

From Cool to Committed: The Pathways Linking Brand Trendiness, Emotional Identity, and Behavioral Loyalty in the Indian Fashion Market



Dr Partha Pratim Chakraborty^{1*}, Dr. A.S.Suresh², Dr. Santhosh Joseph³, Dr Prachi Jain⁴, Dr. Govind Soni⁵

^{1*}Associate Professor, DBS Global University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India ORCID ID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6425-7564>, Phone : 91 9804239811, Email : partha@parthapc.in

²Professor & Director, Doon Business School, DBS Global University, Dehradun , Email: sureshiyer1963@gmail.com mob:7022627719

³Head Techno Commercial Adani Digital Labs, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India ORCI ID : <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1910-2991> Email : josanathosh75@gmail.com

⁴Associate, The Jurists International Law Firm, New Delhi, India Email : pckjain@gmail.com

⁵Senior Faculty Gr II , Footwear Design & Development Institute, Govt. Of India Email: govindsoni02@gmail.com, Phone: 8889617766

Abstract

In the fast-paced Indian fashion industry, brand trendiness the belief that a brand is cool, modern, and breaking new ground has become a key factor in consumer engagement and loyalty – particularly among Gen Z and Millennial shopper segments. Based on the literature review and previous studies' findings, secondary data are used to develop a conceptual framework using Aaker's Brand Identity Model that links brand trendiness, emotional identity, and loyalty outcomes. In summary, the results indicate that if fashion brands are perceived as trendy and culturally relevant, they elicit emotions of identification within young adults and help them see the brand as an extension of their self-concept. In addition to the marketing implication, the study has a contribution to the body of sustainable entrepreneurship as it informs the debate on sustainability as a tool of innovation and responsible business development in the Indian fashion sector through brand trendiness. It points out the trend informed design and emotional branding through start-ups and small fashion enterprises to attain economic viability, social inclusion, and long-term sustainability. This places the study in the larger context of sustainable development and ethical entrepreneurship in emerging markets in Asia.

Keywords: Sustainable Entrepreneurship; Brand Trendiness; Emotional Identity; Behavioural Loyalty; Fashion Entrepreneurship; Sustainable Development.

Introduction

The Indian fashion industry, which is growing fast and where consumers are becoming more materialistic, provides a favourable situation for exploring the complex associations between brand trendiness, emotional identity, and behavioural loyalty (Kautish et al., 2021). This complex landscape is also complicated by the ever-increasing influence of digital media on consumer focus and cultural leanings influencing brand consumption (Gaur, 2024). More in-depth, it is a fact that the knowledge of how specialty fashion brands develop sustainable loyalty among consumers who consider products as tools for self-expression and emotional satisfaction and not only mere attitudes becomes important in this context (Jabar and Noor, 2025; Ahmed et al., 2024). Fashion companies are forced to use new strategies that go beyond the conventional marketing mix as well in order to attract and create greater consumer engagement (Kim and Sullivan, 2019). One of the successful strategies of achieving this is brand building using influencer marketing, and it has evolved as one of the most powerful

mechanisms for brands to create emotional connections with consumers—in the Indian context particularly, where people have roots, stories are very personal, and history stands testament to its efficacy. This can provide authenticity of message from the influencers, which makes stories and doesn't make advertising; rather, it helps in trust creation and building brand want-ability.

The fast growing fashion industry in India has not only changed the consumer behavior, but also provided opportunities to undertake sustainable entrepreneurship. Numerous up-and-coming designers and fashion start-ups are using digital resources, creativity in their cultures, and influencer networks to create profitable and socially responsible businesses. Such entrepreneurial activities encourage local craft, lower waste by means of demand-based production and integrate ethical sourcing actions. Through this, brand trendiness becomes a type of innovation that defines beauty and environmental and cultural sustainability, which helps entrepreneurs to compete in a global-conscious marketplace.

