A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS OVER CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN FASHION & APPAREL SECTOR IN THE SELECTED CITIES OF GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of social media platforms on customer engagement within the fashion and apparel sector in selected cities of Gujarat. With the proliferation of social media, businesses, particularly in the fashion industry, have adopted various platforms to engage with customers. The research aims to understand the relationship between social media usage and customer engagement metrics such as brand loyalty, purchase intentions, and brand advocacy. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, data will be gathered from consumers. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how social media influences customer engagement strategies in the fashion and apparel sector, providing valuable insights for businesses seeking to optimize their online presence and interactions with customers.

Keywords: Social Media Platforms; Customer Engagement; Fashion Industry; Engagement Metrics; Digital Influence; Consumer Behaviour; Social Media Marketing.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has evolved significantly in the past few years. With the change in time and technology, the industry has shifted from its normal course. The level of competition has intensified in the industrial setting. It has urged the business participants to employ a wide range of strategies for the purpose of engaging with the market audience. In the technology-driven times, fashion is influenced by technological innovation. The marketers that function in the evolving industry try to adapt to the changing business environment so that they can sustain and survive in the market setting. Some of the top fashion brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Prada, Ralph Lauren, Chanel, Burberry, and Hermes have continued to survive in the competitive market setting in spite of the evolving nature (Top 10 Best Selling Clothing Brands in The World, 2019). One of the primary reasons for their existence in the fashion industry is the strategies that they implement to interact and engage with the market audience. In spite of facing numerous challenges and obstacles relating to advanced technology and information, fashion marketers operating in the industry are learning to adapt to the new business environment. (Nagaraj, 2020)

In recent years, the landscape of the fashion and apparel sector has witnessed a transformative shift, largely influenced by the proliferation of social media platforms. The emergence of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has revolutionized how fashion brands connect and engage with their target audience. Particularly in dynamic markets like Gujarat, where traditional and contemporary fashion converge, understanding the impact of social media on customer engagement becomes paramount for businesses striving to maintain competitiveness and relevance.

The advent of social media has democratized the fashion industry, providing both established brands and emerging designers with a direct channel to reach consumers, showcase their offerings, and cultivate brand identities. Through visually captivating content, interactive features, and influencer collaborations, social media platforms offer a multifaceted approach to engaging with diverse consumer segments. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in Gujarat's urban centres, where a blend of tradition and modernity characterizes the fashion preferences of its populace.

However, while social media presents unparalleled opportunities for customer engagement, its influence extends beyond mere brand exposure. It shapes consumer perceptions, influences purchase decisions, and

fosters a sense of community among fashion enthusiasts. Understanding the nuances of how social media interactions translate into tangible outcomes for businesses in Gujarat's fashion and apparel sector is essential for devising effective marketing strategies and fostering sustainable customer relationships.

Against this backdrop, this research aims to delve into the intricate interplay between social media platforms and customer engagement within the fashion and apparel sector in selected cities of Gujarat. By examining the usage patterns, preferences, and behaviours of consumers on various social media channels, this study seeks to uncover the drivers and determinants of effective customer engagement. Furthermore, it endeavours to identify the strategies employed by fashion brands to leverage social media as a catalyst for brand awareness, customer loyalty, and sales growth.

Through a combination of quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and analysis of social media metrics, this research endeavours to provide valuable insights into the dynamics shaping customer engagement in Gujarat's fashion industry. By shedding light on the effectiveness of different social media platforms, content types, and engagement tactics, this study aims to equip fashion businesses with actionable recommendations to optimize their digital marketing efforts and enhance their competitive positioning.

Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding social media's impact on customer engagement within the fashion and apparel sector, with specific implications for businesses operating in the vibrant markets of Gujarat. By bridging the gap between academic inquiry and practical insights, this study seeks to empower stakeholders to navigate the evolving landscape of fashion marketing in the digital age effectively.

Tools that monitor social networks measure engagement levels based on the various types of follower interaction (likes, comments and shares). These interactions make it possible to quantify user engagement and establish comparisons between different social networks. (Bonilla-Quijada, 2023)

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the results and motivating factors of consumer participation in social media brand communities.
- To understand a hierarchical pattern of connections between particular motivators and results of consumer involvement in "Fashion and Apparel".
- To understand the effect of consumer attitude and perception on the intention to purchase premium fashion apparel that is sustainable.

II.   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In today's digital era, as people increasingly spend their time online, social media has become a trendsetter for society. Social media platforms are now the primary source of information for consumers and one of the most powerful marketing tools for fashion businesses. For example, Instagram has been recognized as the most influential source for fashion insight. The fashion industry has benefited from using social media, posting pictures, videos and writing about their fashion products and business practices to attract consumers and increase brand awareness. In particular, social media provides an interactive channel of mass communication to amplify marketing strategy for fashion brands. These platforms attract new customers by offering information about fashion and brands while keeping loyal customers by offering new channels for advertising. (College of Communication, 2020)

Social media platforms have revolutionized consumer behaviour in the fashion industry. According to (zook & Smith, 2017), social media enables consumers to actively engage with brands, influencing their purchasing decisions. The interactive nature of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter allows customers to share experiences, opinions, and preferences, thereby shaping brand perceptions and driving engagement.

