondents are geographically distributed. Telephone interviews are powerful and efficient method for gathering information as the respondents to be reached are accessible through telephone (Mathers et al, 2000). One major drawback of telephonic interview is that the interviewee cannot be seen, hence, the body language cannot be used to get more information (Opdenakker, 2006).

To analyse how customers are getting influenced and interpreting the impact social media marketing and word-of-mouth have on them, a survey was conducted through Google forms, where a self-completed online questionnaire was sent across to different Indian customers. In a questionnaire, the respondents were given a set of questions which they read, interpreted and answered appropriately. As there was no personal communication between both the parties, the answers given by the respondents were accurate and honest. The interviewer saved time, along with human and financial resources as there was no interaction. Due to lack of personal contact, the interviewer had to verify that questions were simple and coherent. Another disadvantage was the response rate is very low which could at times affect the sample size (Kumar, 2011 & Mather et al, 2009).

3.4 Pilot study

Prior to executing any study, it is crucial to review its quality and adequacy. Hence, before conducting the actual survey a pilot study was performed. A pilot study is carried out on a small-scale which helps in giving information about where the actual study can fail or whether advised strategies or tools are irrelevant or extremely confusing (Teilingen & Hundley, 2002 & Saunders et al., 2012).

For the purpose of this research, the questionnaires were given to 6 students of University of Bristol, who had good knowledge related to the Indian fashion industry. Before the questionnaires were sent to the respondents a brief explanation was given to them. Upon completing the questionnaire, the participants provided feedback and recommended to improve the questionnaire by giving suggestions like reducing the scale from 10 to 5 points for easier

ratings. All the inputs given were considered and the required changes were made to confirm that the survey was easier to understand and interpret by the participants.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In order to study the research's validity, a pilot test of the questionnaire needs to be conducted to ensure participants do not experience any hurdles while answering the questionnaire (Saunders et al., 2009). Prior to conducting the survey for this research, the researcher pre-tested the questionnaire by giving it to a group of people for their opinions and comments, which were later modified. Investigations and conclusions are derived from substantial numerical facts from the data collected, to acquire confirmed and appropriate information.

With respect to the reliability of the research, *"It refers to the stability of a measure, and the extent to which the data collection method will yield consistent analysis"* (Saunders et al. 2009). The questionnaire was sent to around 160 participants, finally 150 questionnaires were filled conveying adequate answers to yield persistent and sufficient findings. For interviews, prominent and outstanding designers were chosen who could provide authentic information as they were dealing with the social media sites that were used for marketing. Thus, reliable conclusions can be made.

3.6 Data analysis

The collected data was analysed in two ways. The questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics. The researcher used bar graphs and pie charts to present the data. Descriptive statistics is helpful as it allows the researcher to take large amounts of data and summarize it in simple methods (Anon, 2019).

After interviewing the designers, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings in word documents. With the scripted interviews, a thematic analysis was done. *"Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data."* A theme catches and portrays anything significant about the information gathered by the researcher. This offers an organized method to exhibit familiar responses and purposeful synopsis of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7 Ethical consideration

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), while carrying out a research ethical implication must be considered. The following ethical issues were considered while conducting interviews and giving out questionnaires:

- **Protection from harm:** During the interviews and survey, it was assured that the respondents were safe from any physical or psychological threat.
- **Informed consent:** Prior to the interviews, participation information and consent forms were given to the respondents to understand the nature and purpose of the research. A brief description about the research was provided to the respondents answering the questionnaire. None of the participants were obliged to participate and could leave the research in the middle if they were not comfortable.
- **Right to privacy:** The data collected from the participants was kept confidential and the names of the interview participants was mentioned under their consent.
- **Honesty:** The reports provided after the information was gathered were reliable and complete. Findings and results were presented equitably and without any distortion.

No ethical considerations were violated during this research and all the participants were provided with the necessary information at the initial stage of the survey.

The next chapter presents the findings of the research. It analyses the data collected during the research process and presents the qualitative and quantitative data.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter exhibits the responses gathered by conducting surveys and interviews. This section is further divided based on qualitative and quantitative data. Thematic analysis was done to analyse qualitative data, where the information is broken into themes. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics with pie charts, column charts and bar graphs.

4.1. Qualitative Data

This section of the chapter demonstrates the thematic analysis of the interviews. The collected data is broken down into three themes (i) social media platforms (ii) Increasing customer base (iii) The benefit of social media marketing and word-of-mouth on business.

4.1.1 Social media platforms

These days social media platforms are not solely used to stay in touch with friends, but also a marketing tool that is used to reach target audience. The most popular ones in India are Facebook with 1.59 billion users using it to promote businesses, organizations and brands. The other most popular platform is Instagram a visual social media platform, with 400 million active users influencing followers with reviews of products and services (Maina, 2018).

A common theme was noticed among the 3 designers interviewed, as all of them were keen on using Instagram to communicate with their customers. Jayanthi Reddy, a well-known and established designer who is a part of the Lakme Fashion Week stated *“In fact social media platforms such as Instagram mainly is one of my main ways of marketing and getting across to my clients and Facebook as well, but it’s definitely not as popular as Instagram today because a lot of youngsters are the ones who are on Instagram and they are more tech savvy with it, and a lot of my clients are basically brides who are young.”* She even specified that she is successful in terms of the social media Instagram profile as she has almost 260,000 followers. Furthermore, according to her research and statistics, she noticed that 80% of her clients have seen her Instagram profile and walked in. She also has a website of her own which is marketed through Instagram. Similar to what Jayanthi said, research led by Nielsen NV (2015), stated that in India the monthly active Instagram users increased in a year. It also stated that Indian Instagram users are the individuals who are generally young between the age group 18-24, with high spending power and the ones who are technology driven. The research additionally determined that users follow many brands on Instagram. Over half of them purchase products from the brands that they follow. In order to learn and stay in touch with the most recent products they follow these brands. *“One of the big motivators for fashion businesses is to be Insta-ready”* (Amarnath, 2018).

Similarly, Geethika, a new designer and Chetana quite a famous designer in the industry had comparable responses in regard to using Instagram. Geethika, states that her customers come to her with screenshots of posts where *“All the youngsters that would be 70% come from Instagram and 30% are the old people who come from Facebook.”* she also added that *“Our target crowd is 18 to 35. So, that age group people are usually most active on Instagram, so that’s the reason why we are mostly focusing on Instagram.”* Chetana also stays in touch and communicates with her customers by posting 3-4 pictures and a lot of stories on Instagram and Facebook, but when a new collection is launched, she posts 15-20 pictures as a catalogue.

According to her *“Facebook has come down and our target audience are mostly through Instagram.”*

The point gained from these responses is that these days the designers are concentrating more on Instagram as they believe that their clients are young individuals who are often engaged with Instagram than any other social media platform.