This has significant implications in the Indian context, an amalgamation of many cultures and languages where influencers assume importance by acting as a vital link between organizations and the public to fill up the communication vacuum and build emotional relations (Gaur, 2024). This research, thus, seeks to thoroughly investigate the various paths by which brand trendiness affects emotional identity and consequently influences behavioural loyalty in India's fashion market, taking into consideration influencer engagement as an intermediary factor. Specifically, the study attempts to understand how consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence and collective self-esteem, as well as demographic variables, moderate fashion involvement in this special market (Khare et al., 2011). The rise of social media has changed how consumers engage with brands and needs to be examined in a world where digital engagement (especially influencers) shapes perceptions around a brand's trendiness and emotional relevance (Rani et al., 2022).

They have become core to the way fashion brands engage with consumers and can foster brand loyalty through carefully thought-out digital campaigns (Tripathi, 2018). This research further aims to examine how these digital interactions as influenced by influencer marketing influence affective, continuance, and normative brand commitment among Indian consumers, leading finally to behavioural loyalty (Singh et al., 2021). Accordingly, this large-scale study will be highly beneficial for fashion brands who wish to develop long-term relationships with their critically important target market in the challenging and dynamic marketplace.

Objectives of the Study

01. To determine the direct and indirect effects of *brand trendiness* on *behavioral loyalty* among Gen Z and Millennial consumers in the Indian fashion market.

02. To examine the *mediating role of emotional identity* in the relationship between brand trendiness and behavioral loyalty.

03. To analyze the *moderating role of influencer engagement* in shaping the relationship between brand trendiness, emotional identity, and behavioral loyalty.

04. To understand the influence of *social media platforms and AI-enabled tools* in shaping consumer-brand emotional connections and loyalty formation.

05. To propose a *conceptual framework grounded in Aaker's Brand Identity Model* that integrates brand trendiness, emotional identity, and behavioral loyalty within the Indian fashion context.

Literature Review

One such newly adopted phenomenon is the use of influencer marketing, which uses individuals with high number of followers and reliable authority to spread company's message and create personal and emotional relationships on the audience (Gaur, 2024). This approach relies on the influencers' credibility and familiarity to generate genuine stories that develop trust and increase brand desire. This strategy is especially effective for involving consumers, creating favorable interrelations and favouring customer engagement by respecting the Commitment-Trust Theory (Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro, 2020). Brands connect with consumers and influencers based on the emotional connection that the latter feel for their content, communication history, and interactive engagement. The tactics have been successful in altering the attitudes of customers for purchase, in such fast-moving Indian fashion market especially sounding culture and holding relatable content has proven beneficial. The efficiency of influencer marketing is heightened in this regard by the ability for influencers to provide opportunities to increase engagement elasticity as well as connect a brand with a target audience directly that will potentially stimulate a sense of community around it (Leung et al., 2022) (Ali et al., 2024). Further, as an intermediate between the traditional advertising and a personalized recommendation, influencers realize relative more subtle and reliable brand promotion through their authentic relationship with followers (Leung et al., 2022).

More specifically, the effect of influencers on their audience's opinions as well as purchase behaviour has been demonstrated (Gaur, 2024). They are judged based on their perceived expertise trustworthiness and authenticity of the message which ultimately affect their overall credibility and also influence consumer purchase decision and brand image (Ali et al., 2024). This influence is deeply embedded in the fact that consumers are relying more on jaw-dropped user-generated content and peer-recommendations, believing them to be more real and credible than traditional advertising (Chowdhury et al., 2024). That perceived authenticity and approachability turn digital influencers into a highly credible eWOM (electronic Word-of-Mouth) source, naturally enabling brand endorsements within their day to day life story sharing (Santiago and Castelo, 2020).

People possibly tend to feel that they are in the place to be provided with key advice from a friend and consumer confidence and purchase intention seem notably affected by their suggestions (Gaur, 2024). Their (sincere) authenticity and expertise result a high level of credibility, which allows influencers to shape consumer attitudes towards brands and products more successfully than traditional

marketing channels do (Li, 2023). This is especially pertinent to the Indian apparel market, where consumer reliance on personal influence and culturally consistent endorsements play a dominant role while making purchase decisions (Migkos et al., 2025).

