

Impact of Social Media on Clothing Startups: A Case Study of The Souled Store

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Abstract—The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally reshaped marketing practices across industries, particularly for apparel startups operating within digital-first business models. Social media platforms have emerged as critical tools for brand communication, enabling startups to build visibility, connect directly with consumers, and compete with established brands despite limited resources. This study examines the role of social media marketing in influencing brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention in the apparel startup ecosystem. Using The Souled Store as a case study, the research adopts a mixed-method approach to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of consumer behaviour. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to consumers, while secondary data were drawn from academic journals, industry reports, and digital marketing analytics. Quantitative techniques were employed to analyse the impact of social media activities on consumer responses, supported by qualitative insights to contextualize engagement patterns and brand perception.

The findings indicate that social media marketing plays a significant role in accelerating brand growth for apparel startups. Strategic use of content marketing, influencer collaborations, and interactive campaigns was found to enhance brand recall, strengthen consumer engagement, and positively influence purchase decisions. The results further suggest that consistent and creative social media presence contributes to higher customer trust and loyalty.

The study concludes that effective utilization of social media marketing serves as a key driver of sustainable competitive advantage for apparel startups. By aligning content strategies with consumer preferences and leveraging platform-specific features, startups can improve marketing efficiency and long-term brand performance. The research offers practical insights for marketers and entrepreneurs seeking to optimize social media as a core component of their growth strategy.

Index Terms—Social Media Marketing, Apparel Startups, Brand Awareness, Consumer Engagement, Purchase Intention, Digital Marketing, The Souled Store

I. INTRODUCTION

The apparel industry has undergone a significant transformation with the rapid rise of social media platforms, fundamentally altering how brands communicate, market, and build relationships with consumers. Traditional marketing channels such as print advertising, billboards, and television have increasingly given way to digital ecosystems that facilitate real-time interaction, two-way communication, and personalized engagement. For apparel startups in particular, social media has emerged as a powerful equalizer enabling smaller, resource-constrained firms to compete with established brands by building visibility, authenticity, and community-driven brand identities.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter allow apparel startups to showcase products through visually rich content, storytelling, and interactive campaigns that resonate with digitally savvy consumers. Unlike conventional advertising, social media marketing enables continuous engagement through likes, comments, shares, and direct messages, fostering a sense of closeness between brands and consumers. This shift has transformed consumers from passive recipients of marketing messages into active participants who influence brand perception, reputation, and purchase decisions through online interactions and peer recommendations.

In the context of fashion and apparel, where trends evolve rapidly and visual appeal plays a central role, social media serves as an ideal medium for brand expression. Clothing startups increasingly rely on influencer collaborations, user-generated content, and

community-driven campaigns to enhance brand recall and emotional connection. These strategies not only amplify reach but also build trust, as consumers often perceive influencer endorsements and peer reviews as more credible than traditional advertising. As a result, social media has become a critical driver of brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention within the apparel startup ecosystem.

However, while social media adoption among apparel startups is widespread, its actual impact on consumer behaviour and brand growth requires systematic academic examination. Understanding how social media marketing influences awareness, engagement, and buying decisions is essential for startups aiming to design effective, data-driven strategies. This research seeks to explore these dynamics by examining the role of social media marketing in shaping consumer behaviour, with a focused case study of The Souled Store, a prominent Indian apparel startup known for its strong digital presence and community-led branding approach.

1.1 Background of the Study

The emergence of social media has redefined marketing communication by enabling brands to interact directly with consumers without the mediation of traditional advertising channels. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have become cost-effective and scalable tools for apparel startups to communicate brand values, launch new collections, and engage with niche audiences. The visual nature of these platforms aligns particularly well with fashion marketing, allowing brands to highlight product aesthetics, styling ideas, and lifestyle narratives.