4.1.2 Increasing customer base.

Attraction is a key element for a successful business. This implies that there must be something which makes the provider interesting to give their customer (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017). This theme was developed when the designers mentioned about the different ways, they use to attract their customers in order to increase their customer base.

According to Geethika, by doing collaborations she can increase her social media presence and marketing. She specified that *“We generally collaborate with actresses, fashion influencers and bloggers to reach more people and also, by posting original, unique content, so that the engagement with the audience increases.”* In accordance with this, the findings of the research by Ublova (2014), state that, few people become customers, as they are invited by their friends and have intentions to purchase the product. It is very important to have a good impression as they are not familiar with the brand. These customers often tend to build relationships and opinions based on the posts they see on social media platforms. The organization may lose customers if this first contact fails to attract customer’s attention. Geethika also mentioned that a lot of new customers do approach her due to suggestions made by previous customers. She stated that to attract these customers, *“We continuously post ethnic stuff and the reach becomes stagnant, so suddenly when we post like an Indo-western outfit or something, there is shock sort of a thing for the audience, so suddenly that post gets a lot of reach. So, vice-versa it happens.”* Later, she added that by doing this she is increasing her customer base.

As fashion is a highly visual industry, posting a lot of content on social media helps brands to increase customer base and experience, brand awareness and loyalty (Marta, 2018). Chetana’s view on social media is *“Previously it used to be one way communication, like whatever we post, customers used to see, but these days what we observed is that there should be a lot of interaction, a two-way communication between the customer and the brand, we need a lot of input from the customer so that we can improve our product or the way we serve the people.”*

In order to strengthen brand messaging and to expand reach creative social media engagement is essential (Marta, 2018). The study by Ublova (2014), stated that instead of producing their own content customers tend to consume a lot of content on social media. Similarly, Chetana mentioned that *“On daily basis customers want lot of new content and what we observe is like customer can take how much ever content that you can post. Now the customers have very low attention and time, so you must post lot of content at the same time so that customers absorb this, and you know whenever they have an occasion or event, then they’ll come to you.”* By doing this her customer base increased as she mentioned that her average orders increased a lot as compared to last year. She also explained that she has a track of the new, repeat and referral customers. *“On a monthly basis, I would say 40% will be new, 30% will be my old customers and rest 20-30% will be referral. You know that’s a good sign, like when your brand has 50% of your customers as your referrals and your repeat, this shows that it is a trustable and reliable brand.”*

Brands need to perform different activities to deepen their connection with customers (Ublova, 2014). Jayanthi, already successful in terms of social media, believes that *“There is always improvement I feel, you can never be on the top, there are always ways to improve. And I would say, I mean the way I plan on improving is kind of improving the quality of my pictures, adding a lot of more behind the scenes, information to let the client know that we are a big brand and there is a lot of effort that goes into making the pieces. It’s not just, making outfits and posting them, there is a lot of inspiration that is required. So yeah, I feel like the way I am going to go forward and kind of bring my brand more online is kind of let the clients know what happens behind the scenes and explain to the client what I am posting and the details and the work that goes on behind it.”* In accordance with this point another researcher stated that young people enjoy watching videos rather than reading posts. For fashion labels using social media platforms videos are a good choice to engage with customers (Ublova, 2014). Furthermore, Jayanthi disclosed that *“My followers increase every now and then, initially I used to get like an extra 1000 followers every 2-3 days, but now that I already have quite a large amount, now it increases every week or so. So, I have never seen a decrease in my followers, it always keeps increasing, sometimes it might be slow when I kind of don’t post enough to engage a client, but the more you keep posting, the more you keep having celebrities, the more popular you get, the more followers you have.”* This shows that her customer base is increasing constantly. Later she added that customers who came through word-of-mouth had a positive impact on her customer base.

Finally, it can be said that these designers take different actions to draw customer's attention to increase their customer base. All of them also mentioned that they do collaborate with jewellers to increase their brand presence as it is a complementing business.

4.1.3 The benefit of social media marketing and word-of-mouth on business

Fashion and social media are inseparable. The aesthetic appeal of clothing and the visuals of social media platforms blend well together. Big fashion brands are using social media to improve their brand awareness and increase their sales (Libby, 2016). This theme emerged when the designers spoke about which medium benefits their business and how negative word-of-mouth affects their brand.

Geethika revealed that word-of-mouth has bigger impact on her business than advertising, though she believes that *"A lot of sales happens through word-of-mouth and through advertising your name gets popular."* Being new to the industry, it is very crucial for her to build her brand. word-of-mouth helps in generating positive attitudes towards products and services, which in turn helps in building a brand image (Wagner, 2019). Later she adds that she has never encountered negative word-of-mouth but admits that this can have a negative impact on her brand. She also said that *"If it directly comes to us then we would talk to them and sort it out, like what went wrong, so that we can help them to have a better experience, but definitely we would like to find out what the issue is and then be able to, I mean not discount maybe but we can remake the whole piece."* By doing this she thinks she can overcome negative word-of-mouth.

According to Chetana, advertising and word-of-mouth *"Both, should go hand in hand, because these days things and trends are changing very quickly, both should work, you can't really rely on one thing. Previously there used to be very less brands, so that time word-of-mouth used to work but now you know you should keep hitting on your customer's head that "we are there! We are there!"*. There were two instances she recollected where both had a great benefit to her business. *"Customers came to us saying that, somebody in their family had purchased for their wedding, so they want their half saree ceremony for both their daughters to be done by us in a contemporary way but for a traditional occasion. So, you know they have spent almost 4-5 lakhs with us just through word-of-mouth and, that's the first time they are coming to us but were ready to spend that huge amount and that too it was completely a customized order, which we*

never did!” and coming to advertising she said it works best for the international clients. *“We took a risk of doing individual show depending on our digital marketing. But it really paid off. For a private show people that too in a different country, people came to us to purchase. That’s what we have been doing for the past two years which is completely through digital marketing.”* So finally, she says both kinds of marketing are required for her to do her business.

Coming to negative word of mouth, she says *“Even though how good you are at your product or customer service, that 2% bad customers will be there. Whatever or however you do the product, they are not happy.”* In accordance with this, Marta (2018), stated that after a brand is established and is active, regardless of how extraordinary it is, there will be customer complaints. A negative review on a social media platform is a blessing in disguise. Later Chetana added that *“But you should compare the percentage like how many things like this happen in a month, if it is below 5% then it is accepted, because you can’t really convince or satisfy every customer. So, what we usually do is like we either exchange the product or sometimes there are cases that we refunded the amount, because the end of the day the customer satisfaction is important. They can’t really go to other people and say, “these people screwed my outfit, and they cheated on us.” Yeah, but we have a very good percentage of happy customers at least 99% I can confidently say.”* Finally, she said *“We try our level best to avoid such things”*.

