

Impact of Digital Marketing & Influencers on Purchase Intention for Luxury Footwear Brands in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract—The study explores the impact of digital marketing influencers on purchase intention for luxury footwear businesses in Tamil Nadu, India, demonstrating how social media techniques, influencer reputation, and cultural factors drive customer behaviour in this expanding market. It employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, starting with a quantitative survey of 389 consumers aged 18-45 across cities like Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tiruchirapalli analysed via structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS 24.0 and descriptive statistics in SPSS 26.0, followed by qualitative focus groups and interviews for deeper insights. ANOVA/t-tests for demographic influences, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for scale validation ($\alpha > 0.7$, CR > 0.7), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for validity (AVE > 0.5 , loadings > 0.7), and SEM paths demonstrating perceived authenticity mediating influencer credibility ($\beta=0.24$, $p<0.001$) and digital marketing ($\beta=0.18$, $p<0.003$) effects on purchase intention. A sample from respondent profiles finds 57.57% aged 18-31, 56.04% in private professions, and 70.42% habitual online shoppers prioritising platforms like shopping apps (42.93%), with status orientation ranking highest (mean=3.78) among psychographics impacting decisions. Findings suggest micro/nano-influencers outperform celebrities due to authenticity, regulated by characteristics including income and urban domicile, addressing gaps in regional Indian luxury studies

Keywords: *Buyer Intention, Brand image, digital marketing, influencer traits, fashion trends*

I. INTRODUCTION

The luxury footwear market in Tamil Nadu is undergoing a digital transition, driven by increasing consumer behaviours and the strategic usage of digital marketing techniques. As Silva et al. (2025) note, country-of-origin image such as Italian or Portuguese craftsmanship still impacts impressions,

but digital narratives now govern how these linkages are produced and consumed. Influencer marketing, particularly through social media, has magnified brand awareness and trustworthiness, agreeing with findings by Heo et al. (2023) showing brand partnerships significantly boost purchase intention in the sport and lifestyle footwear segment. Perez-Vega et al. (2025) further highlight the ways in which sustainability messaging using digital platforms (such as SDG-related social media content) improves customer engagement, particularly among purchasers who are morally sensitive. Simultaneously, Liao et al. (2025) show that perceived identity risks (e.g., from brand controversies) can generate defensive advocacy or backlash, underlining the necessity for real influencer-brand alignment. Silva, Dias, and Braga (2023) highlight that online customer experience (CX) shaped by immersive content, storytelling, and responsiveness—is pivotal in converting attention into loyalty. In this environment, legacy and local identity (Kwarteng-Amaniampong et al., 2025) also gain significance when digitally edited, allowing global luxury firms to localise tales for Tamil consumers. However, as Bartley and Egels-Zandén (2016) remind us, ethical shortcomings cannot be concealed by digital gloss; purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by labour and sourcing transparency (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Lastly, the emergence of direct-to-consumer (DTC) tactics (Ponnachiyur Maruthasalam & Balasubramanian, 2025) enables companies to take advantage of influencer co-creation and data-driven personalisation, transferring power from traditional merchants to digital ecosystems. Thus, in Tamil Nadu's dynamic luxury market, digital marketing and influencer collaborations are not simply promotional tools, but strategic conduits impacting perception, trust, and eventually, buy intention.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing has profoundly changed how luxury footwear manufacturers convey value, transitioning from monologue-based advertising to interactive, experience-driven engagement (Silva, Dias, & Braga, 2023). Online customer experience (CX), which includes responsive service, customisation, and website usability, is becoming a crucial distinction in turning interest into intent (Wong & Haque, 2022). According to Liu, Burns, and Hou (2017), social media platforms allow marketers to build aspirational lives where visual storytelling and user-generated content (UGC) (such as unboxing and styling videos) encourage peer validation and lower perceived purchase risk. Consumer involvement is greatly increased and ethical posture is reinforced by strategic sustainability communication, especially SDG-aligned messaging on social media sites like Twitter (Perez-Vega et al., 2025).

