

## Research Article

## Open Access

## From Discovery to Purchase: Social Media and Apparel Consumption Among Nepali Youth

Sudhamshu Dahal

Associate Professor, Department of Languages and Mass Communication, School of Arts, Kathmandu University, Nepal

### ABSTRACT

This study examines how social media shapes apparel purchasing pathways among Nepali youth, with particular attention to platform-specific roles in discovery, evaluation, and conversion. It responds to a gap in Nepal-focused social commerce research by asking how Instagram and Facebook are used for apparel discovery, how user-generated content, influencers, and advertisements affect purchase-related decisions, and how reviews, peer recommendations, quality, and price influence final choice. A quantitative cross-sectional online survey was administered to 128 Nepali youth social media users with experience browsing or purchasing apparel online. Data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. The findings show that Instagram is the dominant apparel discovery platform (85.9%), while Facebook plays a smaller discovery role (7.0%). User-generated content and influencer recommendations commonly shape early interest, but immediate advertisement-driven purchase is rare (1.6%). Most respondents instead save products for later, request price or product details, compare alternatives, and rely on peer recommendations and reviews to reduce quality uncertainty. Discounts increase purchase propensity, but tangible attributes, especially quality and price, remain stronger than trend visibility or influencer appeal. The study concludes that social media expands youth exposure to fashion and supports consideration, but conversion depends on perceived value, trust cues, seller responsiveness, and risk reduction. The article contributes to understanding youth consumption in a developing digital economy by clarifying the distinction between platform-led discovery and trust-mediated purchasing.

### \*Corresponding author

Sudhamshu Dahal, Associate Professor, Department of Languages and Mass Communication, School of Arts, Kathmandu University, Nepal.

**Received:** September 02, 2026; **Accepted:** September 08, 2026; **Published:** September 15, 2026

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Apparel Purchasing, Consumer Behavior, Product Discovery, Purchase Conversion, Social Commerce, Nepal

### Introduction

Social media has shifted from a peripheral communication channel to a central environment in which consumers encounter products, compare alternatives, evaluate sellers, and co-create marketplace meaning. The contemporary social media marketplace is not a linear broadcast system in which brands simply transmit messages and consumers respond. It is closer to an interactive value-creation system in which consumers, firms, influencers, platform algorithms, and peer networks continuously redirect attention and meaning [1]. This is particularly important in apparel consumption because clothing is visual, socially visible, and identity-laden. Apparel choices communicate taste, lifestyle, gendered expression, group belonging, and aspirational self-presentation, therefore, social platforms that prioritize images, short video, comments, and sharing can strongly influence how consumers notice, interpret, and evaluate fashion products.

The expansion of social commerce has also altered the traditional consumer decision process. Apparel shoppers may encounter an item through an influencer post, save it for later, compare similar products through multiple pages, read comments, ask the seller for size and fabric details, seek peer confirmation, and purchase days or weeks after the first exposure. This process complicates

older assumptions that media influence can be assessed only through immediate purchase. In fashion contexts, social media often operates as an inspiration and evaluation environment rather than as a direct conversion machine [2]. The practical challenge is therefore to identify where social media exerts the greatest influence: discovery, interest formation, risk reduction, or final purchase.

Nepal provides a relevant setting for this inquiry. Digital adoption has become increasingly visible in everyday consumption, and online selling through Facebook pages, Instagram shops, direct messages, and platform-based marketplaces has become part of urban and semi-urban retail practice. DataReportal's 2026 country report estimates 16.6 million internet users in Nepal by the end of 2025 and 14.8 million active social media user identities, equivalent to about half of the population [3]. The same report indicates that Instagram's advertising reach was smaller than Facebook's overall reach, but Instagram remains culturally important for youth fashion discovery because of its visual feed, short-form video formats, and creator-led style circulation. These national-level indicators do not by themselves explain purchase decisions, but they establish the broader digital environment within which youth apparel consumption is taking place.

Existing Nepal-focused studies indicate that social media marketing, content marketing, social networks, and influencer credibility can affect consumer buying behavior and purchase

intention [4-6]. A more recent study of Nepalese youth also reports that Instagram and Facebook are important in advertisement-related consumer purchasing behavior [7]. However, the apparel-specific pathway remains underexplored. Apparel purchasing through social media involves uncertainty about fabric, fit, authenticity, delivery reliability, and exchange practices. These risks make social proof and trust cues important, but they may not eliminate price sensitivity or quality concerns. Consequently, a Nepal-specific analysis must distinguish between social media influence at the level of attention and social media influence at the level of conversion.

This study addresses that gap by examining social media pathways to apparel purchasing among Nepali youth. It focuses on platform preference, content influence, and trust cues. Rather than assuming that digital exposure produces immediate purchase, the study treats purchasing as a staged and iterative process. The central argument is that social media expands discovery and stimulates consideration, but conversion depends on perceived quality, affordability, peer validation, and seller credibility. This distinction is important both theoretically and practically: theoretically, it clarifies how attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control interact in social commerce, practically, it shows that Nepali apparel sellers need trust-forward communication rather than mere visibility.