Jayanthi being well established in this industry says advertising works better for her business. According to Khatri (2006), celebrity endorsement is a strategy used by marketers to attract customers. Presently, in order to create a unique identity, it turned into a need to relate famous personalities with their brand. Celebrity endorsement creates a buzz and offers popularity to the brand. Jayanthi mentioned that *“I do have a lot of popular people, like I mean there are a lot of socialites who wear my clothes, there is Aditi Rao Hydari who is a celebrity, who has been my showstopper wears them very often and we also get a lot of people like Sonam Kapoor wanting to wear the outfits, she has been my showstopper as well. So, I would say more of celebrities wearing them and of course like I mean socialites who are very well known in the social circle, somebody like that wears it, you know people be like “oh even she’s worn it, so let’s just go and pick something similar.” so, that’s how it works.”* She later added that, advertising with celebrities increases her brand presence where she gave an example that after a celebrity wore her outfit in a show, she had got 40-50 orders on that outfit. Similar to what Jayanthi said, research conducted by Han & Yazdanifard (2015), stated that customer purchases are influenced by celebrity endorsements. When a celebrity is seen on an advertisement, the

consumer tends to think *“If this product works for this celebrity, then it can work for me.”* This leads to consumer purchasing the product.

Speaking about negative word-of-mouth she said, *“Definitely it does affect and that’s why as a brand we go out of our way to make sure everybody is happy, whether it’s in terms of the quality, whether it’s in terms of the time that it’s delivered, whatever it is, it definitely makes a bad impact on your brand you know when someone messes up with an order.”* Later she added that *“we have always been very good with customer service, we always do a complete refund to them, or we give them another tiny gift to make up for whatever mess we have been through, so yeah I am not saying that we haven’t made mistakes but 99% of them have not been bad experiences to be honest.”*

Ultimately, after the interviews it can be said that as Jayanthi is well established in the industry, advertising on social media works better for her and word-of-mouth isn't that significant. On the other hand, Geethika is still new to the industry and creating a brand image, word-of-mouth is very essential for her. Lastly, all three designers did not experience much negative word of mouth, but the measures taken to overcome it is quite similar.

4.2. Quantitative Data

This segment of the chapter proposes the descriptive statistics. The results of the findings are set out under four themes (i) social media usage (ii) The effect of social media on consumers in relation to the fashion industry (iii) social media marketing vs. Traditional marketing (iv) The effect of social media on consumer purchasing decision.

4.2.1. Social media usage

The first four questions of the questionnaire were general questions which help in analysing whether the respondent uses social media and for how long they are engaged with it, which platforms are they most active on and the purpose of using them. By understanding these factors, it will facilitate the researcher to evaluate the respondent’s social media usage.

Q1: Do you use social media?

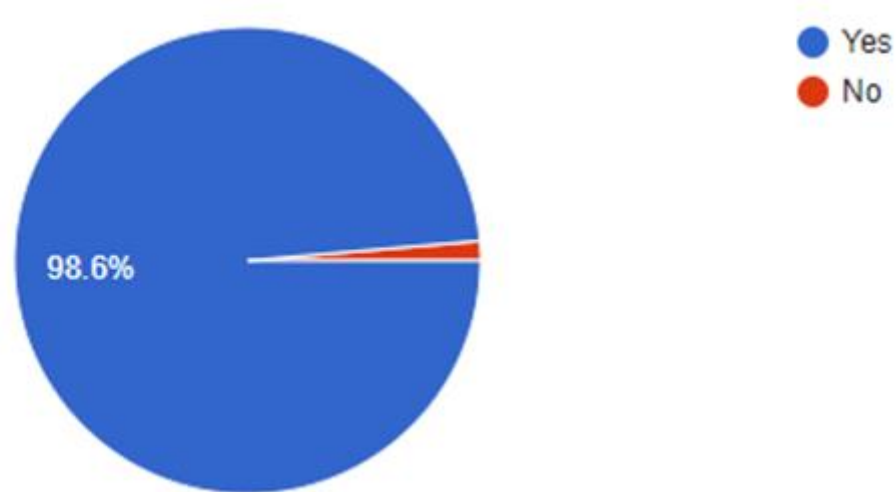


Figure 4: Social media usage

The above chart depicts 98.6% of the respondents use social media while only 1.4% do not use it. This is due to the ease of internet access that all the residents of India have as per Statista Research department (2019) and the number of social media users in India stood at 351.4 million in 2019.

Q2. How many hours do you spend on social media?

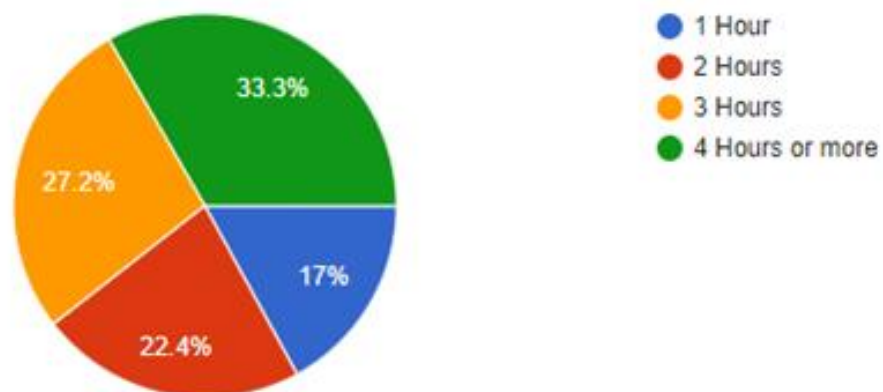


Figure 5: Number of hours spent on social media

The chart above displays that 17% of them use social media for an hour, 22.4% use it for 2 hours, 27.2% use it for 3 hours and finally 33.3% of the sample size use it for 4 or more hours.

Q3. What is your purpose for using social media?