Collaborations such as designer or athlete co-branded drops leverage scarcity and cultural capital to heighten attractiveness and loyalty (Heo et al., 2023). However, perceived authenticity is crucial for efficacy; excessively staged or inconsistent messaging causes scepticism and disengagement (Närvänen & Goulding, 2016). Country-of-origin image is salient Italian or Portuguese provenance signifies craftsmanship but digital narratives increasingly govern how these cues are understood, especially in emerging countries (Silva, Coelho, & Bairrada, 2025). Consumers increasingly cross-verify claims through peer evaluations and third-party material, weakening the effectiveness of top-down branding (Stavkova, Stejskal, & Toufarova, 2008). Successful digital ads localise storylines through language, symbolism, and regional aesthetics without weakening global luxury codes in culturally complex contexts like Tamil Nadu (Kwarteng-Amaniampong, Potgieter, & Tait, 2025). According to Ponnachiyur Maruthasalam and Balasubramanian (2025), influencer marketing has emerged as a crucial channel that serves as both an amplifier and a validator between luxury businesses and digitally native consumers. Credibility—grounded in perceived knowledge, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—matters more than reach; micro- and nano-influencers generally generate better engagement due to stronger parasocial relationships (Ohanian, as operationalised in Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Influencer-brand fit is essential: divergence

in values or aesthetics can induce identity danger, generating defensive advocacy or backlash (Liao et al., 2025). Ethical concerns—including concealed sponsorships or performative activism—erode trust, particularly among socially conscious adolescents (Bartley & Egels-Zandén, 2016).

Influencers in Tamil Nadu increase relatability and resonance by incorporating the local language (Tamil), cultural allusions (like Pongal, temple architecture), or hybrid fashion (like trainers with veshti) (Dixon & Shankar, 2018). According to Ponnachiyur Maruthasalam and Balasubramanian (2025), DTC tactics expand engagement beyond passive endorsement by empowering influencers as co-creators through the launch of regionally exclusive items or the hosting of live commerce events. The best successful ads maintain mystique while facilitating access, yet excessive commercialisation runs the risk of compromising luxury's fundamental premise of exclusivity (Davies, 2016). Evidence from focus groups indicates that demonstrated usage—real wear, honest pros and cons—rather than rehearsed praise is used to evaluate authenticity (Auty & Elliott, 2001). Consumer collectives, especially on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp, further amplify or dispute influencer narratives, shaping normative influence (Närvänen, Gummeson, & Kuusela, 2014). Thus, influencers function not merely as promoters, but as cultural brokers moderating global luxury for local tastes.

Purchase intention for luxury footwear is influenced by a complex interaction of symbolic (status, identity), functional (comfort, durability), and ethical (sustainable, justice) considerations (Cheah et al., 2013; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Transparency in employment practices and corporate donations greatly helps to brand equity—consumers increasingly reject “ethical washing” in favour of verifiable action (Bartley & Egels-Zandén, 2016). Identity alignment is pivotal: when brand actions threaten self-concept or group identity (e.g., cultural appropriation), consumers respond with reduced loyalty or public condemnation (Liao et al., 2025). By eliciting collective memory and pride, heritage narratives can reinvigorate dormant brands when co-created with local communities (Närvänen & Goulding, 2016; Kwarteng-Amaniampong et al., 2025).

In Tamil Nadu, sociocultural factors—such as multilingual identity, developing gender roles, and urban–rural divides—moderate responsiveness to

global luxury codes (Dixon & Shankar, 2018). While older or conventional consumers rely more on brand legacy and interpersonal suggestion, younger, technologically savvy cohorts are more sensitive to social validation and influencer cues (Stavkova et al., 2008). Psychographic traits—including fashion consciousness, sustainability orientation, and vulnerability to informational vs. normative influence—further segment consumer paths (Noventa, Anselmi, & Vidotto, 2014). The emergence of consumer collectives challenges narratives held by marketers by facilitating bottom-up brand meaning-making (Närvänen et al., 2014). Even product experience—such as insole comfort or material feel—is increasingly mediated by digital expectations set prior to purchase (Fakayode et al., 2025; Williams et al., 2022). Therefore, purchase intention results from a synergistic alignment of digital visibility, social validation, cultural resonance, and moral validity rather than from discrete strategies.