The study is guided by three research questions. RQ1 asks what differences exist in apparel purchasing behavior between Nepali youth who primarily use Instagram and those who primarily use Facebook, and what factors may contribute to those differences. RQ2 asks how exposure to content types such as sponsored posts, user-generated content, and influencer recommendations affects apparel purchasing behavior. RQ3 asks what role reviews, ratings, and peer recommendations play in decisions concerning product quality and trustworthiness. Because the sample is non-probability and descriptive, the analysis does not claim population-level causality, instead, it provides evidence-based interpretation of the decision pathway reported by respondents.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides the first theoretical anchor for the study. TPB proposes that behavior is primarily shaped by intention, while intention is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [8]. In social media apparel purchasing, attitudes may be shaped by perceived style, aesthetic appeal, price-value assessment, and brand image. Subjective norms may be shaped by peers, influencers, visible engagement metrics, and platform-based trends. Perceived behavioral control may be shaped by budget, confidence in online product evaluation, trust in seller reliability, and the perceived ease of delivery, exchange, or complaint resolution. TPB is useful because it explains why positive attitudes toward a product and strong peer visibility may still fail to generate purchase when quality uncertainty or affordability constraints remain high.

Social proof theory provides a second conceptual anchor. Social proof refers to the tendency to interpret other people's behaviors, recommendations, and evaluations as evidence of what is appropriate, desirable, or trustworthy, particularly under uncertainty [9]. In social media commerce, social proof is visible through likes, comments, shares, customer reviews, follower counts, influencer endorsements, tagged customer photos, and peer recommendations. Apparel decisions are especially susceptible to social proof because consumers cannot fully inspect texture,

fit, and durability before purchase. However, the diagnostic value of social proof may vary. Peer reviews and user-generated content may appear more authentic than sponsored endorsements, especially when consumers suspect commercial motivation.

The third framework is the social media value-creation or 'pinball' perspective. Hennig-Thurau et al. argue that social media changes marketing from a controlled funnel to a dynamic system in which multiple actors nudge value creation through unpredictable interactions [1]. In this environment, a consumer's save, share, comment, direct message, or peer discussion is not merely a weak form of engagement, it can be an intermediate movement in the purchase pathway. For apparel brands, this means that value is generated not only through final sales but also through the curation of desire, the circulation of styles, and the building of confidence through repeated interaction.

The broader social commerce literature supports this interpretation. Hajli shows that social commerce constructs such as forums, communities, ratings, reviews, and recommendations contribute to trust and purchase intention [10]. Santos et al. similarly show that consumer engagement in social media brand communities is a significant area of inquiry because engagement connects consumers, brands, and peer communities [11]. These findings suggest that social media should not be reduced to advertisement exposure. It is a socio-technical environment where consumers make sense of products through relational, informational, and evaluative exchanges.

Fashion-specific research further clarifies the staged character of social media influence. Nash found that social media platforms support fashion inspiration and information search, but final purchase intention is not always directly determined by social media content [2]. Djafarova and Bowes show that Instagram marketing tools can encourage Generation Z impulse purchasing, but even impulse-oriented behavior is shaped by platform features, perceived relevance, and user interpretation [12]. This suggests that apparel discovery may be rapid, but purchasing is not uniformly impulsive. Consumers may be attracted quickly while still deliberating over price, quality, and seller reliability.

User-generated content (UGC) is central to this process because it provides evidence from ordinary users rather than from brands alone. Vazquez et al. show that visual UGC can stimulate aesthetic, relational, emotional, and interactive experiences in fashion consumption [13]. In apparel social commerce, UGC can show garments on real bodies, in ordinary lighting, and in everyday settings, thereby reducing uncertainty about fit and appearance. In developing markets where informal sellers and page-based shops are common, UGC can also serve a verification function: it signals that the seller has delivered products to actual customers and that the promoted item may correspond to the received item. Influencer marketing adds another layer of social influence. Lou and Yuan argue that message value and influencer credibility affect consumer trust in branded content. Chetoui et al. find that attitudes toward fashion influencers can contribute to purchase intention, while Casalo et al. show that opinion leadership on Instagram has consequences for consumer behavioral intentions [14-16]. More recent evidence by Alrwashdeh et al. indicates that influencer trustworthiness, expertise, and information quality can shape purchase intention, partly through brand attitude [17]. These studies suggest that influencers often operate by shaping attention, confidence, and brand evaluation rather than by directly replacing consumers' practical assessment of quality and price.

The boundaries of influencer influence are equally important. Kondort et al. show that fashion influencers can shape trends and style adoption, but direct buying effects may vary by age group and decision context [18]. Sokolova and Kefi also show that credibility and parasocial interaction matter in purchase intention, especially for younger audiences, but such effects still operate through psychological and relational mechanisms rather than automatic persuasion [19]. For Nepalese youth, influencer content may therefore frame what looks fashionable or desirable, while final purchase may remain dependent on affordability, perceived quality, and trust in the seller.