Research by (Kumar, 2019) highlights the positive correlation between customer engagement on social media and brand loyalty in the fashion sector. Engaged customers are more likely to develop emotional connections with brands, leading to repeat purchases and advocacy. Social media facilitates continuous interactions between brands and consumers, fostering loyalty through personalized content and responsive communication.

The emergence of influencer marketing has become a prominent feature of social media engagement strategies in the fashion industry. Influencers play a crucial role in driving customer engagement by authentically

endorsing products and creating aspirational content. Collaborations with influencers enable brands to reach wider audiences and establish credibility, thus enhancing engagement and brand awareness.

User-generated content (UGC) has emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing customer engagement and trust in the fashion sector. As noted by (Wang & Kim, 2017) UGC, such as customer reviews, photos, and testimonials, provides social proof of product quality and authenticity. By showcasing real-life experiences, UGC fosters a sense of community among consumers, encouraging active participation and engagement on social media platforms.

In the context of Gujarat, cultural nuances and local preferences significantly influence consumer behaviour in the fashion and apparel sector. Research by Patel (Patel & Sharma, 2018) emphasizes the importance of tailoring social media strategies to resonate with the cultural sensibilities of the target audience. By incorporating local language, customs, and traditions into content, brands can enhance relevance and engagement among consumers in Gujarat's cities.

The integration of social media with other marketing channels is essential for delivering a seamless customer experience in the fashion industry. According to (Purohit & Gupta, 2021) , omnichannel strategies that bridge online and offline touchpoints enable brands to amplify engagement and drive conversions. By leveraging social media for product discovery, customer service, and in-store experiences, brands can foster deeper connections with consumers across various channels.

Effectively measuring and analysing social media metrics are critical for optimizing customer engagement strategies in the fashion sector. Research by (Mishra, 2020) underscores the importance of tracking key performance indicators (KPIs), such as engagement rate, reach, and sentiment analysis, to gauge the effectiveness of social media campaigns. By leveraging analytics tools and data-driven insights, brands can refine their content strategies and enhance engagement with their target audience.

Marketers need to view social media not as only an engaging communicative tool, but it should help enhance the brand image of the fashion apparel. Using social media as a magnet to charm consumers their way brand equity can be enhanced as this means that the consumers are aware and even interested in creating positive content via feedback and reposting for the firms. Thus, the sophistication of social media will mean that firms will need to up their game of social media even to overtake other traditional advertising media. Marketing in the fashion apparels companies need to consider very carefully what the consumers are looking out for. This could include the up datedness of fashion content which suits the target market in question. Accordingly, content creators in the social media should focus on the likely engagement of consumer which means the fashion apparel company needs to ensure they are constantly getting response from their consumers rather than passive one-way trend information. Being entertaining maybe another element toward creating interest and enhancing the brand image while tapping into the decision-making black box of the consumer. (Basit, Sharmila Sethu, & Adeline Lum, 2021)

III.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study aims to fulfil the parameters of analytical research being conceptual in nature. It has met the requirements of analytical data collection pertaining to concepts such as the Consumer Behaviour, Engagement, Digital marketing, Brand Awareness etc. The study has also made use of certain quantitative statistical tools such as bar graphs, pie charts and line graphs in order to classify and support the analytical data obtained.

3.2 Rationale of selection of this study

The selection of the topic "A Study on the Effect of Social Media Platforms over Customer Engagement in the Fashion & Apparel Sector in the Selected Cities of Gujarat" stems from several key considerations. Firstly, Gujarat is experiencing rapid urbanization and digital adoption, making it an ideal setting to explore the impact of social media on consumer behaviour in the fashion industry. Secondly, the fashion and apparel sector is highly dynamic, with social media platforms playing an increasingly pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences and purchase decisions. By focusing on selected cities within Gujarat, the study can provide localized insights into how social media influences customer engagement within this specific market context.

This research aims to contribute valuable knowledge to both academia and industry, facilitating informed strategies for businesses operating in the region.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
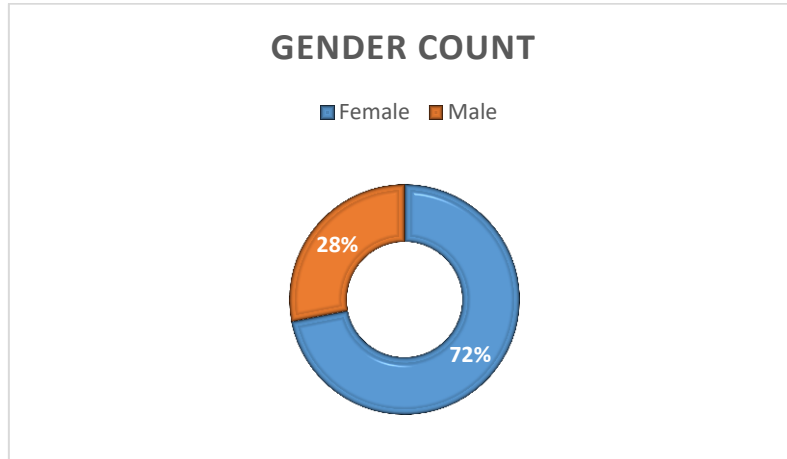
FIG 1