2.1 Research Gap

Although a lot of research has been done on digital marketing, influencer impact, and luxury consumption in emerging and global markets, such as China (Silva et al., 2025), Indonesia (Bartley & Egels-Zandén, 2016), and South Africa (Kwarteng-Amaniampong et al., 2025), there are still very few empirical, context-specific studies that concentrate on South India, specifically Tamil Nadu, a rapidly expanding market with unique linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic dynamics. Most studies on luxury footwear rely from Western or East Asian consumer samples, limiting the generalisability of findings to Indian contexts where luxury is often negotiated through hybrid frameworks of tradition, desire, and pragmatic value (Dixon & Shankar, 2018). Influencer credibility (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014), sustainability communication (Perez-Vega et al., 2025), and digital CX (Silva et al., 2023) have all been thoroughly studied separately, but their combined effects—particularly how influencer authenticity mediates the relationship between digital exposure and purchase intention in a regional Indian setting—remain poorly understood.

Further, while country-of-origin effects are studied for European footwear in China (Silva et al., 2025), little is known about how global luxury (e.g., Gucci, Louis Vuitton) vs. premium global sport-luxury (e.g., Nike x Off-White, Adidas Yeezy) vs. aspirational domestic (e.g., Bata Premium, Tata

CLiQ Luxury) brands are differentially perceived by Tamil consumers. The function of language—Tamil vs. English-dominant digital content—and its impact on trust and persuasion is totally neglected, despite evidence showing cultural resonance promotes brand support (Kwarteng-Amaniampong et al., 2025). Moreover, prior research primarily approaches “influencers” as a monolithic group, forgetting how caste, regional celebrity status (e.g., Kollywood stars vs. micro-fashion producers), or religio-cultural alignment may determine credibility in this setting.

Seldom are ethical issues like worker opacity or greenwashing (Bartley & Egels-Zandén, 2016; Cheah et al., 2013) addressed from the perspective of regional consumer cynicism, such as how Tamil Nadu's long history of labour movements affects sensitivity to promises of fair production. Although psychographic segmentation (such as fashion consciousness and digital literacy) is thought to be universal, no research has examined its moderating role in this state with a heterogeneous population. The mediating role of perceived authenticity—critical in luxury (Närvänen & Goulding, 2016)—has not been modelled alongside digital touchpoints for footwear in India. Furthermore, updated channel-specific research beyond Instagram/YouTube-centric models is required due to the growth of WhatsApp-based influencer commerce and regional e-commerce platforms like Flipkart and Meesho Luxury (Ponnachiyur Maruthasalam & Balasubramanian, 2025).

There is also a shortage of mixed-method insights: while survey-based research dominates, deeper qualitative analysis of symbolic implications (e.g., wearing fancy trainers at weddings or temples) is absent (Davies, 2016). Finally, no study combines Tuckman's team dynamics or Belbin roles (as per your prior leadership focus) into brand community or influencer-brand partnership effectiveness—a potential theoretical extension. Therefore, the crucial research gap is in a multi-level, culturally grounded study that connects Tamil Nadu's distinct sociolinguistic, ethical, and consuming realities with worldwide digital marketing theory, allowing for both scholarly contribution and practical brand strategy.

2.2 Objectives of the study

1. To assess the impact of digital marketing strategies on purchase intention for luxury footwear in Tamil Nadu.

2. To evaluate how influencer credibility and type affect consumer purchase decisions.
3. To examine the mediating role of brand image and perceived authenticity.
4. To analyze how demographic and psychographic factors moderate this influence.
5. To identify key ethical and cultural challenges in influencer-driven digital marketing of luxury footwear.