Generational research helps explain why youth consumers may be highly exposed to social media yet cautious in conversion. Kim and Ammeter identify feedback, responsiveness, personalization, complaint acceptance, and enjoyment as important for digitally immersed consumers [20]. Munsch similarly highlights the need to understand generational differences in digital marketing communication [21]. Wang argues that Gen Z consumers expect brands to align with their values and use social media as a central channel for product information and brand connection [22]. Romanchuk reports that social media and word-of-mouth remain significant product discovery channels for younger consumers [23]. Taken together, these studies indicate that youth consumers use social media intensively, but they also expect responsive, transparent, and credible interaction before committing to purchase.

Nepal-focused evidence is broadly consistent with this literature. Shrestha et al. find that social networks, social influence, and content marketing affect consumer buying behavior in Nepal. Gautam et al. show that influencers can affect consumer purchase intention in urban Nepal, while Gurung et al. identify trustworthiness and attractiveness as relevant influencer characteristics among social media users [4-6]. Chaudhary further reports that Instagram and Facebook are important platforms in Nepalese youth purchasing behavior, although demographic effects may be limited [7]. These studies provide local grounding, but they do not fully explain the apparel-specific distinction between platform discovery, content evaluation, trust formation, and final purchase. The present study contributes by mapping that pathway descriptively.

**Materials and Methods**

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. This design was appropriate because the aim was to describe patterns of platform use, perceived influence, and purchase-related decision sequencing among youth social media users at a specific point in time. The study did not attempt to establish causality, rather, it aimed to generate a focused empirical account of how Nepali youth report moving from apparel discovery to evaluation and purchase through social media.

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire prepared in Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed through Instagram, Facebook, and messaging platforms. Purposive sampling was used to reach respondents who identified as Nepali youth, actively used social media, and had experience browsing or purchasing apparel through online or social media channels. Although purposive sampling limits generalizability, it was appropriate for reaching platform-active respondents relevant to the study’s research questions.

A short pilot test with five respondents was conducted before full distribution. The pilot helped refine wording, sequencing, and clarity of the instrument. The final questionnaire included

items on demographic profile, platform preference for apparel discovery, usual shopping method, perceived influence of UGC, influencer recommendations, advertisements, discounts, peer recommendations, reviews, ratings, quality, price, brand reputation, trends, and FOMO-related pressure. Most items used fixed-response categories suitable for descriptive analysis.

A total of 128 valid responses were retained for analysis. The sample was predominantly female (62.9%), followed by male (33.9%) and non-binary respondents (3.2%). Most respondents reported bachelor’s-level education (72.7%). Employment status included employed respondents (49.2%) and students (25.8%), suggesting a mix of respondents with varying degrees of discretionary spending capacity. The sample profile is summarized in Table 1. Percentages are reported as provided by the survey output and may not total exactly 100 because of rounding and residual response categories.

**Table 1: Respondent Profile and Shopping Orientation**

| Indicator                     | Result reported in survey                            |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Valid responses               | 128                                                  |
| Gender                        | Female 62.9%, male 33.9%, non-binary 3.2%            |
| Education                     | Bachelor’s-level education 72.7%                     |
| Employment status             | Employed 49.2%, students 25.8%                       |
| Typical apparel shopping mode | Online/social media or website 61.7%, in-store 33.6% |

**Source Note:** Percentages are based on survey output and may not total 100 because of rounding and residual response categories.

The data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. This approach aligns with the exploratory and descriptive purpose of the study. Given the small number of Facebook-primary respondents, the study does not conduct inferential comparison between Instagram and Facebook users. Instead, it interprets platform patterns cautiously and emphasizes decision-stage tendencies. Ethical considerations were addressed through voluntary participation, non-collection of personally identifiable information in the reported dataset, and presentation of results only in aggregate form. The manuscript reports no individual-level data that could identify respondents.

**Results**

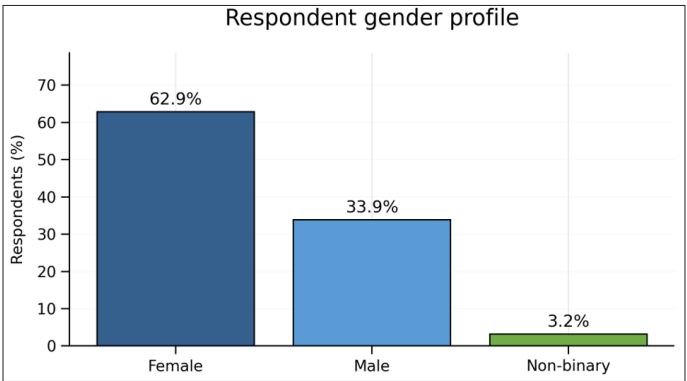


**Figure 1: Respondent Gender Profile**

The results indicate that apparel purchasing through social media among Nepali youth is best understood as a staged pathway rather than as an immediate stimulus-response process. Respondents reported high orientation toward online apparel shopping, strong reliance on Instagram for discovery, meaningful influence from UGC and influencers, but very low immediate advertisement-driven purchase. This pattern suggests that social media is powerful in discovery and consideration, while conversion depends on evaluation and trust.