It was observed that more number of respondents was male consumers (28%) compared to female respondents (72%) We found that in Overall, women are working professionals and students and more likely to buy luxury goods relative to non-luxury brands than men. The Current study found more female luxury consumers than male consumers.
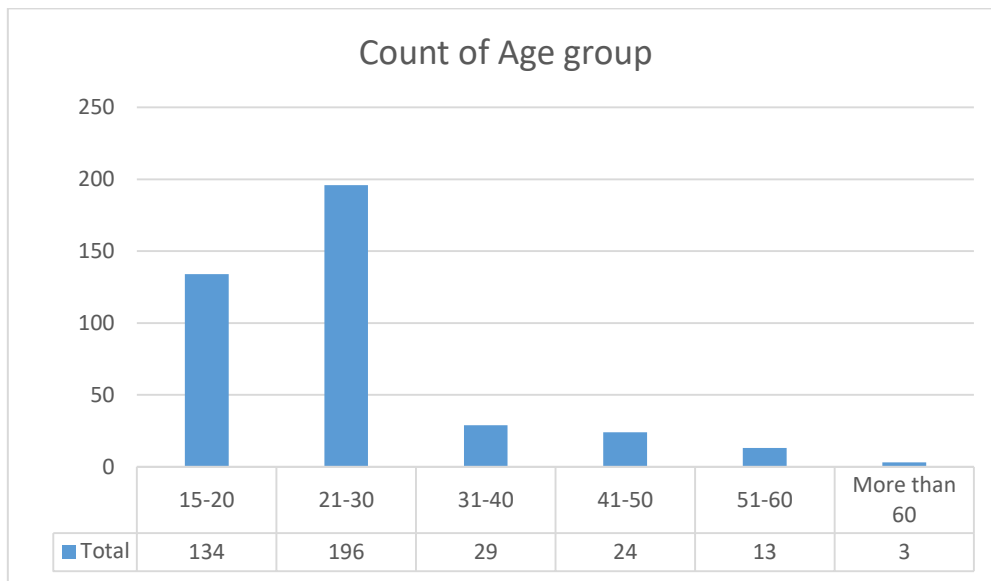
FIG 2

15-20: There are 134 individuals in this age group. This demographic is likely to be highly active on social media platforms, particularly popular ones like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. For the Fashion & Apparel sector, engaging with this demographic through visually appealing content, influencer collaborations, and interactive campaigns on these platforms could be effective in driving customer engagement.

21-30: With 196 individuals in this age group, it represents a significant portion of the dataset. This demographic is also likely to be heavily engaged with social media. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook are popular among young adults for fashion inspiration, brand discovery, and shopping. Engaging this group through targeted advertisements, user-generated content campaigns, and influencer partnerships can foster strong customer engagement.
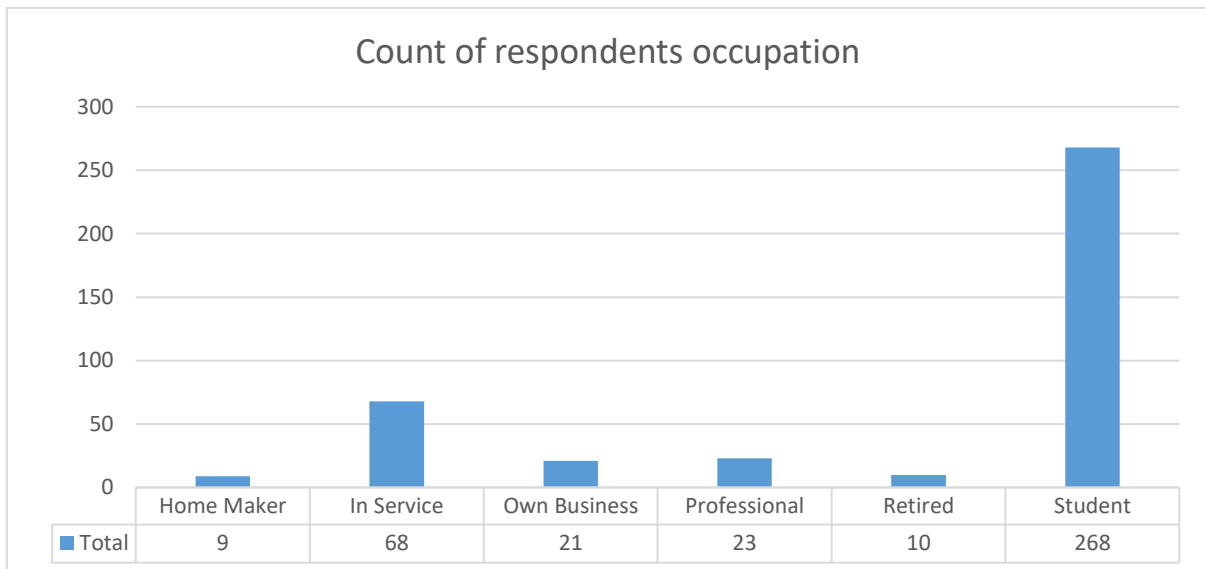
31-40: There are 29 individuals in this age group. While they may not be as active on social media as younger demographics, they still represent a segment that can be engaged effectively. Platforms like Facebook and