The rise of influencer marketing, expected to be 28 billion rupees by 2026 in India is a testimony that it is an emerging trend as a marketing concept (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). This emerging market is based on digital platforms and parasocial relationships one to many relationship, which justifies further research on its mechanics and impact in the fashion industry (Leung et al., 2022; Berné-Manero & Navarro, 2020). More specifically, this study will investigate how social media influencers construct the process of translating brand trendiness to emotional identity and behavioral loyalty among consumers in Indian fashion market (Zhou et al., 2021).

Accordingly, the literature on influencer marketing and consumer behavior as well as brand loyalty will be collated in order to provide a foundation for the study's conceptual model and proposed hypotheses. It will also explore the effectiveness of influencer's credibility influence on purchase intention and brand trust amongst digitally sophisticated Gen Y and Z consumers in RTW apparel sector (Kadić-Maglajlić et al., 2024).

This involves investigating influencer authenticity – comprised of transparency and genuine passion, in mediating the relationship between reading product placement on social networks through influencers and following actions among consumers. This point of view emphasis on the importance of influencer's credibility and the construction of parasocial relationships in creating trust among consumers and affecting purchase intention (Garg and Bakshi, 2024). The increasing popularity of influencer marketing furthermore calls for an awareness of the specificities of different types, as micro-influencers can for example induce more engagement and loyalty than macro-influencers due to their narrower reach and relatability (Samala and Rawas, 2024).

Despite a burgeoning area of academic research on influencer marketing, an important gap exists in understanding how different types of social media influencers influence consumer outcomes with particular reference to niche markets like Indian fashion (Rahman 2022). This gap underscores the importance of empirical investigation that explains the particular mechanisms that transfer influencer

attributes and strategies to a form of brand commitment loyalty in this culturally unique setting (Hudders and Lou, 2023). Accordingly, this research seeks to provide a well-regarded gap in the literature by investigating how brand trendiness drives emotional identity and behavioural loyalty through the mediated-moderation effect of fashion influencers in India. More specifically, the study will look into the translation of influencer-driven brand trendiness to emotional resonance and subsequent behavioral loyalty among consumers in this volatile market (Darshan et al., 2024; Hudders and Lou, 2022).

This has implications for understanding the interconnectivity of digital influence, consumer psychology, and market dynamism in India, providing actionable strategic insights for brands operating within the fashion industry in India (Bevan-Dye and Motaung, 2023). The current study seeks to explore the different impacts of influencer marketing, specifically the types of influencers that contribute to developing a loyal audience base in the Indian fashion industry (Rahman, 2022). A comprehensive systematic literature review demonstrates the strong influence of influencer traits such as trustworthiness, parasocial relationships, and no-payment peer ship on influencing consumer purchasing behavior (Sarkis et al., 2024). In addition, the psychological processes at play in influencer marketing activities such as social learning and identification, tend to be key determinants of consumer purchase decision-making when these influencer-consumer relationships are influenced by cultural dimensions (Chavda and Chauhan, 2024).

Sustainable entrepreneurship is the new source of innovation in events of creative industries in Asia especially in the fashion industry. It is the desire to achieve economic prosperity by ensuring business undertakings are eco-friendly, inclusive to all cultures, and socially conscious. This is seen in India through the emergence of small and medium fashion enterprises which combine traditional craftsmanship and modern digital branding to both support livelihoods and also address the contemporary consumer identities. Placing brand trendiness as an instrument of ethical innovation, fashion entrepreneurs are redefining competitiveness with measures of sustainability of resource efficiency, local empowerment as well as responsible marketing. Emotional identity and sustainable innovation are the two components that form a bridge between profitability and long-term effects on society.