### Platform Preference and Discovery

Online shopping was common among respondents: 61.7% reported typically purchasing apparel online through social media pages or websites, while 33.6% preferred in-store shopping. This finding suggests that online and social media-mediated purchasing is not marginal among the surveyed youth segment. Nevertheless, in-store preference remains meaningful, which may reflect the continued importance of physical inspection, fabric verification, size assessment, and immediate trust in the seller.

Instagram was the dominant platform for apparel discovery, reported by 85.9% of respondents. Facebook was reported by 7.0%, while TikTok was reported by 6.3%. This does not mean Facebook is irrelevant to Nepal's wider digital environment, national data show Facebook's much larger advertising reach in Nepal [3]. Rather, in this apparel-focused youth sample, Instagram appears to have stronger platform-product fit. Apparel is visually evaluated, and Instagram's image-forward and short-video environment enables quick aesthetic scanning, outfit inspiration, creator-led display, and saving for later. Facebook may still contribute to credibility checks through pages, groups, comments, and messenger interactions, but it was not the primary discovery environment for most respondents.

The result responds to RQ1 by showing that platform difference is primarily a difference in discovery function. Instagram appears to operate as a visual discovery and curation space, while Facebook appears less central for initial apparel discovery in this youth sample. Because the Facebook-primary subgroup is small, the study cannot claim statistically robust behavioral differences between Instagram and Facebook users. However, the descriptive pattern is theoretically meaningful: platform affordances shape where apparel products are first noticed and how they enter the consumer's consideration set.

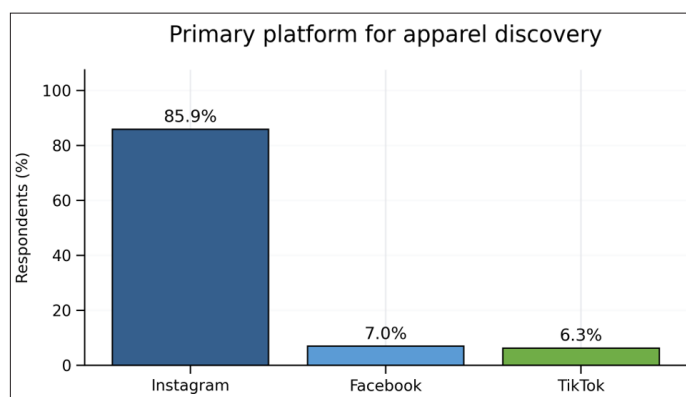


**Figure 2: Primary Platform for Apparel Discovery**  
Note: Percentages are based on the survey summary.

### Content Influence and Decision Sequencing

UGC influenced apparel purchases for most respondents: 59.0% reported occasional influence and 21.0% reported frequent influence. Influencer recommendations were also salient, with

48.4% reporting that influencers affected them sometimes and 30.5% reporting influence most of the time. These figures show that peer-generated and creator-generated content contribute to the early stages of the decision pathway. However, the nature of the influence appears to be more deliberative than impulsive.

Immediate purchase after advertisement exposure was rare: only 1.6% reported buying immediately. Instead, the most common responses were saving items for later (37.5%) and checking or asking for price and details (31.3%). These behaviors indicate information search, delayed evaluation, and risk management. A saved post is a micro-commitment, not a purchase. A direct message asking for price, size, or fabric details is a test of both product value and seller responsiveness. In TPB terms, social media may strengthen attitude and subjective norm, but perceived behavioral control remains dependent on price, quality certainty, and transactional confidence.

This finding responds to RQ2 by showing that different content types have stage-specific effects. Advertisements, influencer posts, and UGC can capture attention and create interest. UGC and reviews appear to support evaluation by providing social proof. Seller replies and transparent information may then determine whether the consumer proceeds toward purchase. The low rate of immediate purchase should not be read as advertising failure, rather, it indicates that the social media apparel pathway is extended and mediated by consumer caution.

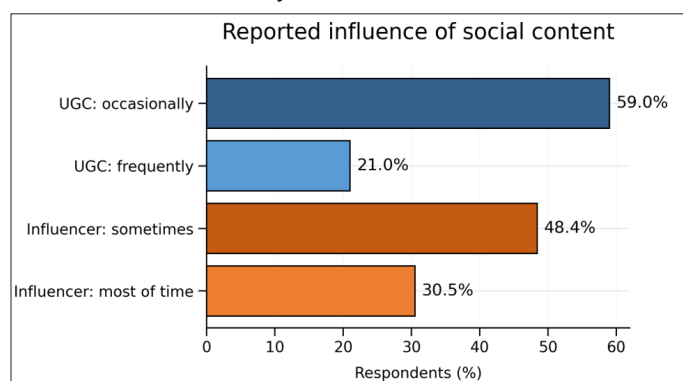


**Figure 3: Reported Influence of Social Content**  
Note: Measures use different response wording and are not ranked statistically.

