

Consumer Perception of Apparel Brands in the Digital Era: The Mediating Role of Social Media Engagement.

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of digital technologies, the way consumers interact with apparel brands has changed, and social media plays a crucial role in brand communication and customer engagement. The impact of apparel brand activities on consumer perception is explored in this chapter, while paying specific attention to the influence of social media engagement in between. The chapter summarizes some of the concepts that have been taken from recent open access literature such as consumer perception, digital branding, social media marketing, influencer marketing and electronic word-of-mouth. A conceptual model is suggested, where the positive role of apparel brand activity on social media engagement, which in turn positively affects consumer perception, by improving brand trust, brand image, and purchase intention. The conversation also emphasizes the importance of consumer interaction, customized communication and genuine partnerships with influencers, as these strategies create deeper emotional connections and lasting customer relationships for apparel brands. The chapter additionally suggests practical tips for apparel marketers, including pursuing an engagement approach to digital marketing, constantly watching customer feedback, and leveraging social media analytics to boost brand performance. The proposed framework is conceptual, but it will help future empirical studies on consumer behaviour in the digital fashion industry. In overall conclusion, this chapter suggests that social media engagement is an important mediator that influences positive consumer perceptions and leads to sustainable competitive advantage in the apparel industry in the context of digital branding activities...

1. INTRODUCTION

People have changed the way they interact with apparel brands because of the growing digital technologies. For many consumers, social media platforms are a vital way to research products, connect with brands, and make buying decisions. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube have become crucial channels for consumers to discover products, connect with brands, and make purchasing decisions. These platforms offer a more interactive and participatory approach to marketing, unlike traditional marketing, which allows two-way communication for consumers to share their experiences, offer feedback, and impact the percept of other consumers who intend to buy. These platforms are more interactive and participatory in marketing as they enable two-way communication for consumers to share their experiences, provide feedback, and influence the perception of other consumers who intend to buy, unlike traditional marketing.

In the Apparel industry, perception is an important factor in influencing brand preference, trust, loyalty, and purchase intention. More and more, these perceptions are influenced by social media interactions, such as “liking”, “commenting”, “sharing” and “liking”, interacting with brand content. Increased levels of engagement lead to more positive brand evaluations and increase consumers' emotional connection with brands (Sharma et al., 2021).



While various studies have investigated about the digital marketing and the consumer behaviour, there isn't sufficient research to look at the role of social media engagement between apparel brand activities and consumer perception. Hence, this chapter examines the role of the social media engagement in shaping consumer perceptions about apparel brands in the digital world through literature review and conceptual framework. The results have implications for researchers and marketers interested in improving the relationship between consumers and brands, as well as brand performance in the digital realm.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Consumer Perception in the Digital Era

Consumer perception is the selection, organization, interpretation and evaluation of information by the individual to form opinions on products, services or brands. It includes cognitive and emotional reactions which affect the buying process and the brand relationship for the future. Consumers' perception in the apparel sector goes beyond the quality of the product and the price to brand image, ethical issues, sustainability efforts, customer experience, and digital interactions. Digital touches are growing more important in the consumer's brand perception because they're using online channels to discover and assess products.

Consumer behavior has greatly changed with the advent of digital technology. Today's shoppers seek out product information, review and compare rival brands, check out consumer feedback and engage with online communities prior to purchasing. Today, consumer perceptions are no longer solely created by marketing communications created by the firm alone but also created by user-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth, discussions on the Internet, and recommendations by social media or bloggers. This shift has led to consumer perception as a dynamic construct that is constantly changing and shaped by both brand-generated and consumer-generated information (Park and Ha, 2021).

Compared to other sectors, visual presentation is a more important element in the apparel sector, as fashion products are experiential and symbolic. People often look at style, fit, and appeal of an apparel brand as well as how it fits into their lifestyle, and how it resonates with them on an emotional level. Digital platforms can help with this evaluation, by offering high-quality visual content, virtual try-on technologies, customer-generated photographs and interactive story-telling which help consumers make their perceptions before being physically present with the products. As it's done, it has made it more crucial to maintain a constant and exciting online brand.

Moreover, consumer perception directly affects the behavioural outcomes such as brand preference, satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and purchase intention. Positive perceptions lead to repeat purchase and positive recommendations, while negative perceptions can be communicated quickly on digital platforms and have a negative impact on brand reputation. Hence, it is crucial for apparel marketers to grasp the influences on consumer perception to attain sustainable competitive advantage.