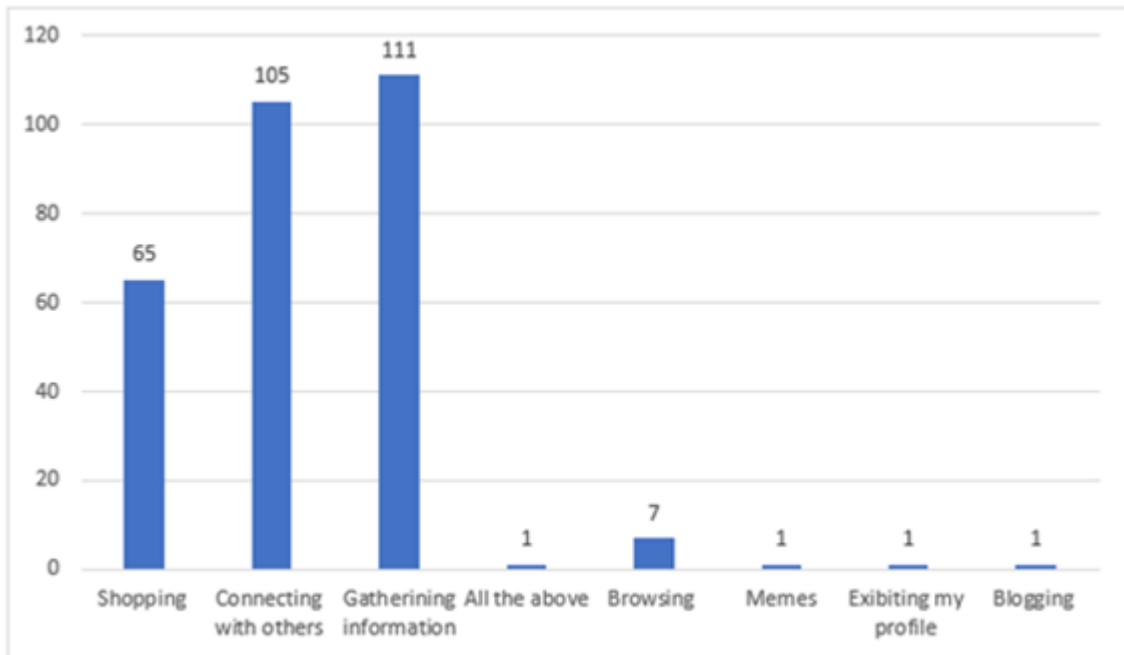


Figure 6: Purpose of using social media.

The bar graph depicts consumers usage of social media for various purposes. The most significant reason was gathering information (111), followed by connecting with others (105) and shopping (65). Consumers use social media to gather information and shop online as they can research about the product, check previous customers reviews and evaluate their purchase decision (Xplenty, 2017). With the ease of internet access, people can connect with others across the world. The other respondents mentioned that they use social media to browse (7), exhibit their profile (1), check memes (1) and for blogging (1).

Q4. Which social media sites do you use?

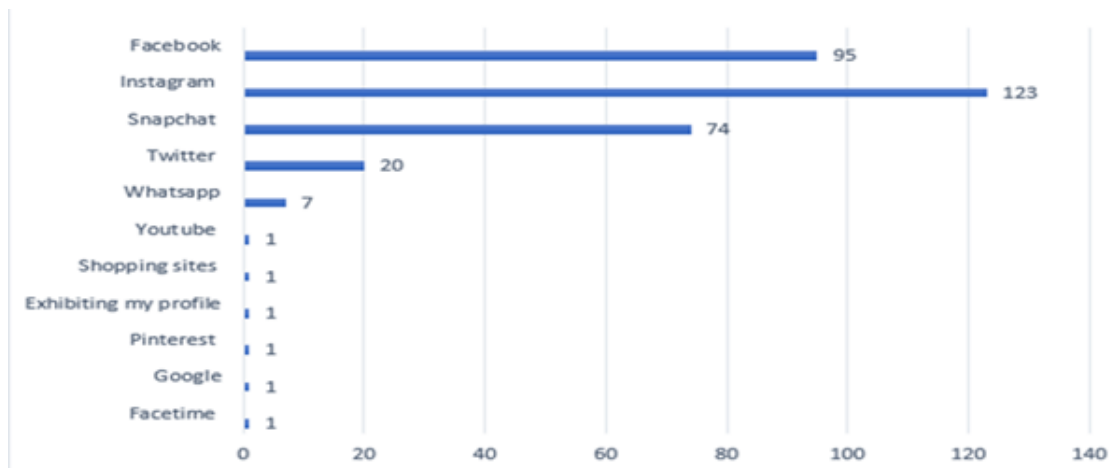


Figure 7: Different social media sites used.

The column chart depicts that majority uses Instagram (123) followed by Facebook (95) and snapchat (74). As mentioned earlier, Instagram and Facebook are the most popular platforms India, which helps people share information. Quite a few uses twitter (20) and WhatsApp (7). While the others mentioned they use YouTube (1), Pinterest (1), Google (1) and Facetime (1).

4.2.2 The effect of social media on consumers in relation to fashion industry

The next four questions help in understanding how social media is helping the fashion consumers learn about fashion and adopt it, and do designers play a role in influencing them.

Q5. Have you previously used social media to learn about fashion?

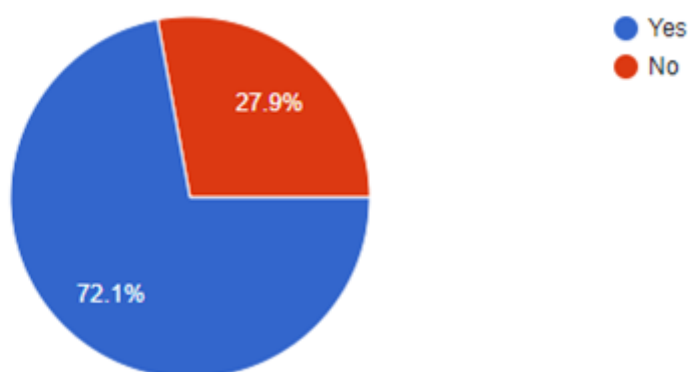


Figure 8: Usage of social media to learn about fashion.

The pie chart presents that 72.1% of the respondents use social media to learn about fashion while 27.9% do not use it. The fashion industry's withheld power and impact is evident on social media. Social networking sites like Facebook, have constructed a modern trend among consumers. From fashion blogs to shopping, consumers have a wide range of information available on social networking sites which enables them to learn more about fashion. social media is helping the fashion industry easily accessible to the general public (Ahmad et al., 2015).

Q6. Do you follow designers on social networking sites?

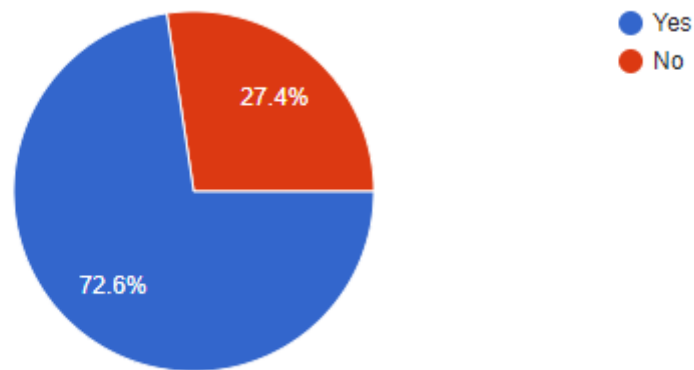


Figure 9: Designers on social media

The above chart shows that 72.6% of the sample size follow designers on social networking sites while 27.4% do not follow designers. The existence of fashion designers on social media platforms is noticeable and these designers who comprehend the worth of social media have a huge fan following (Ahmad et al.,2015).