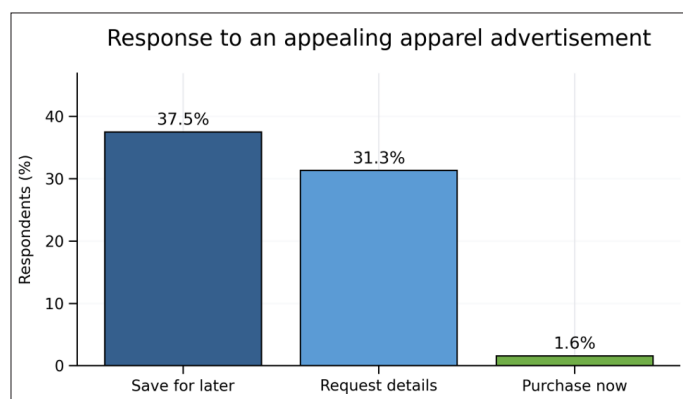


**Figure 4: First Response to an Appealing Apparel Advertisement**  
Note: Only categories retained in the survey summary are shown.

### Discounts, Trust Cues, and FOMO

Discounts and offers increased purchase propensity for many respondents: 56.3% reported that discounts influenced them

sometimes and 21.9% reported influence most of the time. This indicates that affordability remains a strong conversion factor. However, discounts do not operate alone. Respondents also prioritized tangible attributes, with quality reported as the most influential purchase factor, followed by price and brand reputation. Viral trends and influencers were rated lower on average than these practical criteria.

Trust was linked to social validation signals, especially peer recommendations, reviews, high-quality visuals, and perceived professionalism. This responds directly to RQ3. Reviews and peer recommendations function as risk-reduction mechanisms in apparel purchasing because consumers cannot fully inspect the product before purchase. Peer proof may also be more diagnostic than influencer endorsement because it is perceived as closer to actual user experience. In Nepal's social media commerce environment, where many apparel sellers operate through pages, direct messages, and informal storefronts, trust cues become part of the product itself.

FOMO-related pressure varied. A substantial proportion of respondents (48.4%) reported sometimes feeling pressured to buy because of FOMO, while 36.3% reported never feeling such pressure. This mixed result is important. It suggests that youth consumers may be aware of trends and platform urgency, but they do not uniformly surrender to them. FOMO may intensify attention and interest, but it does not necessarily override quality, price, and trust assessment.

**Table 2: Key Social Media Pathway Indicators**

| Decision-pathway indicator                      | Main descriptive result                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary apparel discovery platform              | Instagram 85.9%, Facebook 7.0%, TikTok 6.3%                       |
| UGC influence                                   | Occasionally 59.0%, frequently 21.0%                              |
| Influencer recommendation influence             | Sometimes 48.4%, most of the time 30.5%                           |
| Immediate purchase after advertisement exposure | 1.6%                                                              |
| Delayed evaluation after advertisement exposure | Saved item for later 37.5%, checked/asked price and details 31.3% |
| Discount influence                              | Sometimes 56.3%, most of the time 21.9%                           |
| FOMO pressure                                   | Sometimes 48.4%, never 36.3%                                      |

**Source Note:** UGC = user-generated content, FOMO = fear of missing out.

Table 2 summarizes the key social media pathway indicators. The pattern is consistent: the strongest platform effect occurs at discovery, the strongest content effect occurs at interest and evaluation, and the strongest conversion factors are quality, price, discounts, reviews, and peer recommendations. The findings therefore support a layered model of influence in which social media visibility is necessary but insufficient for purchase.

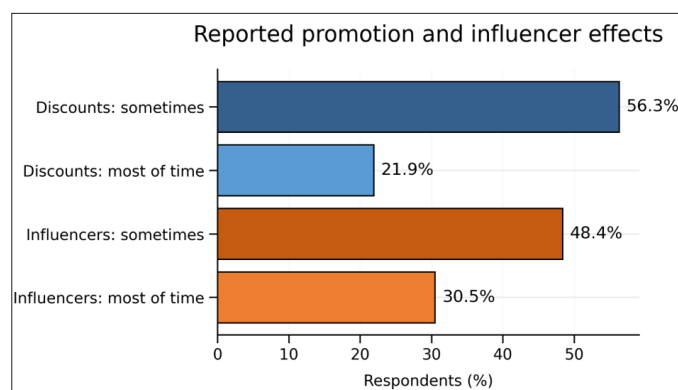


**Figure 5: Reported Promotion and Influencer Effects**  
**Note:** Related measures are presented descriptively.

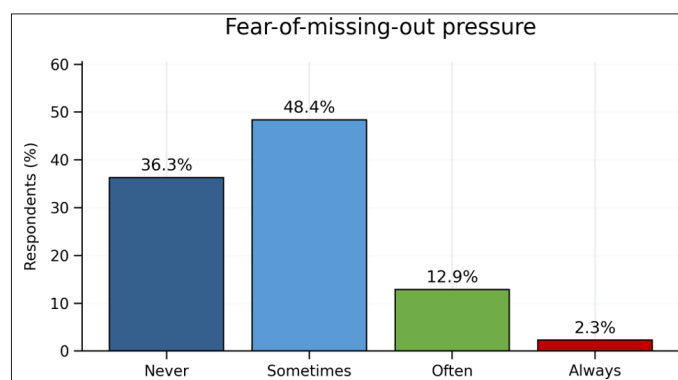


**Figure 6: Reported Fear-of-Missing-Out Pressure**  
**Note:** Percentages total 99.9% because of rounding.

## Discussion

The findings support the argument that social media influence in Nepali youth apparel purchasing is layered and stage-specific. Instagram and social content accelerate discovery and consideration, but purchase conversion is governed by quality, price, trust, and seller responsiveness. This pattern is consistent with the pinball perspective because consumers do not move neatly from advertisement to purchase [1]. Instead, they bounce across posts, influencers, comments, saved items, direct messages, peer opinions, and competing sellers before deciding whether to buy.

