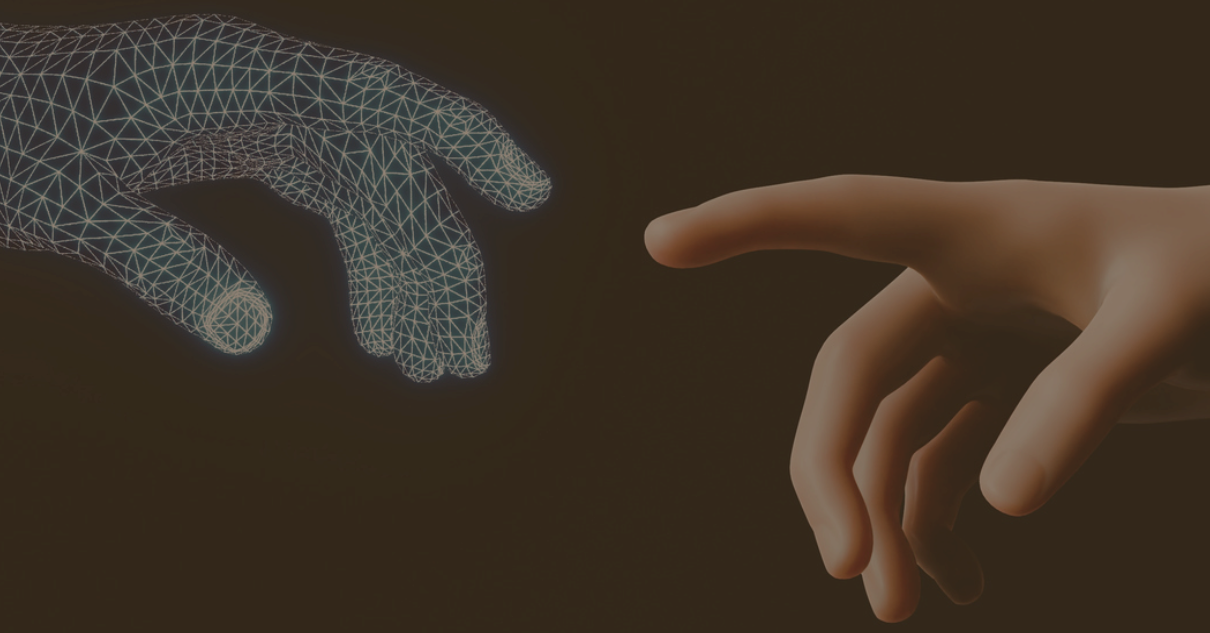
CULTURE, AI AND COMMERCE IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY



EDITOR

Dr. Mariam S. OLSSON

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EDITOR
Dr. Mariam S. OLSSON

AUTHORS
Dr. Dilruba SHARMIN
Dr. M. K. GANESHAN
Dharmendra KUMAR
Rajeswari L.
Araf Mashrafa JAHAN
Olaniyi H. ALIU
Jamiu R. OLASINA
Ojo J. ADARAMOLA
Olawale I. OGUNYINKA
Adeola O. AKINLEYE

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PREFACE

This volume brings together interdisciplinary perspectives on fashion as a cultural, economic, and technological phenomenon. It begins with an exploration of the material culture of fashion in Indian archaeology, tracing the historical intersections of industry, trade, and social meaning. This chapter offers a long-term view of how clothing and adornment practices have reflected and shaped societal structures.

The second chapter shifts to a contemporary regional analysis, examining the limited market penetration of Japanese apparel in Bangladesh. Despite strong global branding, the study reveals how local consumer preferences, economic conditions, and cultural dynamics mediate the influence of foreign fashion in emerging markets.

Technological innovation takes center stage in the third chapter, which investigates the use of artificial intelligence in optimizing fashion supply chains. Emphasizing sustainability and economic efficiency, this contribution highlights how data-driven strategies are reshaping production, distribution, and environmental impact in the fashion industry.

The final chapter synthesizes themes of digital transformation, consumer behavior, and e-commerce ecosystems. It provides a comprehensive view of how online platforms, shifting consumer expectations, and technological integration are redefining the fashion marketplace. Together, these chapters offer a multifaceted understanding of fashion's evolving role across time, space, and systems.

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CHAPTER 1
MATERIAL CULTURE OF FASHION: INDUSTRY, TRADE, AND SOCIAL MEANING IN INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Dharmendra KUMAR[1]
Rajeswari L.[2]

[1]Science Branch, Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay Institute of Archaeology, Archaeological Survey of India, Greater Noida-201310, paldkasi@gmail.com
[2]Science Branch, Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay Institute of Archaeology, Archaeological Survey of India, Greater Noida-201310.

INTRODUCTION

Copper has been integral to the advancement of human civilization for millennia, playing a vital role in the development of tools, weapons, currency, and art. Its use dates back to the earliest stages of human history, from the creation of bronze alloys to the crafting of intricate artifacts in ancient cultures. The enduring presence of copper artifacts in archaeological sites offers a valuable window into past societies, providing essential insights into technological advancements, cultural practices, and economic systems. These artifacts serve not only as physical representations of ancient life but also as crucial elements for historical and scientific research [1]. However, as with all materials, copper is subject to the effects of time, environmental conditions, and, notably, microbial activity, all of which can significantly impact the preservation of these objects.