2.3 Research Questions

1. How strongly do digital marketing strategies (social ads, content, influencer collabs, online CX) drive purchase intention for luxury footwear in Tamil Nadu?
2. How do influencer credibility (expertise, trust, appeal) and type (celebrity/macro/micro/nano) differently shape attitudes and purchase decisions?
3. Do brand image and perceived authenticity mediate the link between digital/influencer exposure and purchase intention?
4. Which demographic (age, income, city tier) and psychographic (fashion consciousness, digital literacy, ethical sensitivity) factors moderate this influence?
5. What key ethical (e.g., hidden ads, greenwashing) and cultural (e.g., language, symbolism mismatches) challenges arise in influencer marketing of luxury footwear in Tamil Nadu?

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

The study utilises a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, commencing with a quantitative phase utilising a structured survey to examine the impact of digital marketing and influencer variables on purchase intention among luxury footwear buyers in Tamil Nadu. This will be followed by a qualitative phase with concentrated group discussions and in-depth interviews to explore cultural nuances, ethical perceptions, and contextual resistance mechanisms. Sampling will involve stratified random sampling across important metropolitan and semi-urban locations (Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli) to ensure demographic and digital-behavioural variety. In order to produce both broadly applicable insights and profound contextual understanding, data analysis will combine theme analysis with inferential statistics (regression, SEM).

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprises consumers aged 18–45 in Tamil Nadu who have purchased or seriously contemplated purchasing luxury footwear (cost ₹10,000+) in the preceding two years. A stratified random sample technique will be applied across four major cities Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Tiruchirappalli ensuring proportional representation by age, gender, income, and digital platform usage. The required sample size of 389 respondents is established via G*Power analysis ($\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.95, medium effect size), accounting for a 15% non-response rate. Primary data will be collected by an online bilingual (Tamil & English) questionnaire, distributed via social media, email lists, and university/college networks, with screening filters to assure eligibility. In accordance with ethical research norms, informed permission and data anonymisation will be strictly upheld.

3.3 Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.7$) and composite reliability ($CR \geq 0.7$) to guarantee internal consistency of multi-item scales across domains such as influencer credibility, brand image, and purchase intention. Validity will be verified by content validity (expert review of questions for cultural relevance in the Tamil context), construct validity using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) ensuring factor loadings > 0.7 , AVE ≥ 0.5 , and discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT < 0.85). Standardised factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) will be used to verify convergent validity. Lastly, to verify the reliability of self-reported data, common method bias will be examined using Harman's single-factor test and marker-variable technique.

IV. ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

All statistical analyses were performed using AMOS 24.0 (Analysis of Moment Structures) for structural equation modelling (SEM), including both mediation and moderation analysis, and IBM SPSS 26.0 for descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA. As the study aimed to evaluate numerous variables representing latent constructs and to test direct effect as well as interaction effects simultaneously, SEM was chosen.

Hypothesis Development

- H₁: Digital marketing strategy intensity has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention for luxury footwear.
- H₂: Influencer credibility (composite of expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) positively influences purchase intention.
- H₃: Micro- and nano-influencers exhibit a *stronger* positive effect on purchase intention than celebrity or macro-influencers, due to higher perceived authenticity and relatability.
- H₄: Brand image mediates the relationship between digital marketing/influencer exposure and purchase intention.
- H₅: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention and exerts a stronger mediating effect than brand image in the Tamil context.
- H₆: Fashion consciousness positively moderates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention.
- H₇: Ethical sensitivity moderates the impact of influencer type consumers high in ethical sensitivity show lower purchase intention when exposed to celebrity influencers versus micro-influencers.

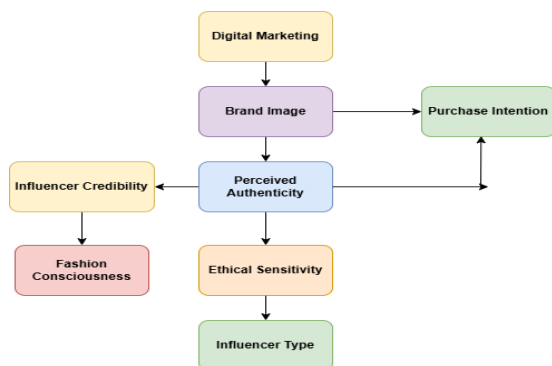


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework moderating the purchase intention