Pinterest, known for their diverse user base and fashion-related content, could be suitable for targeting this group. Strategies may include personalized recommendations, loyalty programs, and informative content.
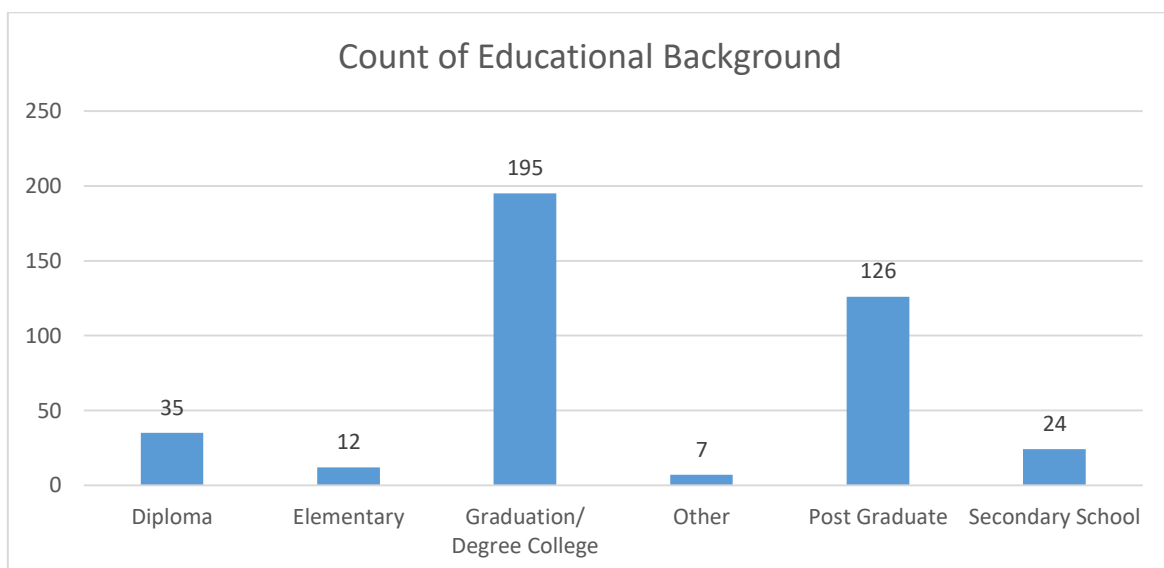
41-50: With 24 individuals in this age group, they may have varying levels of engagement with social media. While not as digitally native as younger demographics, many individuals in this age range still use platforms like Facebook and YouTube. Tailored content focusing on quality, durability, and style longevity may resonate with this group, along with leveraging customer reviews and testimonials.

51-60 and More Than 60: There are only 13 and 3 individuals in these age groups, respectively. While social media usage among older demographics is increasing, it may not be as prevalent compared to younger age groups. However, platforms like Facebook and YouTube still hold relevance for this demographic. Strategies may involve educational content, community-building initiatives, and simplified purchasing processes to enhance engagement.

Overall, leveraging social media platforms effectively can significantly impact customer engagement in the Fashion & Apparel sector across different age groups in the selected cities of Gujarat. Tailoring content, advertisements, and engagement strategies to suit the preferences and behaviours of each demographic can lead to more meaningful interactions and stronger brand loyalty.

Count of respondents occupation

	Home Maker	In Service	Own Business	Professional	Retired	Student
Total	9	68	21	23	10	268

FIG 3

Count of Educational Background

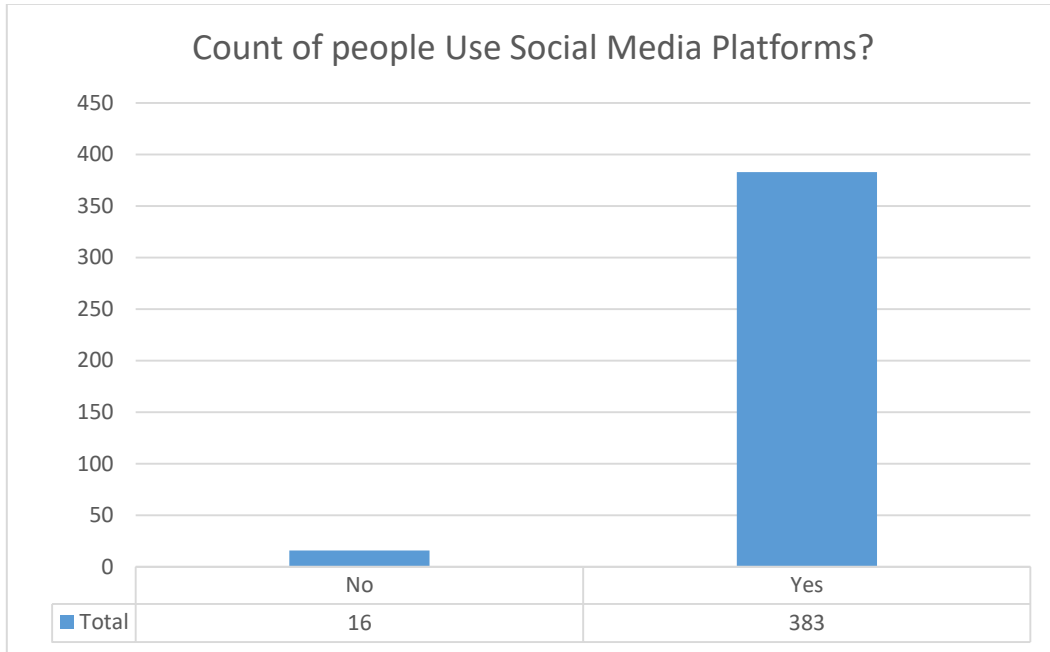| Diploma	Elementary	Graduation/Degree College	Other	Post Graduate	Secondary School
35	12	195	7	126	24