Q7. The designers that you follow belong to which category?

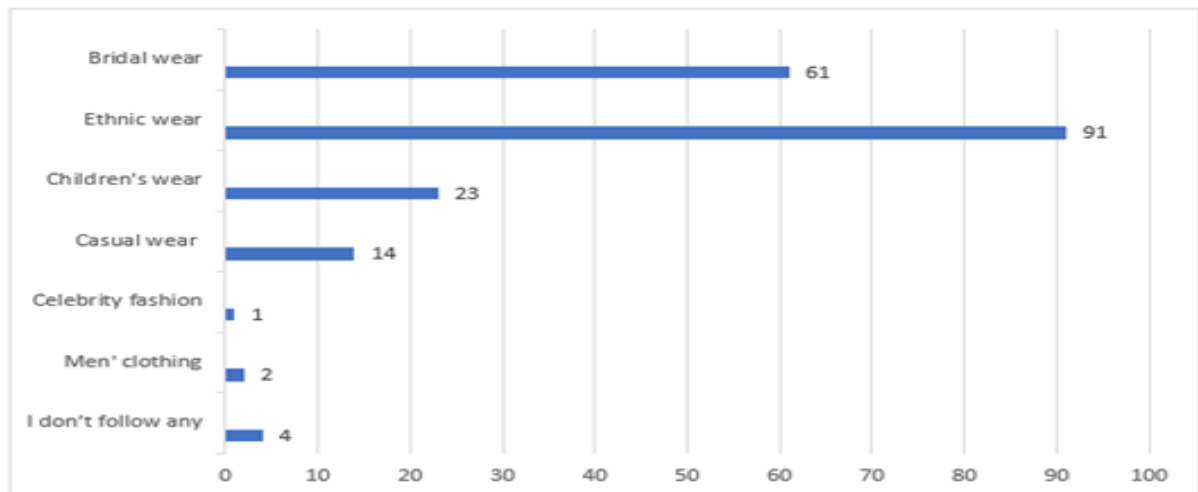


Figure 10: Designer categories

The column chart depicts that most of the respondents follow designers for ethnic (91) and bridal wear (61), followed by children's (23) and casual wear (14). India is a diverse country with different cultures and religions (Sharma, 2012). Ethnic wear is a part of Indian culture. Consumers wear these outfits during weddings and some special events. This kind of clothing is generally followed by all ages of people (Shah, 2017). Attire is an important aspect in a wedding which needs to be paid a lot of attention (Today'sbride, 2017), so consumers always

tend to get their wedding dresses from designers who design according to consumer preferences. The children's and casual wear are focused by designers to reach a wide range of customers. The rest of the respondents mentioned that they follow designers who deal with celebrities and men's clothing. Few of them mentioned that they do not follow any designers.

Q8. Do you adopt the latest fashion trends from social media sites?

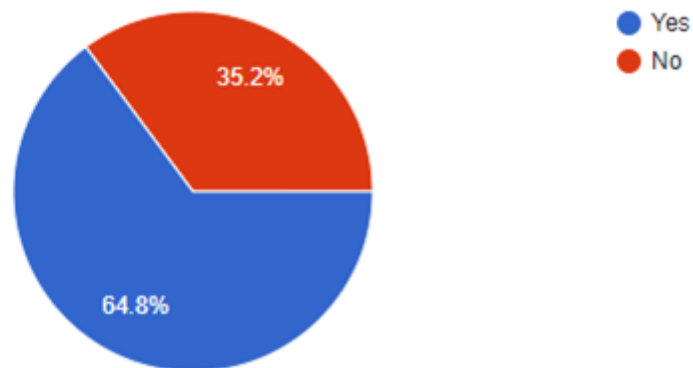


Figure 11: Adoption of fashion trends from social media

The above chart shows that 64.8% of the respondents adopt the latest fashion trends from social media sites while only 35.2% do not adopt.

4.2.3. Social media marketing vs. Traditional marketing

The next three questions help in analysing whether the respondents find social media marketing and word-of-mouth better and useful than compared to traditional means of advertising and to understand which source is credible.

Q9. Does social media influence your buying decisions?

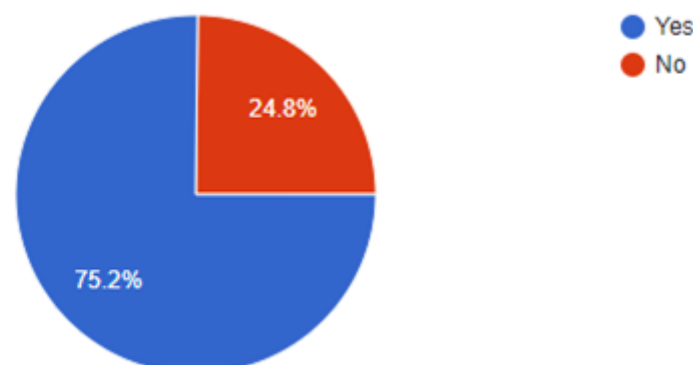


Figure 12: social media influence on buying decisions.

The pie chart mentions that 75.2% of the respondents accepted that their buying decisions are influenced by social media while the rest 24.8% said that it doesn't influence their decisions.

Q10. What is your preferred source of information for your purchase decision?