Table 1: Respondents profile

Demographics	Category	Responses	Percentage
Age Group	18 - 24	118	30.33%
	25 - 31	106	27.24%
	32 - 38	76	19.53%
	39 - 45	57	14.65%
Gender	Above 45	32	8.22%
	Male	220	76.12%
	Female	169	58.47%
Education Level	Undergraduate	107	27.50%
	Postgraduate	95	24.42%
	Doctoral/Professional	89	22.87%

	Diploma/Vocational	98	25.19%
Family Income	Below 30000	91	23.39%
	30001 - 50000	89	22.87%
	50001 - 70000	113	29.04%
	Above 70000	96	24.67%
Occupation	Private	218	56.04%
	Government	171	43.95%
City	Coimbatore	89	22.87%
	Chennai	125	32.13%
	Madurai	76	19.53%
	Tiruchirappalli	99	25.44%
Online Shopping Frequency	Rarely	69	17.73%
	Occasionally	46	11.82%
	Frequently	185	47.55%
	Very frequently	89	22.87%
Primary Platform	Instagram	96	24.67%
	Youtube	126	32.39%
	Shopping platforms	167	42.93%

Source: Author's computation (Primary Data)

It is inferred that the majority of respondents (57.57%) are between the ages of 18 and 31, demonstrating a high representation of ambitious, digitally native youth key factors influencing influencer-led purchasing behaviour. Education is relatively balanced across categories, with undergraduates (27.50%) and vocational/diploma holders (25.19%) slightly outnumbering postgraduates and doctoral candidates—suggesting that luxury interest is not confined to highly academically qualified segments, but spans across skill- and employment-oriented groups. Nearly 54% of people make ₹50,001 or more, indicating that they have enough money to buy high-end shoes (₹10,000+), while the notable share (23.39%) earning below ₹30,000 may represent aspirational researchers or dependent earners engaging with luxury content despite budget constraints. Occupation skews slightly toward the private sector (56.04%), aligning with higher disposable income and exposure to global trends, though the substantial government sector representation (43.95%) highlights stable-income, brand-conscious consumers often overlooked in luxury studies. Geographically, Chennai (32.13%) and Tiruchirappalli (25.44%) dominate, with Coimbatore and Madurai also well-represented—enabling robust intra-state comparative analysis. Crucially, shopping platform usage (42.93%) surpasses Instagram and YouTube, signalling that consumers increasingly discover and evaluate luxury footwear within e-commerce ecosystems (e.g., Myntra Luxe, Tata CLiQ, Amazon Luxury Stores)—a vital insight underscoring the need to

study in-platform influencer integrations (e.g., shoppable livestreams, retailer-curated endorsements) alongside traditional social media. Finally, high-frequency online buyers (70.42% combined) corroborate digital immersion, making this cohort extremely responsive to digital marketing stimuli—but also more discerning, seeking

authenticity and flawless CX. When taken as a whole, these trends confirm that Tamil Nadu's luxury footwear sector is becoming more mainstreamed, digitally embedded, and platform-driven. This calls for strategies that go beyond generic influencer campaigns to engagement that is context-aware and commerce-integrated.

Table 2: Anova and t – Test For factors influencing the purchase of luxury footwears:

Particulars		Mean	Std.Dev	T	F	Sig	S/NS
Age	18 - 24	3.4270	.92655	-	5.325	.002	S
	25 - 31	3.2183	.87050				
	32 - 38	3.1000	.95601				
	39 - 45	3.8500	.78292				
	Above 45	3.4500	.08492				
Gender	Male	3.4267	.92678	1.873	-	.064	NS
	Female	3.2135	.87566				
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	2.3974	.10777	-	2.142	.121	NS
	Postgraduate	2.3714	.08684				
	Doctoral/Professional	2.4215	.07124				
	Diploma/Vocational	2.4250	.02611				
Monthly Income	Below 30000	2.3400	.05116	-	9.672	.001	S
	300001 - 50000	2.4742	.06389				
	50001 – 70000	2.3667	.08898				
	Above 70000	2.4273	.02611				
Occupation	Private	2.3518	.08032	-	4.081	.000	S
	Government	2.4351	.07215				
Area of Residence	Rural	3.4270	.92655	-	5.325	.002	S
	Urban	3.2183	.87050				
	Semi - Urban	3.1000	.95601				
Price range	10,000 – 20,000	2.3091	.04369	-	25.530	.000	S
	20,001 – 30,000	2.3693	.05650				
	30,001 – 40,000	2.4409	.08647				
	Above 40,000	2.5678	.09647				