The literature reviewed in the paper reveals the following dominant findings and theoretical orientations:

Theme	Key Insights from Literature
Brand Trendiness	Identified as a critical driver of perceived brand coolness and symbolic value, yet its <i>direct-to-loyalty linkage</i> remains underexplored in emerging markets (Kautish et al., 2020; Kim & Sullivan, 2019).
Emotional Identity	Studies emphasize emotional connection and self-brand congruence but lack integration with trendiness and digital influence models in India's cultural context (Jabar & Noor, 2025).
Influencer Marketing	Influencers shape perceptions of authenticity, trust, and trendiness, but most prior studies analyze their <i>promotional impact</i> rather than their <i>mediating role</i> between brand image and loyalty (Gaur, 2024; Bansal et al., 2024; Santiago & Castelo, 2020).
Digital and Cultural Mediation	Indian studies acknowledge cultural diversity and social media's role but have not empirically mapped <i>cultural orientation</i> or <i>digital engagement</i> as moderators in the trendiness-identity-loyalty chain (Khare et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2022).
Brand Loyalty Constructs	Prior work mostly focuses on <i>attitudinal loyalty</i> or purchase intention, while <i>behavioral loyalty</i> —manifested through advocacy and sustained patronage—remains conceptually fragmented (Tripathi, 2018; Singh et al., 2021).

Table 1 : Identified Gaps in Literature

Gap Type	Description	Relevance
Conceptual Gap	Limited research integrates brand trendiness, emotional identity, and behavioural loyalty into one model within the Indian fashion context.	Builds theoretical integration using Aaker's Brand Identity Model.
Contextual Gap	Most prior studies are Western or East Asian; there is scarce literature on how Gen Z and Millennials in India perceive trendiness and emotional identity in fashion branding.	Provides cross-cultural insight into brand identity formation in emerging markets.
Methodological Gap	Existing works are largely survey-based or exploratory; few develop conceptual models based on secondary synthesis to generalize consumer identity formation.	This study uses systematic literature synthesis to derive a conceptual model.
Theoretical Gap	Absence of an integrated framework combining brand identity theory, social identity theory, and influencer-mediated branding.	The present study bridges these by applying Aaker's framework within digital brand ecosystems.
Practical Gap	Limited understanding of how influencer engagement moderates emotional attachment and converts trend-based appeal into sustained loyalty.	Offers strategic insights for brand managers and entrepreneurs in India's fashion industry.

Table 3 : Mapping Gaps to Research Objectives

Objective	Linked Literature Gap	Contribution of Current Study
O1: To determine the direct and indirect effects of brand trendiness on behavioral loyalty	Lack of empirical clarity on how trendiness translates to behavioral (not just attitudinal) loyalty.	Establishes brand trendiness as a loyalty antecedent in the Indian fashion market.
O2: To examine the mediating role of emotional identity between brand trendiness and behavioral loyalty	Limited exploration of emotional self-brand connection as mediator in trend-based loyalty models.	Introduces emotional identity as the psychological bridge converting coolness to commitment.
O3: To analyze the moderating role of influencer engagement in these relationships	Influencers' credibility studied mostly for promotional efficiency, not for moderating emotional pathways.	Identifies influencer engagement as a cultural and digital moderator amplifying emotional effects.
O4: To understand the role of social media and AI-enabled tools in shaping consumer-brand relationships	Digital transformation literature lacks integration of AI and social media with emotional branding.	Expands framework to include AI-based engagement as strategic loyalty enhancer.
O5: To propose a conceptual framework grounded in Aaker's Brand Identity Model	Previous studies lack a unifying theoretical model for integrating trendiness, identity, and loyalty.	The paper constructs an integrated conceptual pathway grounded in brand identity theory.