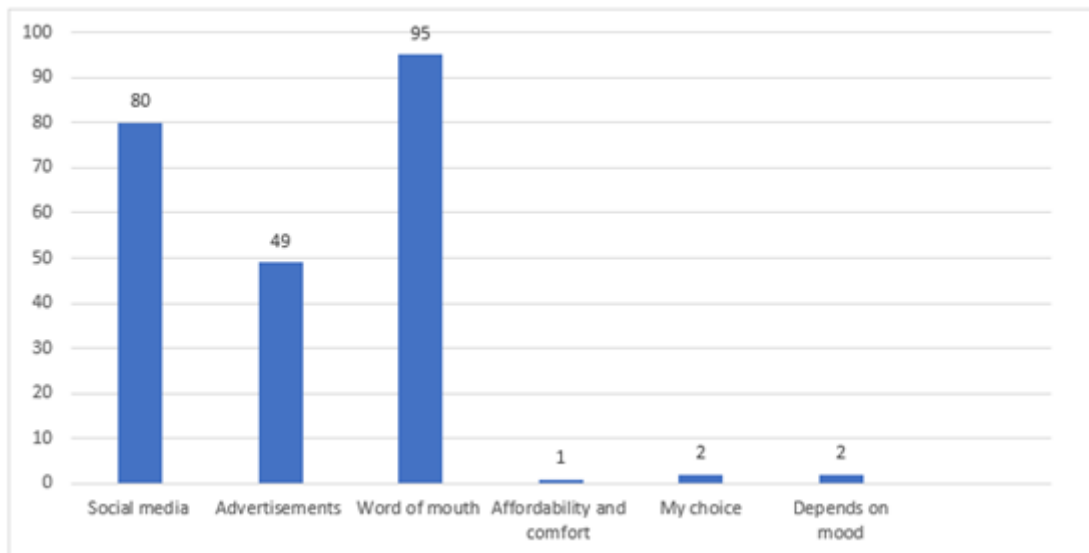


Figure 13: Preferred source of information

The bar graph illustrates the different sources of information for the respondents purchase decision. This suggests that consumers prefer word-of-mouth (95) and social media (80), followed by advertisements (49) to gather information to make a purchase decision. As mentioned in question 3 consumers use social media to gather information and connect with others, this implies that these factors are influencing their decision making. The other few reasons mentioned are affordability and comfort (1), their choices (2) and mood (2).

Q11. Do you think social media and word-of-mouth have higher credibility than advertisements?

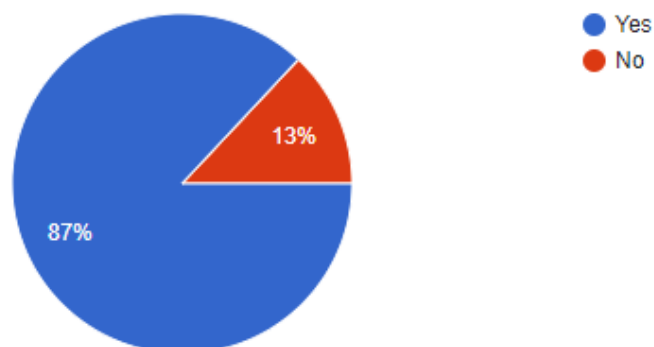


Figure 14: Credibility of social media and word-of-mouth

The above chart portrays that 87% of the sample think that social media and word-of-mouth have higher credibility than advertising, while the rest 13% think that advertising is more credible. Consumers generally trust their family and friends more than any advertisements posted by the marketers (Mosley, 2017). For many consumers others experiences and thoughts regarding products are an important source of information. This information is more trustworthy and valuable (Kavanagh, 2018).

4.2.4. The effect of social media on consumer purchasing decision.

The last set of questions in the questionnaire help in understanding how social media affects consumer purchasing decision by looking at how often respondents depend on information regarding a purchase, if their initial preference changes after checking social media, how reviews and ratings affect their buying behaviour.

Q12. How often do you rely on the information available on social media if you have uncertainties regarding a purchase?

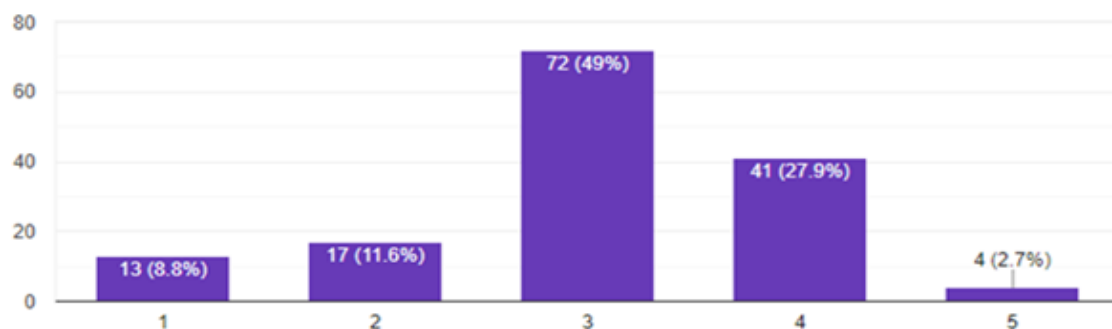


Figure 15: Reliability on social media

This bar graph highlights how often respondents rely on social media to make a purchase decision. While 49% of the respondents sometimes rely on the information, 27.9% often rely, 11.6% rarely depend on this, 8.8% never rely and only 2.7% regularly depend on information available on social media if they have any uncertainties regarding the purchase decision.

Q13. Do you change your initial purchase preference after searching relevant information via social media?

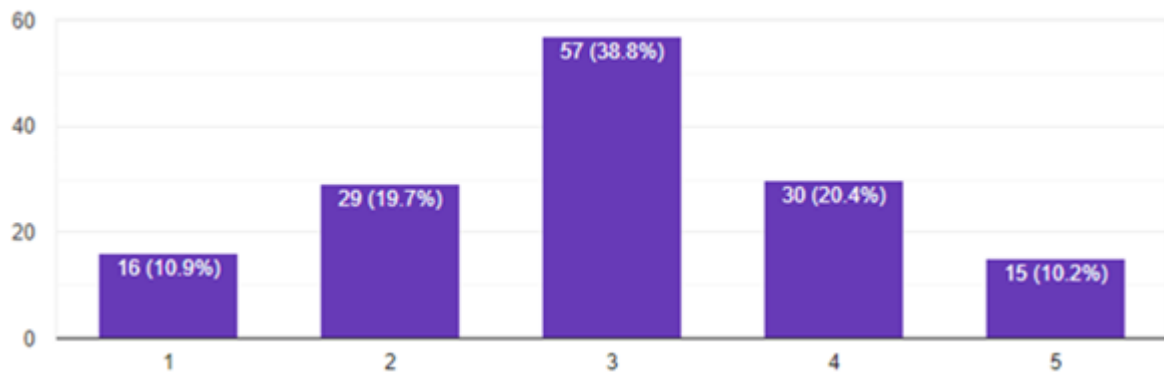


Figure 16: Change in purchase intentions.

This bar graph exhibits that 38.8% accepted that they do sometimes, 20.4% approved that it happens quite often, 19.7% said it rarely does, 10.9% confirmed that it never does and only 10.2% of them accepted that it changes regularly.

Q14. How often are you likely to share/comment/review etc. to peers or friends via social media after a purchase?