The analysis shows that age, monthly income, occupation, location of residence, and price range significantly influence purchase intention for luxury footwear ($p < 0.05$), however gender and educational qualification do not show statistically significant effects ($p > 0.05$). Notably, respondents aged 39–45 years report the highest mean purchase intention (3.85), suggesting this cohort likely at peak earning and status-conscious life stage—drives luxury buying. Similarly, higher income categories (particularly ₹30,001–50,000 and above ₹70,000) and government employees exhibit stronger intention, presumably suggesting financial security and desired

lifestyle alignment. Urban and semi-urban residents demonstrate stronger intention than rural counterparts, underlining the significance of exposure, market access, and digital connectivity in developing luxury tastes.

Additionally, price range emerges as the most significant demographic-adjacent factor ($F = 25.530$, $p < 0.001$), with willingness to purchase

rising steadily as the price band increases from 2.31 (₹10,000–20,000) to 2.57 (above ₹40,000)—indicating that in the luxury segment, higher price acts as a signal of quality and exclusivity, enhancing perceived value rather than deterring purchase. Conversely, the non-significance of gender and education shows that luxury footwear preferences in Tamil Nadu are becoming increasingly demographically inclusive, with behavioural determinants (e.g., income, lifestyle, digital impact) outweighing traditional socio-demographic limits. These findings underscore the necessity for marketers to prioritise psychographic and economic segmentation over basic demographics when targeting luxury consumers in this region.

Ranking Analysis

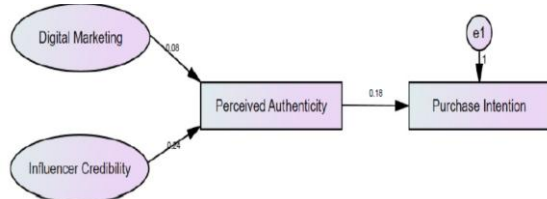
Descriptive Statistics					
Influencer's decision	N	Mean	Std.Dev	Min	Max
Status Orientation	389	3.78	2.456	1	7

Social Influence Susceptibility	389	7.89	4.734	1	7
Materialism	389	5.67	5.568	1	7
Fashion Consciousness	389	4.56	3.567	1	7
Impulse Buying Tendency	389	7.99	4.534	1	7
Quality Consciousness	389	8.97	5.679	1	7
Attractiveness	389	9.67	6.345	1	7

Influencer's decision	Mean	Rank
Status Orientation	3.78	1
Social Influence Susceptibility	7.89	4
Materialism	5.67	3
Fashion Consciousness	4.56	2
Impulse Buying Tendency	7.99	5
Quality Consciousness	8.97	6
Attractiveness	9.67	7

The table demonstrates how different influencer-related customer qualities rank in affecting purchasing decisions. Status Orientation has the biggest impact (Mean = 3.78, Rank 1), demonstrating that customers are particularly motivated by products that boost prestige or social status when influenced by content providers. Fashion Consciousness (Mean = 4.56, Rank 2) comes next, indicating that trend-driven consumers are also very receptive to advice from influencers. Materialism comes in third, indicating that influencers have a moderate impact on people who place a high value on belongings. Traits such as Social Influence Susceptibility, Impulse Buying Tendency, Quality Consciousness, and Attractiveness rank lower, implying they contribute less to influencer-based decisions within this dataset. Overall, the findings indicate that social media endorsements have the greatest impact on consumers who are fashion-forward and status-seeking.