Methodology

Research Design

Descriptive-analytical research design is used in the investigation by using secondary synthesized data. It utilizes conceptual, empirical, and industry literature for the development and validation of theorization on brand trendiness in association with emotional identity/behavioral loyalty in the Indian fashion scenario. The method is derived from Aaker’s (1997) brand identity model and enriched by the social identity of Hale et al. (2009) and commitment-trust (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

Data Sources

It increasingly draws only on secondary data using Scopus- and ABDC-indexed journal articles, industry white papers, and consulting reports EY, 2024; Sheth et al., 2020). Criteria for inclusion with a focus on fashion branding, influencer marketing, and consumer psychology in the context of emerging markets were prioritized. To make sure that the theoretical framework is compatible with the principles of a sustainable entrepreneurship, the secondary sources, like the policy reports on NITI Aayog, UNDP, and India SME Forum, were also studied. These papers reveal the national initiative and support of ethical innovation and development of small and medium enterprises as the drivers of sustainable economic development. With such insights, the proposed conceptual framework of this study will go beyond consumer behavior to focus on how fashion entrepreneurs in India can ensure sustainability by applying the concept of trend-led innovation, emotional engagement, and ethical digital branding.

Data Analysis Approach

An open literature review mapped constructs; the relationships and themes were synthesized and

integrated into a conceptual path model. The analysis process was conducted in five steps:

- Literature search (peer-reviewed journals and industry publications from 2018 to 2025).
- Categorical assignment of constructs (brand trendiness, emotional identity, loyalty).
- Mediation and moderation coding (influencer engagement, social media intensity).
- Cross-cultural comparison was done to keep the material relevant to the Indian context.
- Results are visualized in conceptual and graphical models (Figures 1–5).

Framework Development

Theoretical triangulation, market data interpretation, and contextual application are used to develop the conceptual model. Influencer engagement and AI-driven digital platforms were also found to be moderating factors in magnifying the brand trendiness-loyalty relationship.

Ethical Considerations

As the research solely employed secondary data from publicly available and referenced sources, there was no human participation required. All intellectual materials have been cited as per APA 7th ed citation guidelines for honesty and accountability.

Results and Discussions

This section combines secondary data on Scopus-indexed publications and consulting reports (e.g., EY, Bain, OC&C), to explore how brand trendiness and emotional identity contribute to cultivating behavioural loyalty among Indian Gen Z and Millennial consumers. The dialogue mirrors Aaker’s brand identity model (1997) and later relational theories by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006).

Figure 1. Conceptual Path Model: Trendiness → Emotional Identity → Behavioral Loyalty



Summary:

This pathway makes it clear that brand trendiness operates as the first symbolic attractor. Then, through emotional meaning (identity and belonging), it leads into behavioral loyalty in the

form of repeat purchase or advocacy. Influencer involvement and digital channels enhance this route by facilitating sales support in terms of social validation prompts.

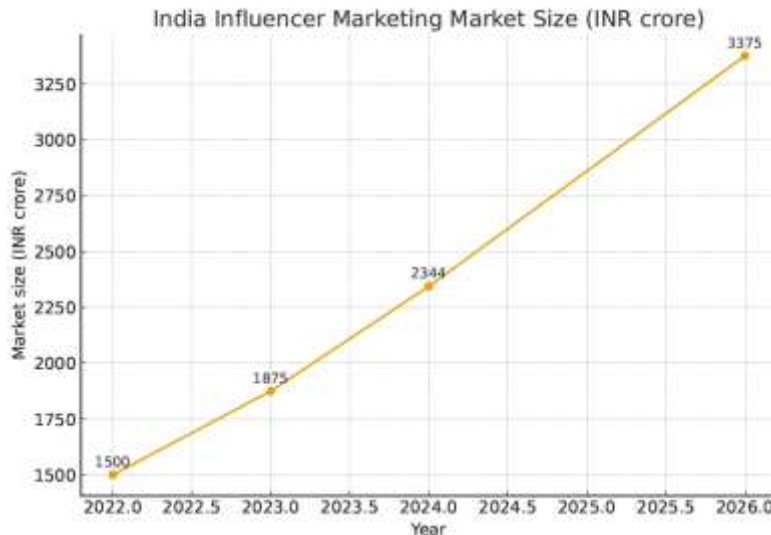


Figure 2: Growth of India’s Influencer Marketing Market (2022 – 2026)

Summary:

The rate of growth in the influencer marketing market is $\approx 18\%$ and it will grow from ₹ 1 500 crore (2022) to ₹ 3 375 crore (2026). The peak demonstrates how digital influencers moderate the trendiness–loyalty relationship and thus make influencer ecosystems a fundamental source of fashion brand adoption and recall.