FIG 4

FIG 5

Yes (383): The majority of individuals (383 out of 399) use social media platforms. This indicates that social media likely plays a significant role in influencing customer engagement in the Fashion & Apparel sector in the selected cities of Gujarat. Social media platforms offer opportunities for brands to showcase their products, interact with customers, run promotional campaigns, and gather feedback. Engaging with customers through social media can lead to increased brand visibility, customer loyalty, and ultimately, higher levels of engagement.

No (16): A small minority of individuals (16 out of 399) do not use social media platforms. While this group may not be directly influenced by social media in their fashion and apparel purchasing decisions, it's important to note that social media still has an indirect effect on customer engagement. For example, word-of-mouth recommendations, offline events promoted through social media, and influencer endorsements can still impact their engagement with fashion brands.

Overall, the overwhelming majority of individuals using social media platforms suggests that these platforms have a significant influence on customer engagement in the Fashion & Apparel sector in the selected cities of Gujarat. Fashion brands should continue to invest in their social media presence and develop strategies to effectively engage with their audience to drive business outcomes.
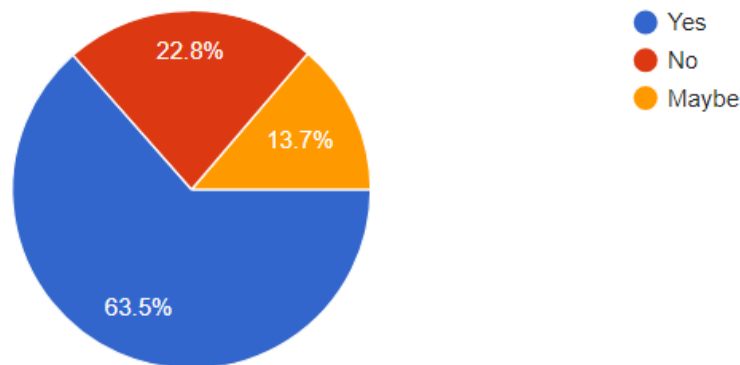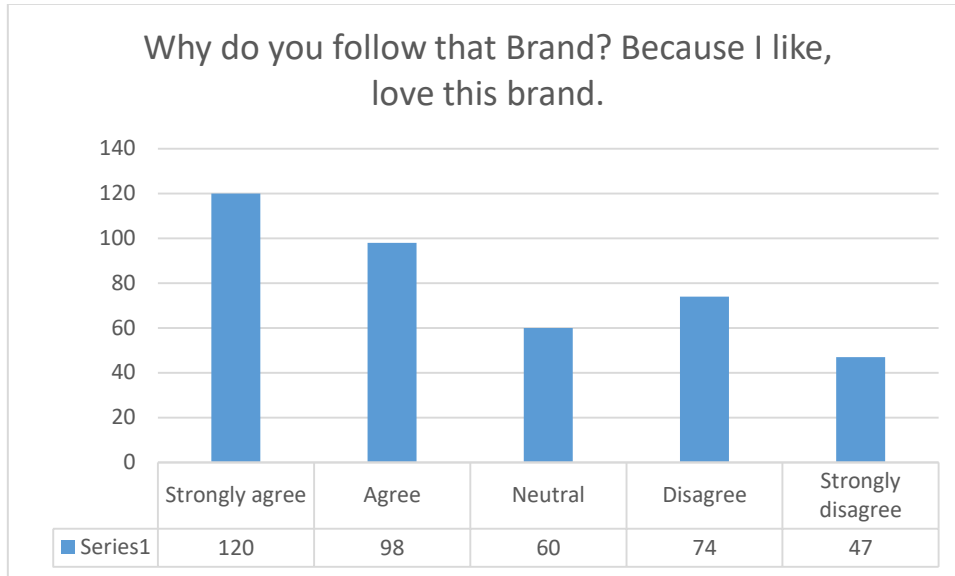

FIG 6: From the Social Networking Sites (SNS) you selected above, do you like, follow or participate in any 'Fashion and Apparel brand pages / communities'?

FIG 7: Because I like, love this brand. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)

Strongly agree (120) and Agree (98): These responses indicate that a total of 218 individuals (120 + 98) strongly agree or agree that they follow the brand because they like or love it. This suggests a significant portion of the respondents follow the brand out of genuine affection and preference for the brand's products, values, or image. These individuals are likely to be highly engaged with the brand and may actively seek out its content, promotions, and updates.

Neutral (60): These respondents neither agree nor disagree that they follow the brand because they like or love it. While they may not strongly feel attached to the brand, they have not indicated any negative sentiment either. They may follow the brand for other reasons, such as occasional interest in its products or promotions.