The dominance of Instagram can be interpreted through platform-product fit. Apparel is visual, aesthetic, and performative. Instagram's interface encourages rapid comparison, aspirational browsing, and style curation. Saving an item for later is especially important because it transforms a fleeting post into part of the consumer's private consideration set. This behavior supports evidence that social media is important for fashion inspiration and information search but may not fully determine final purchase intention [2]. The Nepali case extends that insight by showing that even in an Instagram-dominant discovery environment, youth consumers remain cautious about conversion.

Influencer content appears to operate more as attitude formation than direct conversion. Many respondents reported that influencer recommendations affected them, but quality and price were stronger decision drivers. This aligns with Alrwashdeh et al., who show that influencers can shape purchase intention through brand attitude, and with Kondort et al., who distinguish between style influence and buying decisions [17,18]. In this study, influencers may set the style agenda and increase brand salience, but they do

not override practical constraints. For apparel sellers in Nepal, the implication is that influencer collaboration should emphasize credibility, sizing information, fabric demonstration, and realistic representation rather than only aspirational visibility.

UGC and reviews appear to be more directly connected to risk reduction. Vazquez et al. emphasize that visual UGC stimulates aesthetic and relational experiences in fashion consumption [13]. In the present study, UGC also appears to perform a verification function. Tagged customer photos, review comments, and peer recommendations help consumers decide whether the seller is reliable and whether the product is likely to match what is shown. This is consistent with social proof theory, but the Nepali context gives social proof a practical dimension: it is not only about popularity, it is about reducing uncertainty in page-based and direct-message commerce.

The importance of price and discounts reflects the economic realities of youth consumption. Many young consumers face budget constraints, even when they are digitally active and fashion-aware. Discounts increase perceived affordability and therefore enhance perceived behavioral control. However, the prominence of quality shows that affordability alone is insufficient. A low price may attract attention, but quality uncertainty can prevent purchase. This confirms the value of TPB for interpreting the findings: favorable attitudes and supportive norms must be accompanied by a sense that the purchase is feasible, reliable, and worth the cost.

The findings also refine Nepal-focused literature. Shrestha et al. show that social media marketing affects buying behavior through social networks, social influence, and content marketing [6]. Gautam et al. and Gurung et al. show that influencer characteristics matter in Nepal [4,5]. Chaudhary reports that social media advertisements influence youth purchasing behavior and that Instagram and Facebook are important platforms [7]. The present study adds apparel-specific depth by showing how these influences are sequenced. It is not enough to say that social media influences consumers, the more precise claim is that social media first expands exposure, then supports evaluation through UGC and peer proof, and only later contributes to conversion when price, quality, and trust are sufficiently resolved.

From a marketing practice perspective, the results suggest that Nepali apparel sellers should design for an extended decision journey. Instagram should be prioritized for visual discovery, but every discovery cue should be supported by trust-building information: clear price ranges, size charts, fabric details, return or exchange policy, delivery information, verified customer reviews, and prompt replies to direct messages. Sellers should track not only likes and reach but also saves, profile visits, direct-message inquiries, response time, and review quality. In a pinball environment, these intermediate behaviors are not secondary, they are evidence that consumers are moving through the evaluation pathway.

For influencer strategy, the study suggests a credibility-first approach. Influencers should be selected not only for follower count but also for audience fit, trustworthiness, and ability to provide useful product information. Demonstrations of fabric, sizing, fit, styling alternatives, and realistic use may be more persuasive than generic promotional captions. This is especially relevant when youth consumers are attentive to both fashion trends and economic risk. Influencer content that reduces uncertainty may have stronger conversion value than influencer content that merely increases desire.

For consumer protection and digital literacy, the findings imply that youth social commerce requires informed evaluation. Peer reviews and UGC can help consumers reduce risk, but they can also be curated or manipulated. Young consumers need the ability to distinguish verified customer evidence from promotional content, to evaluate seller credibility, and to recognize urgency-based marketing tactics. This is a media and consumer literacy issue as much as a marketing issue. Transparent seller practices and clearer platform norms around sponsored content would strengthen trust in Nepal's growing social commerce environment.