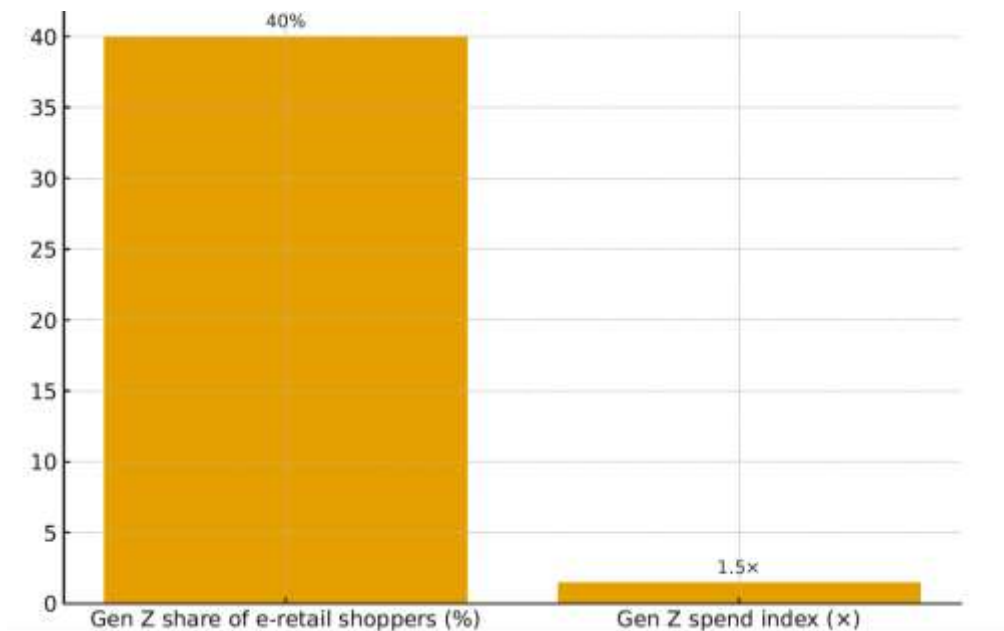


Figure 3: Gen Z Share of Indian E-Retail Shoppers and Spending Index

Summary:

Gen Z is 35–40% of India’s shopper base and has about 1.5× higher discretionary spending in lifestyle, beauty & fashion than other age groups. This information validates that fashion fad acceptance is young-focused and consistent with the identity signalling and status-expression rationales pertinent to emotional self-identity creation.