Over time, social media marketing strategies have evolved beyond simple product promotion to include visual storytelling, influencer partnerships, live content, and user-generated campaigns. Influencer marketing, in particular, has gained prominence as fashion influencers and content creators shape consumer opinions and trends. Similarly, user-generated content enables consumers to become brand advocates by sharing reviews, photos, and experiences, thereby enhancing authenticity and trust. These developments underscore the growing importance of social media as a strategic marketing tool rather than a supplementary communication channel.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread adoption of social media marketing by apparel startups, there is limited empirical research that systematically examines its measurable impact on brand growth and consumer behaviour within the Indian context. While startups invest significantly in content creation, influencer collaborations, and digital campaigns, the extent to which these efforts translate into brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention remains underexplored.

Additionally, existing studies often focus on large fashion brands or global markets, leaving a research gap concerning Indian apparel startups operating in competitive and price-sensitive environments. This lack of context-specific evidence restricts the ability of startup marketers to design optimized social media strategies based on consumer insights. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how social media marketing contributes to sustainable competitive advantage in the Indian apparel startup landscape.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

To examine the role of social media marketing in building brand awareness among consumers of apparel startups.

To analyse the level and nature of consumer engagement generated through social media platforms.

To study the influence of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention in the apparel sector.

To evaluate the social media strategies adopted by The Souled Store and assess their effectiveness in shaping consumer behaviour.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media marketing has emerged as a critical area of academic inquiry due to its growing influence on consumer behaviour and brand performance. Prior research highlights social media as a transformative communication channel that enables interactive, real-time engagement between brands and consumers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet-based applications that facilitate the creation and exchange of user-generated content, emphasizing its role in value co-creation and relationship building. This interactive nature

distinguishes social media marketing from traditional one-way promotional approaches and has reshaped how consumers perceive and interact with brands.

Brand awareness and brand equity are central outcomes of effective social media marketing. Aaker (2014) emphasizes that strong brand awareness enhances consumer trust, perceived quality, and long-term brand loyalty. In the context of apparel startups, social media platforms serve as cost-efficient tools to increase brand visibility and recognition among target audiences. Brodie et al. (2013) further argue that customer engagement on digital platforms positively influences brand relationships by fostering emotional connections and sustained interactions. Their findings suggest that higher engagement levels lead to stronger brand attachment and repeat purchase behaviour.

Social Media Engagement and Consumer Behaviour

Consumer engagement has been widely studied as a key mediator between social media marketing activities and purchase intention. Engagement on social media platforms measured through likes, comments, shares, and content interactions reflects consumer involvement and interest in a brand. Brodie et al. (2013) highlight that engaged consumers are more likely to develop favorable brand attitudes and advocate for brands within their social networks. In the apparel industry, visually appealing content, interactive storytelling, and trend-based campaigns play a significant role in stimulating engagement and influencing consumer perceptions.

Influencer marketing has also gained prominence as a strategic component of social media marketing, particularly in fashion and lifestyle segments. Kotler et al. (2017) argue that influencers act as trusted opinion leaders whose endorsements significantly impact purchase intention, especially among younger consumers. Influencers help humanize brands and enhance credibility by providing relatable product experiences. Studies indicate that consumers often perceive influencer recommendations as more authentic than traditional advertisements, thereby increasing their influence on buying decisions.

Social Media and Purchase Intention in Apparel Startups

Several studies have examined the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, highlighting the persuasive power of digital

content and peer influence. Social media platforms enable consumers to access reviews, recommendations, and real-life product usage, which reduces perceived risk and enhances confidence in purchase decisions. Research suggests that consistent social media presence and interactive communication positively influence consumer attitudes toward brands, leading to higher purchase intention and brand loyalty. For apparel startups, social media serves as a primary channel for launching products, testing market response, and building community-driven brand identities. By leveraging user-generated content and influencer collaborations, startups can foster authenticity and trust, which are essential factors in influencing consumer behaviour. The case of The Souled Store reflects how effective social media strategies can translate into strong brand recall, high engagement, and sustained growth in a competitive digital marketplace.

Research Gaps and Future Scope

Despite extensive research on social media marketing, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, limited empirical studies focus specifically on apparel startups within the Indian market, where cultural preferences and digital consumption patterns differ significantly from Western contexts. Second, while engagement metrics are widely analyzed, fewer studies examine their long-term impact on brand loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour. Third, there is a need for startup-focused case studies that evaluate the effectiveness of specific social media strategies rather than broad platform-level analysis.

Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to examine the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention, using The Souled Store as a case study. By focusing on the Indian apparel startup ecosystem, the research contributes to existing literature and offers practical insights for marketers seeking data-driven and consumer-centric social media strategies.

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESE

H1: Social media marketing has a significant impact on brand awareness of clothing startups.

H2: Social media engagement positively influences consumer purchase intention.

H3: Influencer marketing enhances trust and brand recall among consumers.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention in apparel startups, this study adopts a descriptive research design. The methodology is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour by combining primary data collection with secondary sources. This approach enables the study to capture both consumer perceptions and observable marketing outcomes, ensuring a balanced and systematic analysis of social media marketing effectiveness.

A mixed-source data collection strategy was employed to strengthen the reliability of findings. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to consumers, while secondary data were sourced from academic journals, industry reports, company publications, and digital marketing analytics. The integration of primary and secondary data allows for triangulation and enhances the validity of the research conclusions.

4.1 Primary Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure key variables such as brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention influenced by social media marketing activities. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions based on a Likert scale, enabling quantitative analysis of consumer attitudes and behaviours. A total of 150 respondents aged between 18 and 35 years were surveyed, as this demographic represents the most active social media users and a key target segment for apparel startups.

The questionnaire was distributed online to ensure wider reach and ease of response. Questions focused on social media usage patterns, interaction with apparel brands on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, influence of influencer marketing, and the role of social media content in purchase decisions. The collected responses were coded and prepared for statistical analysis to identify patterns and relationships among variables.

4.2 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was adopted for this study due to accessibility, time constraints, and ease of data collection. Respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate, with the condition that they were active users of social media and had prior exposure to apparel brands online. While convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of results, it is widely used in exploratory and descriptive studies where the objective is to identify trends and consumer perceptions rather than establish causal relationships.

4.3 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data were gathered from peer-reviewed journals, marketing research reports, company case studies, and digital marketing analytics related to social media performance. These sources provided contextual support for primary findings and helped in understanding existing theories, industry trends, and best practices in social media marketing within the apparel sector. Secondary data also aided in comparing the case study brand's performance with broader industry benchmarks.

4.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected primary data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as percentages, mean scores, and frequency distributions to interpret consumer responses. Graphs, tables, and charts were used to visually represent findings and enhance clarity. Secondary data were analyzed through content analysis to identify recurring themes and insights related to social media strategies and consumer behaviour. Together, these techniques enabled a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of social media marketing in influencing consumer decision-making in apparel startups.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

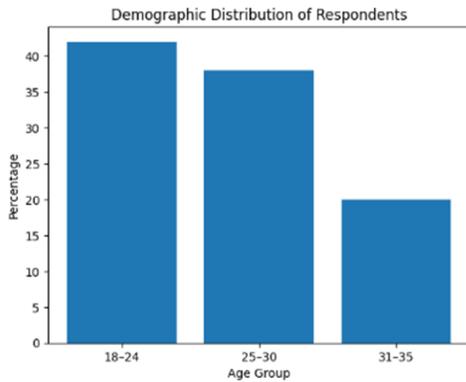
The findings of this study highlight the growing influence of social media marketing on consumer behaviour within the apparel startup sector. Social media platforms have enabled brands to build awareness, engage consumers, and influence purchase decisions more effectively than traditional marketing channels. The analysis also reveals important insights related to demographic factors, platform preference,

and the degree to which social media content shapes consumer buying behaviour.

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents surveyed for this study. The sample primarily consists of young consumers, reflecting the demographic most actively engaged on social media platforms. Respondents aged 18–24 years constitute the largest group at 42%, followed by those aged 25–30 years at 38%, and respondents aged 31–35 years at 20%.