Meta-analytic and review evidence identifies trust and perceived risk as important factors associated with purchase intention in social-commerce and electronic-commerce settings [24-26]. Meta-analytic evidence also indicates that electronic word of mouth is associated with purchase intention [27]. Systematic reviews of fashion influencer marketing and social commerce identify credibility, trust, engagement, and technological and social conditions as important parts of online purchasing environments [28,29]. Fear of missing out has been associated with purchase intention, shopping motivation, and impulse- or compulsion-related purchasing responses in specific consumer and student samples [30,31]. Social-media interaction and cross-platform consumer journeys help explain how consumers may move from digital exposure and product discovery through evaluation to purchase-related decisions [32,33]. Source credibility can mediate fashion purchase intention, while perceived risk and trust can moderate the relationship between online-shopping intention and purchase decisions [34,35]. Integrated influencer-marketing research connects source credibility, fear of missing out, and parasocial relationships with purchase intention, while review evidence identifies influencer credibility and advertising disclosure as additional relevant factors [36,37]. Online consumer reviews have also been associated with purchase intention through review quality, positive valence, quantity, and consumer trust [38].

## Conclusion

This study examined how social media shapes apparel purchasing pathways among Nepali youth. The evidence shows that Instagram is the dominant platform for apparel discovery in the surveyed sample, while Facebook plays a smaller role in initial discovery. UGC and influencer recommendations influence early interest, but immediate advertisement-driven purchasing is rare. Most respondents engage in delayed consideration by saving products, checking price and product details, comparing alternatives, and relying on reviews or peer recommendations.

The study concludes that social media is powerful but not determinative. It expands exposure, normalizes styles, and supports interest formation, but conversion depends on perceived quality, price, discounts, peer validation, seller responsiveness, and trust. Theoretically, the findings support a TPB interpretation in which attitudes and subjective norms are shaped by social media while perceived behavioral control is governed by affordability and risk reduction. Social proof theory explains why reviews, recommendations, and UGC are influential under uncertainty. The pinball marketing perspective explains why saves, shares, comments, and direct-message inquiries should be treated as meaningful stages of value creation.

Practically, the findings recommend that apparel sellers targeting Nepali youth prioritize Instagram for discovery but design communication around trust. Product posts should be supported by transparent pricing, fabric and size information,

clear exchange policies, verified reviews, UGC, and responsive messaging. Influencer marketing should emphasize credibility and product information rather than only aspiration. Promotions should communicate value without undermining quality perception. For researchers, the study highlights the need to move beyond the broad question of whether social media influences purchase and toward more precise analysis of when, how, and through which trust mechanisms influence becomes conversion.

### Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. First, the sample was purposive and relatively small, which limits generalizability. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference. Third, the study relies on self-reported perceptions rather than observed behavioral data such as clicks, saves, message logs, or actual purchase records. Fourth, the Facebook-primary subgroup was small, so platform comparison should be interpreted descriptively rather than inferentially. Fifth, the study did not deeply disaggregate respondents by region, income level, or detailed age cohorts, all of which may affect apparel purchasing.

Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples across provinces, urban and semi-urban markets, and different income groups. They should test theoretical pathways using inferential models, including possible mediation from influencer credibility to brand attitude and purchase intention. Future research could also triangulate surveys with behavioral analytics from apparel sellers, including saved posts, click-throughs, direct-message inquiries, conversion rates, and post-purchase reviews. Qualitative interviews would add depth by explaining how youth define trust, how they interpret UGC, and how they negotiate FOMO, affordability, and quality uncertainty in everyday purchasing decisions.

### Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the respondents who participated in the survey. No additional acknowledgement is declared.

### Declarations

**Originality:** This manuscript is original, unpublished, and not under consideration elsewhere.

**Funding:** The author declares that no external funding was received for this study.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Statement:** Participation in the online survey was voluntary, and the reported dataset does not identify individual respondents. Institutional ethical approval status should be supplied by the author if required by the journal.

**Data Availability:** The dataset is not publicly attached to this manuscript. It may be made available by the author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and institutional requirements.