2.2 Apparel Branding in the Digital Environment

Branding has become a more than just product identification tool and it has become a strategic solution to build a relationship with consumers. In the apparel sector, branding is about conveying a distinctive message, providing a consistent customer experience, and forging emotional bonds to make a brand stand out against the competition. This has been accelerated by the digital landscape with multiple channels for brands to interact with consumers on a continuous basis.

Digital branding is a digital integrated communication approach that includes websites, mobile apps, e-commerce, email marketing, and especially social media platforms. Digital branding offers the advantage of instant customer response, communication, and measurement of performance in real time, which are all lacking in traditional branding. Digital technologies are now utilized by apparel brands to introduce new collections, promote fashion trends, inspire consumers with fashion style and engage consumers in interactive fashion campaigns.

Naeem and Ozuem (2021) noted that while previously fashion brands were focused on transactional marketing, they are now focused on establishing relationships with consumers, as they want to interact with them more than just promote their products. Digital branding thus aims to foster, through experiences, participation, emotional bonding and loyalty.

2.3 Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing is a strategic approach of using social media channels to market products, convey brand messages and connect with consumers. It has emerged as one of the most effective tools in the digital marketing arsenal due to its

ability to connect directly with the target audience. Social media marketing is different than regular advertising because it is a two-way street where consumers can interact, respond and participate by commenting, sharing, liking and generating their own content.

The fashion industry has welcomed social media marketing as it is an image-centric industry. Brands can showcase their products via photos, videos, live-streaming events, and influencers using platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Facebook and YouTube. These platforms also offer a chance for brands to tailor content according to consumer interests and behaviors, enhancing marketing efforts.

Continuous interaction through social media marketing activities positively affects brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty, according to Bilgin (2018). Likewise, Sharma et al. (2021) has shown how the use of social media marketing can improve the communication quality, responsiveness and customer satisfaction in the relationship between customers and brands.

2.4 Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement is a measure of how involved, interacting, emotional consumers are with brand content on social media. Engagement means more than just seeing, it's liking, commenting, sharing, reviewing a product, entering competitions, making user-generated content and engaging directly with brands.

Engagement is a multidimensional phenomenon that has been well acknowledged as involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects. Cognitive engagement describes consumers' attention and interest in brand content, emotional engagement is an affective attachment and enthusiasm, and behavioural engagement is an observable action that increases the brand-consumer relationship.

Studies show that consumers that are highly engaged with a brand tend to have deeper psychological relationships with it and are more inclined to demonstrate positive behaviors. Park and Ha (2021) concluded that fashion brands' presence in social media, which are informative and entertaining, has a significant positive effect on consumers' involvement in the fashion brands' content, which in turn positively affects their attitude towards the brands and their brand relationship. In the same way, Sohaib, Ali and Ahmad-ur-Rehman (2025) found that successful social media marketing increases brand love, behavioural engagement, which then leads to customer loyalty and customer advocacy.

Engagement is especially useful in the retail clothing sector as people usually buy clothes because the fashion relates to their identity and social environment. Consumers savor the opportunity to share outfit ideas, to join in on fashion challenges, to review products, and engage with influencer content. These types of engagement activities can be used to foster digital communities where consumers exchange views, give recommendations and help mold brand reputations.

2.5 Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Consumer Perception

There is undeniable proof that social media involvement has a huge impact on consumers apparel brand image. Engagement helps consumers to acquire in-depth understanding of the product, see real-life customer experiences and fosters emotional connections with brands. These interactions can be helpful in decreasing uncertainty, elevating trust, and positively affecting brand evaluations.

If consumers are engaged members of the brand community, they are better able to know and understand brand values, product quality and organisational credibility. Repeated contact enhances psychological attachment, and reinforces positive brand cues. The more positive brand experiences consumers have through social media, the more positive, more stable their perception of the brand becomes.

The social media marketing elements have been shown by Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger (2020) to have a positive effect on the consumer-brand engagement, which in turn improves brand knowledge and consumer evaluations. In a similar fashion, Riaz et al. (2026) determined that increased engagement is highly significant in increasing brand loyalty among apparel consumers, which is another important link between digital marketing activities and consumer behavior.

2.6 Research Gap

While consumer perception, digital marketing, influencer marketing and consumer social media engagement have been studied widely, there are several emerging research gaps.

Second, most research focus on the direct link between social media marketing and purchase intention or the direct link between brand image and consumer loyalty, but few studies have explored the mediating effect of social media engagement

in the apparel sector. It is crucial to comprehend this mediation as it is the process of the behaviour change by which the attitude of the consumers is influenced by the marketing communications.