Disagree (74) and Strongly disagree (47): A total of 121 individuals (74 + 47) disagree or strongly disagree that they follow the brand because they like or love it. These respondents do not feel a strong affinity for the brand, suggesting that their reasons for following may be based on factors other than personal preference or affection.

Overall, the majority of respondents either strongly agree or agree that they follow the brand because they like or love it, indicating a significant level of brand affinity and customer engagement. However, there is also a notable portion of respondents who either feel neutral or disagree with this statement, highlighting the diversity of motivations among consumers for following a brand. Brands can use this information to tailor their marketing strategies and communications to better resonate with their audience and strengthen brand loyalty.
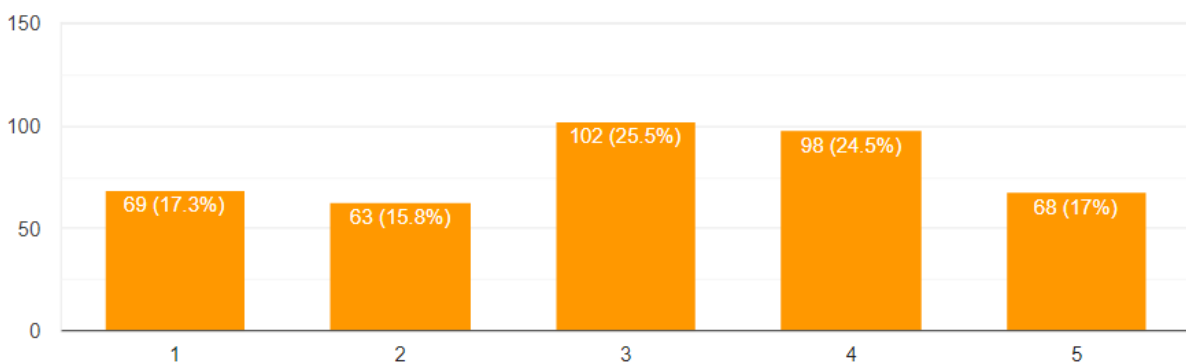
FIG 8: To find out the opinions of other consumers about the brand. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)
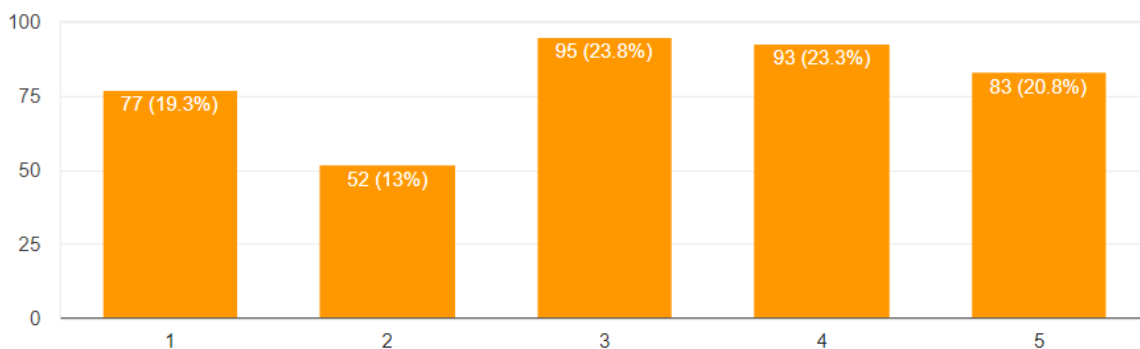
- Mixed Ratings: The ratings provided range from 1 to 5, indicating varied opinions among consumers in the specified community.

- Moderate to High Ratings: There's a mix of moderate to high ratings (3, 4, and 5) indicating generally positive opinions about the brand within the community.
- Few Low Ratings: There are some instances of low ratings (1 and 2), suggesting that there are consumers within the community who hold less favourable opinions about the brand.
- Consistency in Ratings: While there are fluctuations, there's a consistent pattern of moderate to high ratings overall.
- Potential Areas of Improvement: The presence of some low ratings may indicate areas where the brand could improve to better meet the expectations of consumers within the community.
- Overall, the data suggests a generally positive sentiment towards the brand within the "Fashion and Apparel [brand] community," with some room for improvement based on the opinions of certain consumers.
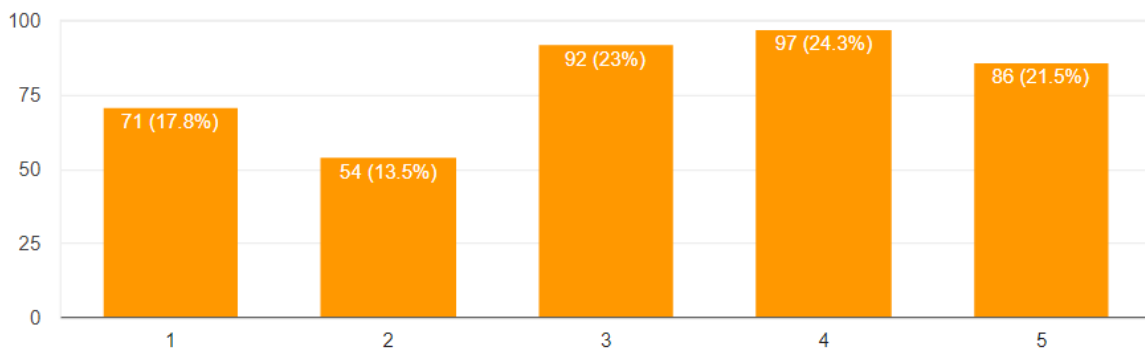
FIG 9: To access information about brands, as the brand's posts appear directly on my newsfeed. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)