**Use of AI-Assisted Editing Tools:** To be disclosed by the author in accordance with the journal's submission policy.

### References

- Hennig-Thurau T, Hofacker CF, Bloching B (2013) Marketing the pinball way: understanding how social media change the generation of value for consumers and companies. *J Interact Mark* 27: 237-241.
- Nash J (2019) Exploring how social media platforms influence fashion consumer decisions in the UK retail sector. *J Fash Mark Manag* 23: 82-103.
- Kemp S (2026) Digital 2026: Nepal. DataReportal <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-nepal>.
- Gautam U, Shrestha A, Basnet R, Khadka K, Ghale P, et al. (2023) Effect of influencers on consumer purchase intention. New Perspective: *Journal of Business and Economics* 6: 23-32.
- Gurung G, Shah SK, Gurung A. The social media influencers and consumer purchasing intentions among social media users. *Nepalese Journal of Business and Management Studies* 2: 1-13.
- Shrestha A, Karki A, Bhushan M, Joshi SK, Gurung S (2023) Effects of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior. New Perspective: *Journal of Business and Economics* 6: 74-82.
- Chaudhary HK (2024) The influence of social media platforms and advertisements on consumer purchasing behavior: a study of demographic variations in Nepalese youth. *NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 1: 96-105.
- Ajzen I (1991) The theory of planned behavior. *Organ Behav Hum Decis Process* 50: 179-211.
- Cialdini RB (1984) Influence: how and why people agree to things. 1st ed. New York: Morrow <https://openlibrary.org/books/OL3179378M/Influence>.
- Hajli N (2015) Social commerce constructs and consumer's intention to buy. *Int J Inf Manage* 35: 183-191.
- Santos ZR, Cheung CMK, Coelho PS, Rita P (2022) Consumer engagement in social media brand communities: a literature review. *Int J Inf Manage* 63: 102457.
- Djafarova E, Bowes T (2021) Instagram made me buy it: Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *J Retail Consum Serv* 59: 102345.
- Vazquez D, Cheung J, Nguyen B, Dennis C, Kent A (2021) Examining the influence of user-generated content on the fashion consumer online experience. *J Fash Mark Manag* 25: 528-547.
- Lou C, Yuan S (2019) Influencer marketing: how message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *J Interact Advert* 19: 58-73.
- Chetioui Y, Benlafqih H, Lebdaoui H (2020) How fashion influencers contribute to consumers' purchase intention. *J Fash Mark Manag* 24: 361-380.
- Casalo LV, Flavian C, Ibanez-Sanchez S (2020) Influencers on Instagram: antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *J Bus Res* 117: 510-519.
- Al-Mu'ani L, Alrwashdeh M, Ali H, Al-Assaf KT (2023) The effect of social media influencers on purchase intention: examining the mediating role of brand attitude. *International Journal of Data and Network Science* 7: 1217-1226.
- Kondort G, Pelau C, Gati M, Ciofu I (2023) The role of fashion influencers in shaping consumers' buying decisions and trends. *Proc Int Conf Bus Excell* 17: 1009-1018.
- Sokolova K, Kefi H (2020) Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *J Retail Consum Serv* 53: 101742.
- Kim D, Ammeter AP (2018) Shifts in online consumer behavior: a preliminary investigation of the Net generation. *J Theor Appl Electron Commer Res* 13: 1-25.
- Munsch A (2021) Millennial and Generation Z digital marketing communication and advertising effectiveness: a qualitative exploration. *J Glob Sch Mark Sci* 31: 10-29.
- Wang W (2021) How has the fashion industry reacted to Gen Z's completely different consumption concepts and shopping

- habits? *Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences* 4: 72-80.
23. Romanchuk J (2024) How each generation shops in 2024: new data from our state of consumer trends report. HubSpot <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-each-generation-shops-differently>.
24. Wang J, Shahzad F, Ahmad Z, Abdullah M, Hassan NM (2022) Trust and consumers' purchase intention in a social commerce platform: a meta-analytic approach. *SAGE Open* 12: 1-15.
25. Lazaroiu G, Negurita O, Grecu I, Grecu G, Mitran PC (2020) Consumers' decision-making process on social commerce platforms: online trust, perceived risk, and purchase intentions. *Front Psychol* 11: 890.
26. Pham Thi VA, Nagy A, Ngo MT (2024) The influence of perceived risk on purchase intention in e-commerce: systematic review and research agenda. *Int J Consum Stud* 48: e13067.
27. Albayrak M, Ceylan C (2021) Effect of eWOM on purchase intention: meta-analysis. *Data Technol Appl* 55: 810-840.
28. George A, Shibu M, Joseph ET, Sunny P (2025) Impact of social media influencer marketing on customer purchase intention in the fashion industry: a systematic literature review. *Front Commun* 10: 1676901.
29. Ahmad A, Abdul Ghani N, Hamid S (2025) Examining the predictors of consumer trust and social commerce engagement: a systematic literature review. *J Theor Appl Electron Commer Res* 20: 247.
30. Habib S, Almamy A (2025) Impact of FOMO on social media engagement and impulse buying of lifestyle products: mediation analysis. *J Innov Digit Transform* 2: 176-195.
31. Barbu Kleitsch O, Dramnescu B (2025) The influence of FOMO on shopping motivation and compulsive buying in young adults. *Journalism and Media* 6: 139.
32. Abdalla R, Faizal S, Menon N, Mohammed A (2025) From scroll to sale: how social media triggers and age shape digital consumer decisions through interaction. *Front Commun* 10: 1664694.
33. Tran AV, Khoa BT (2026) The consumer decision journey of Gen Z in cross-platform commerce: from social commerce stimuli to e-marketplace purchase completion. *J Theor Appl Electron Commer Res* 21: 132.
34. Al-Abdallah G, Khair N, Jatto P (2026) The impact of followers' social identity on fashion purchase intention: the mediating role of source credibility. *J Theor Appl Electron Commer Res* 21: 82.
35. Tran TN, Nghi LD, Chinh DTK (2026) Perceived risk and trust as moderators between online shopping intention and purchase decisions. *Emerg Sci J* 10: 1101-1116.
36. Liu S (2025) Exploring purchase intention in online influencer marketing campaigns through an integrated model. *SAGE Open* 15: 1-13.
37. Sesar V, Martincevic I, Hunjet A (2022) How influencer credibility and advertising disclosure affects purchase intention. *ENTRENOVA* 8: 248-263.
38. Yuliana A, Novandari W, Setyawati SM (2026) Investigating the effect of online consumer reviews on purchase intention among Gen Y and Z. *Jurnal Siasat Bisnis* 30.