Second, existing studies tend to examine digital marketing variables at the single construct level, instead of examining multiple constructs in a consolidated conceptual framework. These piecemeal approaches narrow the field of understanding of complex interactions between branding activities, engagement and consumer perception.

Third, digital consumer behaviour is changing in the wake of fast technological changes such as artificial intelligence recommendation systems, short-form video platforms, live-stream shopping, and social commerce. The earlier literature is generally older and does not take account of these developments, thus suggesting the necessity for new theorizing with respect to contemporary digital marketing practices.

Lastly, many of the previous studies examine consumers' general behavior while a relatively smaller number studies specifically on apparel brands where the roles of visual communication, emotional branding, fashion trends, and social identity are prominent. Thus, the following chapter fills in these gaps by outlining a conceptual framework in which social media engagement functions as a mediator between the apparel branding activities and consumer perceptions of brand, a model that builds upon the existing literature to help better understand consumer behavior in the digital fashion context.



Figure 1. Digital Consumer Journey for Apparel Brands in the Social Media Ecosystem

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The new adoption of digital technologies has completely changed the apparel brands-consumer equation. Social media has grown from just a way of communication into an interactive environment for consumers to find products, judge brand credibility, offer opinions, and engage in brand communities. This means that today, not only does consumer perception depend on the constant exposure to the firm's marketing messages, but it is also affected by ongoing exposure to digital messages and social interactions. To comprehend these intricate relationships, this chapter introduces a conceptual model in which the engagement in social media is considered a mediating variable between apparel branding activities and consumer perception.

The framework is created by integrating the results of the latest research in digital marketing, consumer behavior, brand engagement, and fashion marketing. It implies that with effective “apparel” branding activities, the engagement of consumers on social media platforms will also be improved, which will in turn improve their positive perceptions towards the apparel brand. Digital branding strategies are more about creating an interactive experience that invites the consumer to engage, communicate and emotionally relate with the brand, and enhance brand evaluation.

3.1 Theoretical Foundation

This conceptual model is based on some well-known models in consumer behaviour and digital marketing.

3.1.1 Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Theory

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model is a theory of environmental stimuli affecting the psychological state of the person and, in turn, the resulting responses. In the realm of digital marketing, any social media interaction – whether it's a promotional campaign, a question or answer, an influencers partnership, or a customer review – serves as an external trigger. These stimuli impact on the cognitive and emotional processing of consumers as measured by social media engagement, which then affects the perceptions and behavioural intentions of the consumer.

In the apparel industry, visually attractive content, personalised recommendations, and interactive campaigns stimulate consumers to engage with brands. Greater interactions foster higher emotional bond, trust and familiarity with the brand, leading to more positive perceptions from consumers. Hence, the S – O – R model offered a solid theoretical basis for social media engagement as a mediator.

3.1.2 Relationship Marketing Theory

The primary importance of the Relationship Marketing Theory is on establishing long-term relationships with customers, not just sales. Digital technologies have provided a major boost to relationship marketing by allowing consumers to keep in touch with brands at all times. Apparel brands can build long-lasting customer relationships by engaging in conversations, providing feedback, creating custom interactions, and facilitating community involvement through social media platforms.

From this view consumer engagement is seen as an important pathway to the development of relationship quality. Highly engaged consumers have greater emotional connection, more satisfaction, more trust and ultimately positive consumer perceptions and retention. Naeem and Ozuem (2021) emphasised that the ability to build relationships is a growing concern among successful fashion brands, and this is done through constant digital interaction and engagement rather than solely promotional communication.

3.1.3 Consumer Engagement Theory

Consumer Engagement theory states that the active involvement of consumers with brands generates value and enhances psychological links between them. Engagement involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. When consumers engage with brand content, they become more positive in their attitudes, are likely to recommend products and stick with the brand.

In the clothing and dress business, there are various types of engagement activities such as brand page following, liking posts, sharing fashion content and participating in online campaigns, posting product reviews, and creating user-generated content. These interactions help strengthen brand recognition and foster positive customer perceptions, helping to build trust and engagement.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

From the reviewed literature, the independent variable proposed is the Apparel Brand Activities, the mediating variable is the Social Media Engagement and the dependent variable is the Consumer Perception.



Figure 2. Proposed Conceptual Framework

The framework presumes that the branding actions of clothing stimulates users to interact with brand-specific material on social media sites. These engagement activities boost familiarity, emotional connection, trust, and perceived brand value

which in turn helps improve consumer perception. Thus, social media engagement will be predicted to partially mediate the relationship between digital branding and consumer perception.