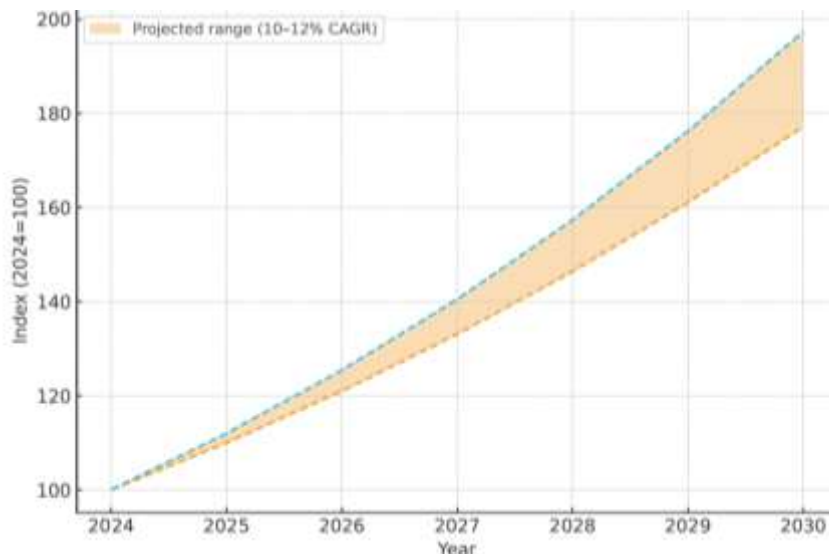


Figure 4: Projection of Indian Apparel Market



Figure 5 : Strategic Implications

In summary, the Indian apparel market is set to grow at a CAGR of 10–12% between 2024 and 2030, with the index pegged to a base value of 100 in 2024. While the numbers present this growth as a phenomenon, when looked through the country’s fashion evolution and consumers’ psychology, the projected growth serves as a structural shift within India’s fashion ecosystem. In this context, the structural trigger includes income elasticity, the ever-increasing urbanization, digital-first life, and mostly, the transformation of consumers’ psychology from utility-seeking to identity-seeking. Through the lens of economics, the growth indicates a shift from volume-based growth to value-based growth. The consumers’ psychology is now leaning towards wanting to buy apparel not just for comfort but also for aesthetic synergy and self-expression dynamic to the social setting. In this ecosystem, brand trendiness, reflecting on consumers as to how innovative or “fresh” the brand appears, helps fashion brands capture the aspirational consumption wave among Millennials and Gen Z.

Even situated in the cycle of marketing-based trends, the clothes’ offering and the fashion brand offer need to be synced with the consumer tastes at an emotional, identification-based level. Viewed economically, this is a move from being good/successful in making the product to having a good brand. Psychologically/behaviorally, these shifts can be attributed to income elasticity, expanding the hedonic and particularly symbolic dimension of clothes. The element that provides experiential, symbolic value to a brand buy is trendy rather than having it/not having it. Moreover, rising income is syncing the consumer’s offering—symbolic consumption ecosystem—in a tale of how I identify with this brand cycle. Moreover, it represents the further integration of digital, the rise of brand personalization and brand immediacy, and trends and points validated by Bagozzi and Dholakia. The sustainability side of the results shows that trendiness-based branding can become a sustainable entrepreneurship model in the Indian fashion market. When entrepreneurs incorporate

the emotional identity and influencer engagement in their branding strategies, they are also encouraging responsible consumption and resiliency of the market in the long term. The entrepreneurial model aims to focus on authenticity, transparency, and inclusivity- which assist in ethical development and town-based innovation. As a result, trendiness becomes not just a short-lived fashion attraction but a reliable business process that will motivate the consumer to trust, be environmentally conscious, and economically secure to local businesses.

Conclusion

The current research gives a detailed insight on how brand trendiness when coupled with emotional identity leads to long-lasting consumer loyalty in the dynamic fashion sector in India. The study is developed based on the Brand Identity Model formulated by Aaker and shows that young consumers can identify themselves with the brand because of the perception of the brand as innovative and culturally relevant, and, therefore, convert the short-term level of attraction into the long-term behavioral commitment. Brand admiration is mediated by its emotional identity, which facilitates transition into advocacy and fosters it by humanizing online relationships and creating sincere emotional resonance. As an entrepreneur, these results have shown that brand trendiness is not only a marketing trend but also a tool of sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation. Fashion entrepreneurs can attract and maintain ethical relationships with consumers by integrating emotional, authentic, and online transparency into their branding strategies and gain sustainable competitive edge. The introduction of social media, personalization with the help of AI, and influencer-driven storytelling is also indicative of how technology can fuel responsible business development. Overall, the report places trendiness as an avenue to sustainable brand entrepreneurship in the emerging Asian markets. According to it, when creativity, emotional attachment, and sustainability collide, fashion businesses will be able to exclude profit-driven ambitions and play a significant role in societal inclusion, environmental awareness, and economical resilience. In this perspective, Indian fashion brands stand out as a good example of how cool can become long-term sustainable with the focus put on innovation and responsible business.

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