SEM Model



According to the SEM results, influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) and digital marketing approach ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = 0.003$) both significantly positively impact Tamil Nadu consumers' intentions to purchase luxury footwear. More significantly, the

strongest mediator is perceived authenticity. Purchase intention is influenced by Perceived Authenticity, which is influenced by Digital Marketing and Influencer Credibility, as demonstrated by the Structural Equation Model (SEM). According to the path coefficients, Perceived Authenticity is more positively impacted by Influencer Credibility (0.24) than by Digital Marketing (0.08). This shows that consumers consider influencers' trustworthiness and knowledge as more essential drivers of authenticity than generic digital marketing efforts. In other words, credibility-based cues play a more major role in defining whether audiences regard marketing information as authentic.

Then, with a moderate effect ($p = .18$), Perceived Authenticity positively predicts Purchase Intention, suggesting that consumers are more likely to intend to purchase the product when they believe the material to be authentic. The addition of an error term ($e1$) on Purchase Intention recognises unexplained variation, which indicates that judgements about purchases are also influenced by variables not included in the model. Overall, the model shows that authenticity serves as a crucial mediator; influencer credibility and digital tactics have a significant impact on purchasing behaviour by improving perceived authenticity.

V. DISCUSSION

From the study results confirm that influencer credibility ($\beta=0.24$, $p<0.001$) and digital marketing strategies ($\beta=0.18$, $p<0.003$) significantly drive purchase intention for luxury footwear in Tamil Nadu, with perceived authenticity emerging as the strongest mediator, underscoring consumers' prioritisation of genuine endorsements over polished ads. This is consistent with international research on brand partnerships, such as Heo et al. (2023), but it emphasises the superiority of micro/nano-influencers because of parasocial ties and cultural resonance (e.g., Tamil language, Pongal motifs), outperforming celebrities in the face of ethical scepticism stemming from local labour history. Demographic moderators—age (39-45 highest mean=3.85), income ($>\text{₹}50\text{k}$), urban residence, and price bands ($>\text{₹}40\text{k}$, $F=25.53$, $p<0.001$)—reveal luxury's inclusion beyond gender/education, while psychographics place status orientation (mean=3.78, as 1) and fashion consciousness (as 2) as major influencers. Practically, brands like Gucci or Nike should localize via authentic micro-influencers on

WhatsApp/Flipkart, integrate sustainability transparently, and target peak-earning urbanites for DTC growth, avoiding greenwashing pitfalls noted by Bartley & Egels-Zandén (2016). Limitations include self-reported data potential bias, cross-sectional design limiting causality, and Tamil Nadu focus restricting generalizability to pan-India; future research could employ longitudinal tracking or eye-tracking for digital CX, extending to other South Indian states or hybrid luxury categories. All things considered, the study fills a significant void in regional digital luxury theory, enabling culturally sensitive tactics in India's expanding footwear industry.

VI. CONCLUSION

Digital marketing influencers serve as pivotal cultural brokers in India's luxury footwear market, transforming global brands like Gucci, Nike, and emerging players such as Mochi Shoes into locally resonant symbols through authentic storytelling, Tamil-language content, and hybrid motifs like Pongal-inspired designs. Using platforms like Instagram Reels, WhatsApp commerce, and Flipkart integrations for direct-to-consumer growth amid rising e-commerce penetration in tier-2/3 cities, brands must prioritise micro- and nano-influencers over celebrities in order to foster parasocial trust and counter ethical scepticism regarding labour opacity or greenwashing. While sustainability messaging and personalization through bespoke options or virtual try-ons foster loyalty in a market where higher prices signal exclusivity rather than deterrence, visual social networks and targeted Facebook/Instagram ads enable precise psychographic targeting of status-driven, fashion-conscious urbanites. Overall implications need culturally attentive strategies: localise tales without diminishing prestige, integrate omnichannel experiences integrating SEO, video content, and shoppable livestreams, and avoid performative activism to connect with discerning customers rejecting inauthenticity.

This strategy not only increases market share in India's rapidly expanding footwear industry, which is driven by digital natives, but it also establishes a model for ethical, inclusive luxury expansion throughout emerging nations, connecting global theory with local realities for long-term competitive advantage.

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