In terms of occupation, students form the largest segment, indicating high social media usage and greater exposure to online apparel brands. Professionals account for 38% of respondents, while entrepreneurs represent 20%. The mixed gender composition ensures balanced representation, strengthening the reliability of insights related to social media influence across consumer groups. Overall, the demographic distribution aligns with the target audience of apparel startups that primarily cater to digitally active, young consumers.

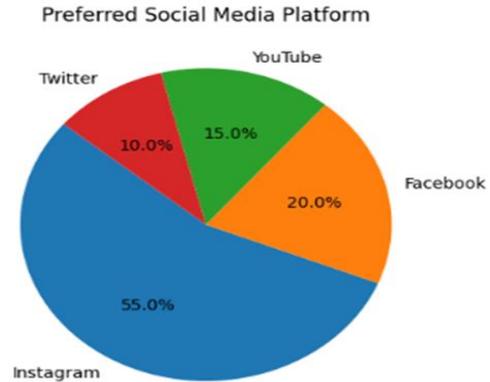


2. Preferred Social Media Platform

Figure 1 illustrates respondents' preferred social media platforms for engaging with apparel brands. The analysis indicates that visually driven platforms such as Instagram dominate consumer preference, followed by platforms like Facebook and YouTube. Instagram's strong emphasis on images, reels, influencer content, and interactive features makes it particularly effective for fashion marketing.

The findings suggest that consumers are more likely to engage with apparel brands on platforms that offer visual storytelling and real-time interaction. This

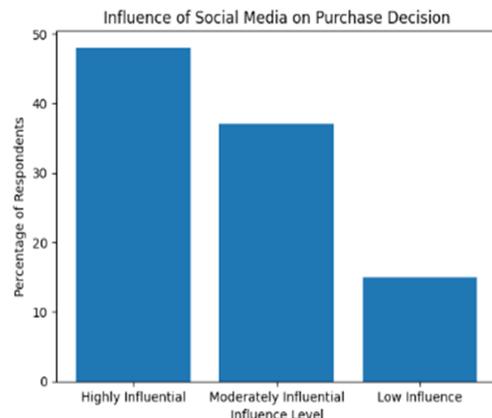
highlights the importance for apparel startups to prioritize platform-specific strategies rather than adopting a uniform approach across all social media channels.



3. Influence of Social Media on Purchase Decision

Figure 2 demonstrates the extent to which social media influences consumer purchase decisions. A significant proportion of respondents reported that social media content, including influencer recommendations, brand posts, and user-generated content, plays a major role in their buying decisions. Consumers indicated that reviews, styling ideas, and peer validation on social media reduce perceived risk and increase confidence in purchasing apparel products online.

The findings reveal a strong positive relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention. Consumers who frequently interact with apparel brands on social media are more likely to develop favorable brand perceptions and proceed toward purchase. This confirms that social media is not merely an awareness-building tool but a critical driver of conversion for apparel startups.



4. Overall Impact of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Behaviour

The analysis underscores that effective social media marketing significantly enhances brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention. Apparel startups that leverage creative content, influencer partnerships, and consistent engagement strategies are better positioned to influence consumer behaviour. However, the study also suggests the need for authenticity and transparency, as consumers increasingly value genuine brand communication over aggressive promotional messaging.

Overall, the results confirm that social media marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer decision-making in the apparel startup ecosystem, offering both strategic opportunities and challenges for sustained brand growth.

5. Findings

The findings of the study provide meaningful insights into the role of social media marketing in influencing consumer behaviour within the apparel startup sector. Based on the analysis of primary data collected from respondents aged 18–35, the following key findings were identified:

Dominance of Young Consumers on Social Media

The demographic analysis reveals that the majority of respondents belong to the 18–24 age group (42%), followed by those aged 25–30 (38%). This indicates that young consumers form the core audience for apparel startups on social media platforms, as they are more digitally active and responsive to online brand communication.

Instagram as the Most Preferred Platform

The findings indicate that Instagram is the most preferred social media platform for engaging with apparel brands, accounting for 55% of respondent preference. Its visual-centric features, influencer presence, and interactive content formats make it highly effective for fashion marketing. Facebook and YouTube play a secondary role, while Twitter shows relatively limited influence.