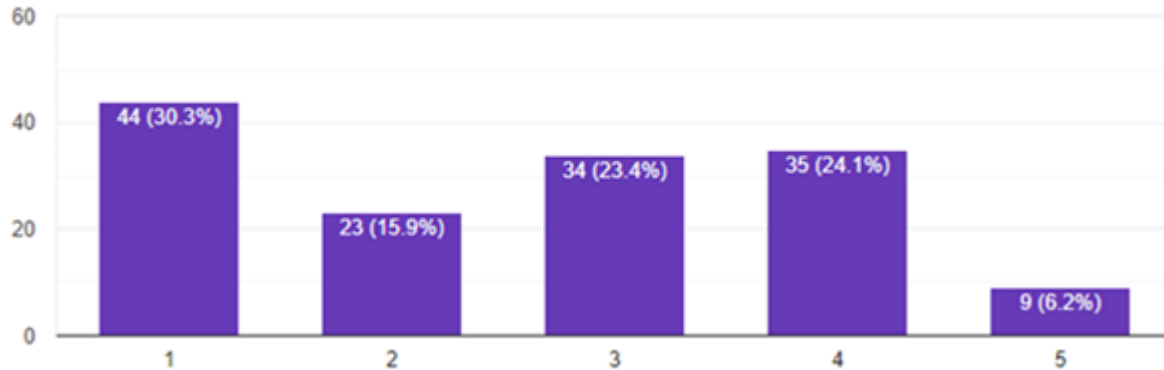


Figure 17: word-of-mouth via social media

This bar graph shows that 30.3% never post about their purchase, 24.1% post very often, 23.4% does this sometimes, 15.9% rarely do it and 6.2% of the respondents regularly keep their peers and friends updated through social media regarding their purchase.

Q15. How much do you agree that social media helps in acquiring information about fashion trends?

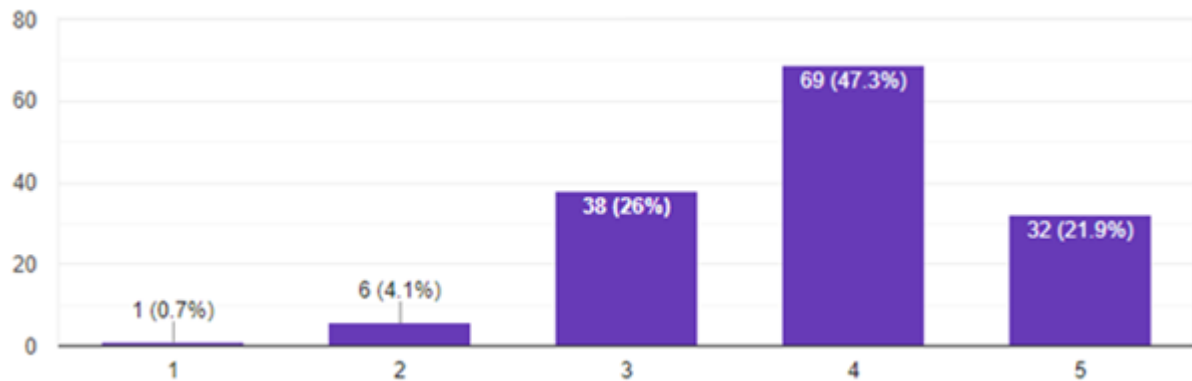


Figure 18: Knowledge acquired via social media.

This bar graph demonstrates that 47.3% agree that social media helps in acquiring information about fashion trends, 26% is neutral about it, 21.9% strongly agree to it, while only 4.1% and 0.7% disagree and strongly disagree to it.

Q16. Do reviews and ratings affect your buying decisions?

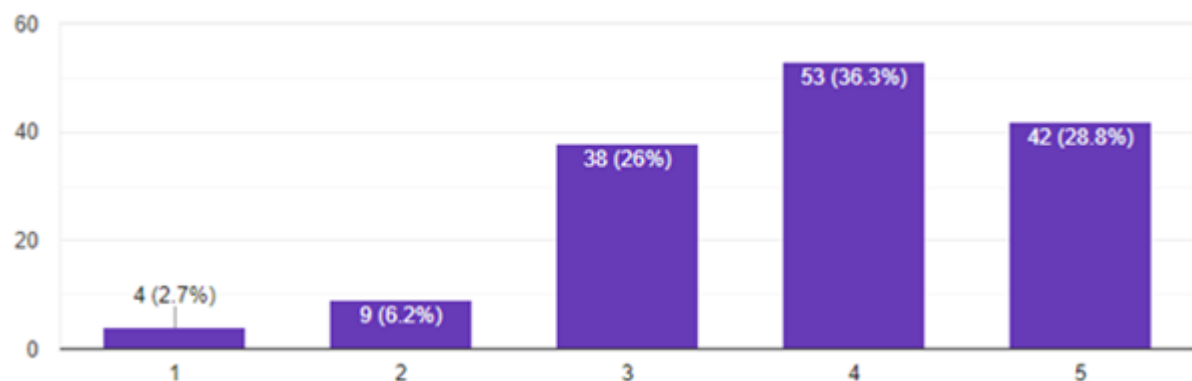


Figure 19: Reviews' effect on buying decision.

This bar graph displays that for 36.3% it often affects, for 28.8% it always affects, 26% said that they affect them sometimes, only minimal number of respondents stated that reviews and ratings affect them rarely (6.2%) or never (2.7%).

4.3 Summary

The results and findings of both the qualitative and quantitative methods used in this research are discussed in this chapter. First the qualitative findings, which intends to understand how designers were using social media and word-of-mouth were presented. The results concluded that designer's target market are generally the young individuals who often use Instagram and

are technologically driven. Hence, they use Instagram extensively to communicate with their customers. These designers generally refund for the damaged product or give complementary products to their customers in order to reduce and overcome negative word-of-mouth.

Thereafter, the quantitative results were presented. The aim was to understand the customer's attitude towards social media marketing and word-of-mouth. The findings determined that many social media users, view these platforms to gather information and connect with others, with Instagram being the highly used platform. A majority of them accepted that they learn and adopt fashion through these platforms. Many individuals confirmed that they consider social media and Word-of-mouth before making any purchase decision as they think these are more credible than traditional forms of advertising. Finally, most of them admitted that they rely on the information available online and change their initial purchase decision after going through the reviews and ratings of the products or services they intend to purchase.

The subsequent chapter finally draws the conclusions of the entire dissertation and briefly states the limitations and scope for further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of the dissertation was to understand how social media marketing and word-of-mouth can influence the buying behaviour of consumers in the Indian fashion industry. Two research questions below were identified to conduct the research.

Question 1: The extent to which fashion designers are using social media and word-of-mouth to influence the consumers buying behaviour.

Question 2: To understand the perception of customers towards word-of-mouth and social media marketing in the Indian fashion industry.