3.3 Hypothesis Development

H1: Apparel Brand Activities positively influence Social Media Engagement.

The purpose of a digital branding strategy is to make consumers want to engage with apparel brands through fun, informative and visually stimulating content. Interactive campaigns, personalised communication, and influencer collaborations boost consumer engagement and build stronger brand-consumer connections. According to Sharma et al. (2021), the social media marketing activities have a significant influence on improving the quality of communication and involvement of the consumers in the customer-brand interaction. In a similar vein, Park and Ha (2021) found that informative social media experiences lead to higher involvement of fashion brands. So, apparel brand activities should positively impact social media engagement.

H2: Social Media Engagement has a positive effect on Consumer Perception.

Consumer engagement allows for ongoing communication between the consumer and the brand, helping the person to learn about the brand, create trust and build connections. When users are engaged by commenting on, rating, sharing and creating content about the brand, it helps to increase the brand's visibility and drive down uncertainty about the quality of the products and the credibility of the organisation. Sohaib, Ali and Ahmad-ur-Rehman (2025) have shown that engagement has a significant impact on brand love as well as positive consumer behaviour. Similarly, Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger (2020) determine that engagement enhances brand knowledge and consumer evaluations. Therefore, it can be assumed that greater engagement in social media will yield positive perception from consumers.

H3: Apparel Brand Activities positively influence Consumer Perception.

Digital branding activities have a direct impact on customer evaluations as they convey brand values, product quality, organisational credibility, and emotional appeal. A consistent visual identity, catchy storytelling and transparent communication are all adding up to a more powerful brand image and consumer trust. Social media marketing has a significant impact on brand awareness, brand image and customer loyalty (Bilgin, 2018), and digital interactions positively affect consumers' perceptions of fashion brands (Naeem and Ozuem, 2021). Therefore, it is expected that activities of apparel brands will have a positive direct effect on the perception of consumers.

H4: Social Media Engagement is a mediator between Apparel Brand Activities and Consumer Perception.

While digital branding efforts have an immediate impact on how consumers view the brand, the majority of its impact relies on consumers' receptivity to the brand's content. The marketing communication is translated, perceived, and retained by the consumers through their behaviours, which is called engagement. Consumers who are active members of the brand communities will have more positive perceptions as a result of engaging in them as this fosters feelings of attachment, trust and familiarity.

New research shows that engagement is a pivotal link between marketing and behaviour. Riaz et al. (2026) found that consumer involvement significantly enhances brand loyalty among apparel consumers, and Sohaib, Ali and Ahmad-ur-Rehman (2025) emphasized that the process of brand consumer engagement is the link between social media marketing and brand consumer behaviour. Thus, social media interaction is hypothesized to buffer the relationship between apparel brand activities and consumer perception.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is the belief and attitude on how knowledge can be gained and what it is. The study uses positivist research philosophy that assumes that social phenomenon can be empirically measured and analyzed in an objective manner. Positivism is frequently used in the study of consumer behaviour and marketing research because it allows consumer research to use statistics to test consumer research hypotheses and quantify relationships between variables.

Positivism is the ability to measure the consumer perceptions, behaviours and branding activities, using structured questionnaires and numerical scales within the context of apparel branding. The results can then be applied to a larger population, if sampling methods are adhered to.

4.2 Research Approach

The study used deductive approach because hypotheses are formulated based on the theories, which in turn are tested by empirical evidence. The deductive approach starts from existing theories like Consumer Engagement Theory, Relationship Marketing Theory and Stimulus–Organism–Response before testing the collected data for the support of those theories.

For this reason, the deductive approach is appropriate as the study aims to establish and confirm the existing relationship and extend the literature by examining the role of the mediator of social media involvement in the apparel industry.

4.3 Research Design

The research design that is taken in this research is Quantitative Cross Sectional. The cross-sectional design facilitates the collection of data from consumers at one time and quantitative research enables objective measurement of consumer's attitudes and behaviours through a statistical approach.

The study is focused on consumers who are active users of social media platforms and have previous experience purchasing or interacting with apparel brands online. Because consumer perceptions and engagement behaviours can be best understood by only conducting one survey, the cross-sectional design is appropriate.

4.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

This sampling technique is used because it is practical and has been widely used in the digital marketing research. Participants may be recruited by posting online questionnaires in social networking sites, university mailing lists, online communities, and fashion related discussion groups.