Strong Influence of Social Media on Purchase Decisions

The study finds that social media significantly influences consumer purchase decisions. Nearly 48%

of respondents reported that social media content is highly influential, while 37% indicated moderate influence. This demonstrates that social media marketing is not limited to awareness creation but actively drives consumer conversion in the apparel category.

Role of Visual Content and Influencer Marketing

Respondents showed greater engagement with visually appealing posts, styling videos, and influencer endorsements. Influencer marketing and user-generated content were found to enhance trust and reduce perceived purchase risk, particularly among younger consumers.

Positive Relationship Between Engagement and Purchase Intention

The findings suggest a strong positive relationship between consumer engagement on social media platforms and purchase intention. Consumers who frequently interact with apparel brands through likes, comments, and shares are more likely to develop favorable brand perceptions and proceed toward purchase.

Social Media as a Strategic Growth Tool for Apparel Startups

Overall, the study confirms that social media marketing serves as a cost-effective and strategic tool for apparel startups to build brand awareness, foster consumer engagement, and influence buying behaviour in a competitive digital marketplace.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

Limitations of the Study

Despite providing valuable insights into the impact of social media marketing on consumer behaviour in apparel startups, this study has certain limitations. First, the research is based on a sample size of 150 respondents, which may not fully represent the diverse consumer population across different regions of India. As a result, the findings may have limited generalizability beyond the selected demographic.

Second, the study primarily focuses on respondents aged 18–35 years, as this group constitutes the most active users of social media. While this approach is relevant to apparel startups, it excludes older

consumer segments whose purchasing behaviour and social media usage patterns may differ. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling may introduce respondent bias, as participants were selected based on accessibility rather than random selection.

Third, the research relies on self-reported data collected through questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias and personal interpretation. Factors such as changing consumer preferences, platform algorithms, and evolving digital trends were not tracked longitudinally, limiting the ability to assess long-term behavioural changes.

Scope for Further Study

Future research can expand the scope of this study by incorporating a larger and more geographically diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of findings. Comparative studies across multiple apparel startups or established fashion brands could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of different social media strategies.

Further studies may also explore the long-term impact of social media engagement on brand loyalty and customer lifetime value through longitudinal research designs. Additionally, the role of emerging platforms, short-form video content, and artificial intelligence-driven personalization in social media marketing presents a promising area for future investigation. Integrating advanced statistical techniques and behavioral analytics could further enrich understanding of how digital marketing strategies shape consumer decision-making in the evolving apparel industry.

VII. CONCLUSION

Social media plays a transformative role in shaping consumer behaviour and driving growth for apparel startups, fundamentally changing how brands interact with their audiences. By leveraging social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, startups are able to create visually engaging content, communicate brand values, and build strong emotional connections with consumers. The findings of this study highlight that social media marketing significantly enhances brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention, making it a critical strategic tool for clothing startups.

However, the study also identifies key challenges associated with social media marketing, including content saturation, declining organic reach, and concerns regarding authenticity and consumer trust. While influencer marketing and targeted content improve engagement and visibility, excessive promotional messaging or lack of transparency can negatively affect brand credibility. Addressing these challenges is essential for sustaining long-term consumer relationships and ensuring responsible digital marketing practices.

In the Indian context, social media adoption among apparel startups has grown rapidly, with young consumers aged 18–35 forming the most active and influential audience segment. Platforms such as Instagram dominate fashion-related engagement, and brands that invest in consistent content creation, influencer collaborations, and community interaction experience higher engagement and conversion rates. The case of The Souled Store demonstrates how effective social media strategies can translate into strong brand recall, loyal communities, and scalable growth.

To maximize the benefits of social media marketing, apparel startups must adopt a balanced and consumer-centric approach. By prioritizing authentic storytelling, meaningful engagement, and transparent influencer partnerships, startups can build long-term trust and competitive advantage. As social media platforms continue to evolve, their role in shaping consumer preferences and driving sustainable growth for apparel startups will only become more significant.

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