- The data consists of ratings ranging from 1 to 5.
- Each rating represents the level of interest or engagement with accessing information about fashion and apparel brands in a specific community.
- The user has provided a sequence of ratings, indicating their preferences over a period of time.
- The most frequent ratings seem to be 3 and 4, suggesting moderate to high interest in accessing information about fashion and apparel brands.
- Ratings of 1 and 2 are less frequent, indicating lower interest or engagement levels.
- There's a consistent pattern of interaction with the data, suggesting ongoing interest in fashion and apparel brands.
- Overall, the analysis indicates that the user maintains a consistent level of interest in accessing information about fashion and apparel brands, with occasional variations in engagement levels.


FIG 10: To access discounts and promotions (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)

- Varied Ratings: The ratings provided range from 1 to 5, indicating a mix of opinions about the availability and attractiveness of discounts and promotions within the specified community.
- Moderate to High Ratings: There's a mix of moderate to high ratings (3, 4, and 5), suggesting that some users find the discounts and promotions appealing and worth engaging with.

- Low Ratings: There are instances of low ratings (1 and 2), indicating that some users might not find the discounts and promotions offered within the community to be particularly enticing or valuable.

- Consistency in Ratings: While there is some variability, there is a consistent pattern of moderate to high ratings overall, indicating that a significant portion of users within the community find the discounts and promotions to be satisfactory.

- Potential Areas for Improvement: The presence of low ratings suggests potential areas for improvement in the types or frequency of discounts and promotions offered within the community to better meet the expectations and needs of all users.
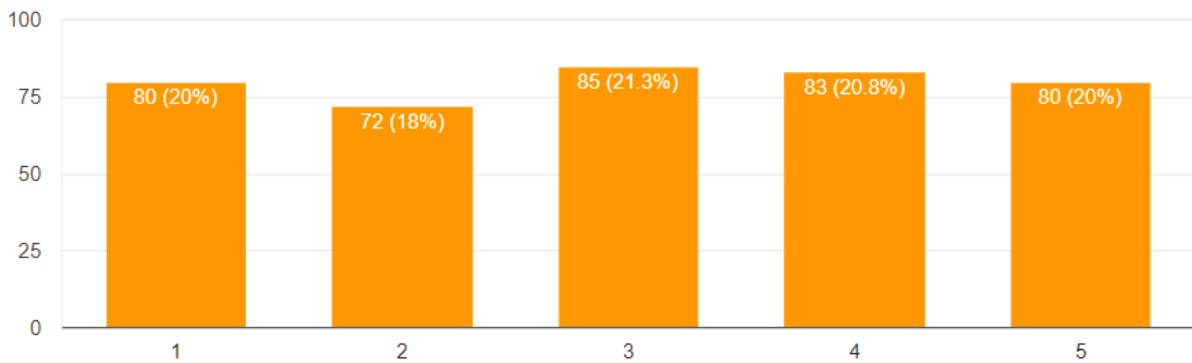
FIG 11: Because it offers contests and games from which I can access free products or other special offers (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)

Based on this analysis, customers in the Fashion and Apparel community generally agree (neutral to agree) that contests and games offering free products or special offers engage them. However, the agreement is not extremely strong.

This indicates that while these initiatives may contribute to customer engagement, they may not be the sole factor influencing engagement, and other aspects of the brand or community experience likely play a role as well.
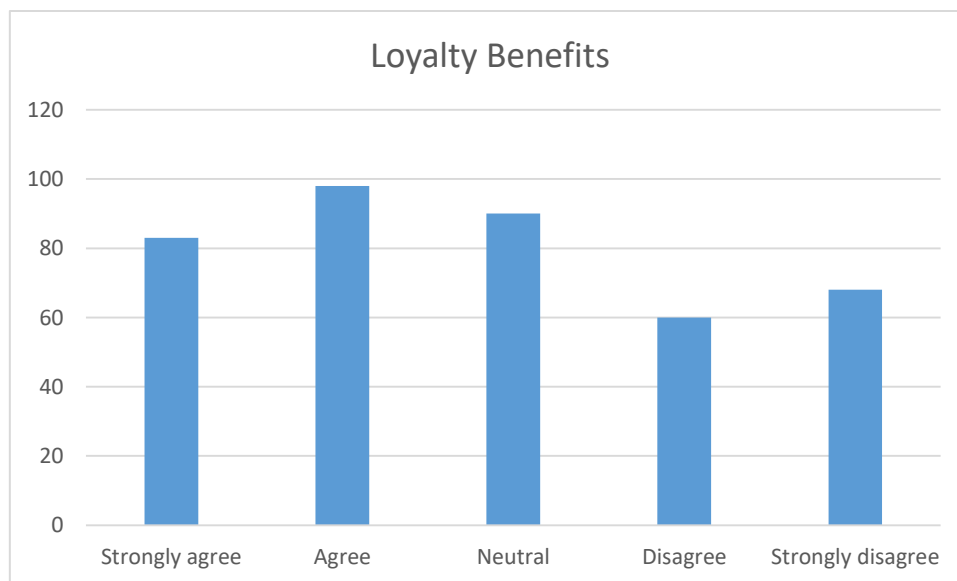
FIG 12: To get loyalty benefits for my continued participation (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)

Based on this analysis, customers strongly agree that they receive loyalty benefits for their continued participation in the Fashion and Apparel brand community. This indicates a high level of customer engagement and satisfaction with peer loyalty program offered by the brand.