In the case of studies using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), a sufficient number of samples is required to provide accurate parameter estimates. The base size of the sample (300–400 respondents) is sufficient for exploring mediation effects and testing the conceptual framework proposed.

Table 1 summarises the sampling strategy adopted in this study.

Table 1. Research Sampling Plan

Component	Description
Target Population	Consumers using social media for apparel brand interactions
Sampling Technique	Convenience Sampling
Sample Size	300–400 respondents
Data Collection Method	Online Questionnaire
Research Design	Cross-sectional Quantitative Survey

4.5 Data Collection Method

Primary data are collected through a **structured online questionnaire** developed using validated measurement scales adapted from previous literature. Online surveys are appropriate because the target respondents are active digital consumers who frequently use internet-based platforms.

The questionnaire consists of two major sections:

Section A: Demographic Information

Gender

Age

Educational qualification

Occupation

Preferred social media platform

Frequency of social media usage

Frequency of online apparel purchases

Section B: Measurement of Research Variables

The study measures three principal constructs:

Apparel Brand Activities

Social Media Engagement

Consumer Perception

Responses are recorded using a **five-point Likert scale**, where:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

The Likert scale facilitates quantitative analysis while enabling respondents to express varying levels of agreement.

4.6 Measurement of Variables

Validated measurement items from previous studies are adapted to ensure content validity and reliability.

Table 2. Research Variables and Measurement

Variable	Description	Example Measurement Items
Apparel Brand Activities	Consumer evaluation of digital branding efforts	Brand posts are informative; Brand content is visually attractive
Social Media Engagement	Degree of consumer interaction with brand content	I frequently like, comment on, or share brand posts
Consumer Perception	Overall evaluation of apparel brands	I have a positive opinion of this apparel brand; I trust this brand

5. DISCUSSION

Digital technologies have rapidly reshaped the apparel industry, altering how people engage with brands' products and services. Social media has proven to be a vital marketing outlet and is used by consumers to find products and interact with brands, to get recommendations and to post their experiences. In many ways, this has shaped how consumers think of a brand, and it is now essential that digital engagement be central to brand success. From the literature reviewed, it is apparent that social media engagement is one of the important mechanisms that can affect consumer perception with regard to apparel brand activities.

Digital branding strategies are becoming vital for brands to build awareness, convey brand values and build emotional connections with consumers, more and more. Social media helps to allow consumers to participate in the conversation, which is a two-way street in contrast to traditional advertising. Brands can strengthen their relationship with their audiences through engaging content, campaigns, product demonstrations, and live sessions, all delivered through visual content. Frequent engagement with these activities fosters brand familiarity, building trust and positive perceptions among consumers. In fact, according to Bilgin (2018), social media marketing activities affect the brand awareness, brand image, and customer loyalty positively and has become an important factor affecting the perception of consumers through digital

communication.

The results of the studies reviewed further indicate that levels of social media interaction are a mediator between apparel brand activities and consumer perception. Engagement is a range of activities, including likes, comments, sharing posts, joining discussions, posting reviews, and creating user generated content. These exercises enable consumers to put themselves into the shoes of a participant instead of a passive watcher of a brand community. The more engaged the consumers are, the more emotionally attached they are, more familiar with the brands, and more trustful they are, and consequently more positive brand perceptions.

Park & Ha (2021) showed that the provision of information and fun experiences on the social media channels of fashion brands greatly contributes to the engagement of consumers. When consumers find social media content useful and entertaining, they are more likely to engage with brands and to have a positive attitude towards them. In a similar study, Sohaib, Ali and Ahmad-ur-Rehman (2025) discovered that social media marketing fosters social engagement through customer behavior, which in turn enhances the brand's love and consequently, customer loyalty and advocacy. This research supports the hypothesis that engagement is not just the result of marketing efforts, but rather it is an important behavioural process in building a stronger relationship between the brand and the consumer.

The effects of influencer marketing and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on consumer perception were equally found in the literature. Fashion enthusiasts often turn to influencers, bloggers, and content creators when seeking product suggestions and inspiration. Content creators can showcase clothing items in a natural and genuine way, thereby making the product recommendations more trustworthy than regular ads. Lou and Yuan (2019) claimed that the credibility of influencers has a positive impact on consumer trust and purchase intention, while Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020) showed that the opinion leaders on Instagram seem to greatly influence consumer attitudes towards brands. In turn, positive customer feedback and user-generated content serve as valuable resources, minimizing buying uncertainty and boosting the trustworthiness of a brand. Influencer marketing and eWOM further reinforce the link between the engagement of social media and consumer perception, so the relationship between the two becomes stronger.