In order to answer the first question, upon concluding the interview, it was observed that the designers actively use social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook to communicate with their customers, as a lot of youngsters who tech savvy use Instagram are, they are more inclined towards it. The findings of the respective dissertation notes that by posting a lot of content on social media, providing customers with details of developing the outfit and collaborating with fashion bloggers and other jewellery designers, designers can increase their customer base. Depending on their presence in the industry, new designers think word-of-

mouth is more beneficial than advertising as customers prefer the product suggested by others leading to long term customers. While the established ones consider advertising on social media works better as, when pictures of actresses or socialites are posted, it influences the customer's buying behaviour. This is because of the celebrity's attractiveness and credibility influences customer's intentions.

Today with the evolution of social media, consumers can post comments and their opinions online. These consumers generally use social media to gather information and communicate with others. With the advancement of social media platforms, there is a lot of information available which helps them learn more about fashion. Since, designers are using social media extensively their presence is noticeable, which is helping consumers adopt the latest fashion trends. The results obtained from the dissertation illustrates that consumers consider word-of-mouth and social media to be more credible than traditional advertising as it involves two-way communication, which empowers customers to trust the information. Reviews and ratings on social media affect their buying behaviour as it helps in assessing their choices.

Both designers and consumers are observed to be passionate about embracing social media. Social media is undoubtedly increasingly trending in the present fashion world, thus, making it necessary to analyse its power and impact.

5.1 Practical implications

Social media and fashion industry are profoundly related to one another. Moreover, they have a noteworthy relationship where 1% increase in social media will prompt to 20.6% in the fashion industry (Ahmad et.al., 2015). Hence, it is necessary for the fashion designers to inculcate social media into their business.

This research will help designers understand what kind of customers use social media in order to learn about fashion. This will additionally help them work on the type of content they need to post, and which another platform can be used to increase their customer base. This will also help them analyse where their focus should be is it on social media advertising or word-of-mouth. Like the well-established designers, the ones who just entered the industry can create a website for themselves to reach more customers.

The designers can further concentrate on different social media platforms like Snapchat and Twitter which are commonly used among the customers. Like Jayanthi, the other designers can also start posting videos on social media related to the effort that is put by them to design and customise the dress for their customers, in order to gain their attention. As the results of the research demonstrate that consumers use social media to gather information, hence the designers can publish more useful and interesting information to ensure that they communicate their value to their prospect customers.

This research also helps the customers regarding the kind of content designers post on social media to influence their buying behaviour.

5.2 Limitations

The research was done by one researcher over a four-month time frame (May-September, 2019). Taking this into account, the research is restricted as far as the scope and profundity of the planned research. To finish this study, the researcher conducted three interviews and one survey. Further, the researcher could not carry out more interviews as the transcription and analysis of data was time bound. Moreover, few designers who were initially approached could not participate due to their personal reasons. As the questionnaire cannot represent all the individuals in India, the answer obtained can vary as psychological factors are involved which might result in different behavioural actions in the buying behaviour.

5.3 Future Research

It is clear that more work will be necessary to extend understanding on how social media marketing and word-of-mouth can influence consumers in the Indian fashion industry. Firstly, the investigation could include more interviews of varied designers to get a better insight of their views on social media. As India is a vast country with different cultures and customs, the research could be done in different cities of the country to understand better about the consumers perception. Further research can be done using one specific social media platform like Instagram to understand why it is so popular among the millennials.

5.4 Personal Reflection

The dissertation enhanced my academic as well as personal knowledge which would further help me in my career.

During my dissertation I have learnt the significance of establishing a strong network of contacts. The three designers interviewed were famous and prominent in the fashion industry and were a part of my network. The individuals who participated in the survey were my friends and family and their contacts. Upon completing the survey, all the respondents disclosed to me that they found the questionnaire extremely genuine and that it was straightforward. This was actually what I needed to reach: a survey straightforward and easy to understand.

During the dissertation process, there were times where I felt that I did not have enough time to adhere to the deadlines. I chose to prioritize the tasks I needed to perform, according to the deadlines to complete my work before the due date. This will further help me in my future profession where I would be required to manage time in order to be successful in carrying out my tasks.

This dissertation also helped me work on my research skills and now I am confident with using both interviewing and surveying methods and work effectively while using mixed methods as well. To conclude, in this section I have mentioned about the knowledge I gained in the process of finishing my dissertation. I am extremely thankful for this opportunity and firmly believe that this will be valuable for my future career and personal development.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DESIGNERS

- 1) Do you use social media to communicate with your customers? How often do you use it?
- 2) On which social media sites you are most active on?
- 3) Which category of clothing do you belong to? Is it ethnic wear, bridal, children's wear or casual wear?
- 4) How can you improve your social media presence and marketing?
- 5) What kind of content does your audience engage with?
- 6) Do you think the content that you are posting on social media is increasing your customer base?
- 7) Do people come up to you with pictures or ideas from social media platforms, if yes, what platforms?
- 8) Have you ever encountered a situation where a new customer approached you due to a suggestion by a previous customer?
- 9) Did this have a positive impact on your customer base?
- 10) What do you think works for your business word-of-mouth or advertising?
- 11) Have you ever encountered negative word-of-mouth? What do you do to overcome negative word-of-mouth?
- 12) Do you collaborate with any other fashion designers on social media to increase your brand presence?

QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1 Do you use social media?

- Yes
- No

Q2 How many hours do you spend on social media?

- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 3 hours
- 4 hours or more

Q3 What is your purpose for using social media?

- Shopping
- Connecting with others

- Gathering information
- Others

Q4) Which social media sites do you use?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- Others

Q5) Have you previously used social media to learn about fashion?

- Yes
- No

Q6) Do you follow designers on social networking sites?

- Yes
- No

Q7) The designers that you follow belong to which category?

- Bridal wear
- Ethnic wear
- Children's wear
- Others

Q8) Do you adopt the latest fashion trends from social media sites?

- Yes
- No

Q9) Does social media influence your buying decisions?

- Yes
- No

Q10) What is your preferred source of information for your purchase decision?

- Social media
- Advertisements
- Word-of-mouth
- Others

Q11) Do you think social media and word-of-mouth have higher credibility than advertisements?

- Yes

- No

Q12) How often do you rely on information available on social media if you have uncertainties regarding a purchase?

Lowest 1 2 3 4 5 Highest

Q13) Do you change your initial purchase preference after searching relevant information via social media sites?

Lowest 1 2 3 4 5 Highest

Q14) How often are you likely to share/comment/review etc to peers or friends via social media after a purchase?

Lowest 1 2 3 4 5 Highest

Q15) How much do you agree that social media helps in Acquiring information about fashion trends?

Lowest 1 2 3 4 5 Highest

16) Do reviews and ratings affect your buying decisions?

Lowest 1 2 3 4 5 Highest

*The transcription of the interview can be provided upon request.