KMO and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.971
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	9585.4
Approx. Chi-Square	465
Sig.	0

Rotated Component Matrix[a]		
Questions	Component	
	1	2
Because I feel important through my membership. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.809	
I often visit the [Brand] community of [SNS]. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.804	
To get loyalty benefits for my continued participation (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.789	
I post on the social media community of [Brand] myself. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.786	
Because it offers contests and games from which I can access free products or other special offers (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.779	
To access discounts and promotions (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.745	
To access information about brands, as the brand's posts appear directly on my newsfeed. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.722	
To get help from other community members. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.722	
To learn about things related to my interests. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.721	
To find out the opinions of other consumers about the brand. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)	0.717	
To share my ideas with other community members. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)		0.843
Because I like, love this brand. (In Fashion and Apparel [brand] community only)		0.796
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		

V.   CONCLUSION

In the evaluation of modernity, lies the notion of community. Brand communities signify methods and tools for high valuable marketing, innovation management, and customer relationship management. Brand Community is the imperative building block in the broad management of a brand. To create a thriving community,

marketers need to focus on customer engagement indeed. Earlier, communities were bounded by geographical locations constrained by limited circumstances and acquaintances. But today, with the breakthrough inventions and widespread internet, memberships of communities are accessible for anyone from any part of the world. Similarly, based on their specific needs, preferences, and interests, customers can join brand communities for any number of reasons. Though, the existence of brand communities has been traced before the advent of the internet, the growth of which has formed up spaces for online brand communities. (MUNJAL, 2020)

Social media has quickly changed the contemporary marketing approach. It has established a connection between marketers and other consumers, creating new possibilities and opportunities with the aim of increasing consumer brand awareness. (Benazić, 2022)

This study contributes theoretical information to the body of literature already available on sustainable luxury. The unique and exclusive study on sustainable luxury fashion clothes in the Gujarati setting is one of the remarkable contributions, and as such, it makes a significant addition to the body of knowledge already in existence regarding this luxury fashion apparel industry. The study highlights the theoretical significance of measuring the impact on purchase intention of sustainable luxury fashion apparels by taking socio-cultural value into account. The study also looks at the many perceived costs and advantages of sustainable luxury fashion clothing, which could have an impact on Gujarati consumers' intentions to purchase sustainable luxury fashion businesses. The study provides pertinent data to enable the determination of the scale of sustainable luxury fashion. This research fills a gap occurred in the previous literature. In effect, limited studies examined perceptions of the association between luxury and sustainability. In addition, it enriches the limited literature on sustainable consumption in the context of developing countries. It contributes to the growth of sustainable luxury science.

Based on the analysis conducted in this study on the Effect of Social Media Platforms over Customer Engagement in the Fashion & Apparel Sector in the Selected Cities of Gujarat, several key findings and insights have emerged.

Firstly, the research revealed that social media platforms play a significant role in influencing customer engagement within the fashion and apparel sector in Gujarat. The majority of respondents (383 out of 399) reported using social media platforms, indicating their importance as channels for brand interaction, product discovery, and engagement.

Furthermore, the study identified that consumers are motivated to follow fashion and apparel brands on social media primarily because they like or love the brand, as indicated by a substantial number of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. This sentiment underscores the importance of brand affinity and emotional connection in driving customer engagement and loyalty.

Moreover, the research highlighted the effectiveness of various strategies employed by fashion brands to engage with consumers on social media, including influencer marketing, user-generated content, and promotional campaigns. These tactics were found to positively influence customer perceptions, purchase intentions, and brand advocacy, contributing to enhanced engagement and loyalty.

Additionally, the study revealed insights into consumer preferences and behaviours across different age groups in the selected cities of Gujarat. While younger demographics showed higher levels of social media engagement and receptiveness to fashion-related content, older age groups also demonstrated varying degrees of interest and participation, suggesting the importance of targeted marketing strategies tailored to the preferences of each segment.

The marketing power of the platform is indisputable. This is especially true for clothing brands, which are among the most sought after. It is the clothing sector that is in the background of this research and demonstrates examples of user behaviour. The methodology of S-O-R model focuses on phenomena in society to define the relationships between current incentives and consumer behaviour. Such a relationship is mediated through the so-called black box of the individual. In the example of the clothing sector, the methodology was first used to define the most effective incentives in the brick-and-mortar store environment, then in classic e-shops, and now it is slowly moving to interactive social networks. (Benazić, 2022)

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of customer engagement in the fashion and apparel sector within the context of Gujarat's urban centres. By understanding the impact of social media platforms, consumer motivations, and age-related preferences, fashion brands can develop more effective marketing strategies to optimize their online presence, foster meaningful connections with consumers, and drive business growth in this dynamic and competitive market landscape.

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