Another recommendation from the literature is to create a meaningful consumer experience instead of just boosting online visibility by using digital branding strategies. Naeem and Ozuem (2021) stated that successful fashion brands focus on maintaining customer relationship with continuous digital interaction, rather than just communicating promotions. Consumers are looking for a greater amount of personalised content, faster replies to their inquiries, clear communication and a way to engage in brand-related activities. Those companies that manage to meet them are likely to develop more positive relationships with customers and create sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on the reviewed studies, there are a number of practical implications from a managerial perspective. For apparel companies, it's important to create high-quality visual content, engage in interactive promotions, and foster community-building efforts to encourage consumers to participate. Frequent interactions such as user-generated content campaigns, contests, live sessions, and comments can help build emotional connection and enhance brand perception. In addition, organisations could work with reputable influencers who are based on the principles that are shared by the target audience and they should regularly check on the internet reviews and feedback from customers for a positive brand image. Digital analytics can be used to track engagement metrics, which can then be leveraged to improve future strategies and better understand consumer behavior.

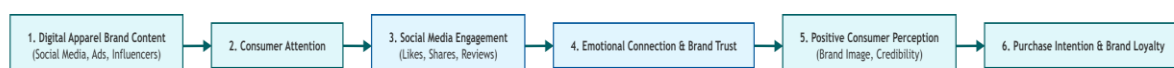


Figure 3. Consumer Engagement Process Leading to Positive Consumer Perception

6. CONCLUSION

Over the last few years, the digital age has done a lot to alter the way consumers will think and relate to apparel brands. Social media is the lifeline for brand communication and users are liking, commenting, reviewing and creating content that is being shared on social media. These engagements are vital to influencing customer perceptions, trust, and buying decisions.

As noted in this chapter, good apparel brand activities can enhance consumers' perception, and social media interaction plays a key role as a mediator. Brands that create engaging, informative, and authentic content are more likely to build



stronger relationships with consumers and enhance their overall brand image.

In addition, the study offers recommendations for apparel companies to emphasize interactive digital marketing, partner with influential people with trust, and attentively respond to customer comments to increase consumer engagement. Though the chapter is conceptual and is based on the literature, it helps to understand consumer behaviour in the digital fashion industry.

The conceptual model proposed in the study should be validated through actual data in future studies and other factors that can affect consumer perception should also be further explored, including brand trust, customer satisfaction, and new technology. In conclusion, social media engagement is an important element in building positive consumer perceptions and securing competitive advantage for apparel brands in the long term.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

While this chapter offers a detailed overview of the link between apparel branding and consumer perceptions, there are some areas needing attention.

The chapter is largely conceptual and draws on the results of other studies rather than empirical research. The proposed conceptual framework needs to be validated with primary consumer data, so it is necessary to conduct empirical studies.

Furthermore, the paper is exclusively devoted to the apparel sector and the results might not be applicable to other product sectors. There may be different sets of factors driving consumer behaviour in different industries, such as product involvement, purchase frequency, and perceived risk.

Digital technologies are also evolving quickly, which is a disadvantage. Social media, algorithms and consumers' tastes will evolve, so digital marketing tactics that are successful now could need tweaking later.

In addition, the role of social media engagement as a mediator variable has been explored in the chapter, with other potential mediators, such as brand trust, customer satisfaction, perceived value and emotional attachment, potentially affecting consumer perception.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

It is recommended that the proposed conceptual framework be empirically tested, with large and diverse samples of consumers in various countries and demographic groups. Comparisons of cross-cultural attitudes towards digital consumer behavior and social media usage would help in understanding cultural differences that have an impact on digital consumer behavior and social media use.

To explore the perception of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality, and social commerce in the apparel industry. Such technologies are becoming more and more part of digital purchase journeys and can have a substantial impact on engagement activities.

There is a need for further studies to explore other mediating and moderating factors such as brand trust, customer satisfaction, perceived value, consumer involvement, and brand authenticity to better understand the digital consumer behaviour.

Longitudinal studies would also help to broaden knowledge on consumer engagement and brand perception over time, especially as social media platforms evolve in terms of new features and marketing capabilities.

Last but not least, a comparison of the various fashion segments, including luxury fashion, sustainable fashion, fast fashion and sport, would give useful insights into the extent to which social media engagement impacts on consumer perception differently across the four segments.

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