Fashion, often considered a contemporary cultural phenomenon, has deep historical foundations rooted in the material and symbolic practices of ancient societies. In the Indian context, fashion, broadly defined as the cultural expression of dress, ornamentation, hairstyle, and body presentation was never merely an aesthetic choice. Rather, it operated as a multidimensional force with profound implications for identity, ritual, economy, and industry. Archaeological remains, literary texts, and artistic depictions together demonstrate that fashion in India was a dynamic system of cultural communication and an engine of craft-based economies.

Archaeological data provide the earliest evidence of fashion-related practices in India. The Indus Valley Civilization (3rd–2nd millennium BCE) offers abundant clues through spindle whorls, terracotta figurines, beads, ornaments, and textile impressions preserved on clay or copper artifacts (Kenoyer, 1998; Possehl, 2002). These materials reveal not only technological sophistication in cotton cultivation, spinning, and weaving, but also the symbolic significance of adornment in gender, status, and ritual contexts. Bead workshops at sites such as Lothal and Chanhudaro further highlight craft specialization and long-distance trade in ornaments, linking fashion directly to economic prosperity (Allchin & Allchin, 1997).

As Indian civilization transitioned into the early historic and classical periods, new visual and textual archives enriched our understanding of fashion.

Sculptures from Sanchi, Mathura, Amaravati, and later Khajuraho depict elaborate draperies, jewellery, hairstyles, and body ornamentation, offering valuable insights into the changing aesthetics and technologies of attire (Ghosh, 1989). These representations confirm that dress and adornment were closely tied to cultural identity, gender roles, and social hierarchies. Kings, ascetics, dancers, and deities were visually distinguished by their clothing and ornaments, underscoring fashion's role in communicating status and function within society.

Equally significant are the painted archives preserved at Ajanta and Lepakshi. The Ajanta murals (2nd century BCE–6th century CE) vividly portray flowing garments, patterned textiles, and intricate jewellery, reflecting both the technical mastery of artisans and the refinement of elite fashion (Singh, 2008). At Lepakshi (16th century CE), mural depictions of costumes, headgear, and ornaments highlight regional continuity as well as innovation in textile and jewellery design (Thaplyal, 2001). These artistic records serve as dynamic visual ethnographies of ancient fashion practices, offering details often lost in perishable material remains.

The continuity of textile traditions is further attested at Rani-ki-Vav in Gujarat (11th century CE), where sculptural motifs incorporate intricate geometric and floral designs reminiscent of the Patola double-ikat technique. These depictions suggest not only the prestige of textiles as cultural symbols but also their role in regional economic activity through production, trade, and guild organization (Yule, 1903). Such evidence reinforces the notion that fashion in India was embedded within broader systems of industrial and commercial networks.

Textual references complement the archaeological and artistic evidence. The Arthashastra of Kautilya (4th century BCE) discusses regulations on textiles, dyes, and guilds, linking fashion directly to taxation, state control, and trade (Thaplyal, 2001). Sangam literature from South India (circa 300 BCE–300 CE) provides rich descriptions of garments, jewellery, and cosmetics, highlighting regional variations and the economic centrality of fashion-related industries (Singh, 2008).

Accounts of foreign travellers Greek, Roman, and later Chinese emphasize the global demand for Indian textiles, beads, and ornaments, situating Indian fashion within transcontinental exchange networks (Yule, 1903). From a cultural perspective, fashion in Indian archaeology can be understood through two interrelated dimensions:

Cultural Significance: Dress and adornment acted as visible markers of identity, gender roles, religious symbolism, and social hierarchy. The use of specific textiles, jewellery, or hairstyles often communicated caste, status, or ritual function. For instance, depictions of deities at Ajanta and Khajuraho highlight how divine identity was expressed through elaborate attire and ornaments, while ascetics were marked by simplicity of dress. Fashion was thus a form of cultural communication, expressing values, beliefs, and social distinctions.

Economic and Industrial Impact: Fashion-related industries: textile production, dyeing, bead-making, jewellery crafting formed engines of technological innovation and economic development. Specialized guilds organized production, while state authorities regulated and taxed these industries. Evidence from sites such as Lothal, coupled with textual references in the Arthashastra, demonstrates that fashion was not peripheral but central to India's industrial and economic systems. The export of textiles to Rome, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia further underscores fashion's role in sustaining India's position in global trade networks (Possehl, 2002; Thaplyal, 2001).

In the medieval period, regional artistic traditions continued to record and innovate upon fashion. The Chola bronzes of Tamil Nadu depict graceful draperies and jewellery, symbolizing divine elegance and courtly aesthetics (Singh, 2008). The Vijayanagara murals at Lepakshi reveal complex layering of garments, elaborate coiffures, and ornamentation that reflect evolving textile technologies and social preferences (Thaplyal, 2001). These sources collectively demonstrate that fashion was not static but responsive to cultural exchange, technological innovation, and shifting political economies.

Therefore, fashion in Indian archaeology emerges not as a trivial pursuit of personal adornment, but as a significant cultural and economic phenomenon.

It was a medium through which identity and hierarchy were expressed, industries and crafts were sustained, and empires derived both symbolic power and material wealth. By integrating archaeological findings with textual and artistic evidence, the study of fashion in India reveals its interdisciplinary importance bridging cultural heritage, economic history, industrial archaeology, and art history.

This chapter, therefore, traces the trajectory of fashion in Indian archaeology from the Indus Valley Civilization to the medieval period. It aims to demonstrate that fashion was a dynamic force shaping industries, facilitating long-distance trade, and symbolizing cultural identities across centuries. By situating fashion within broader frameworks of archaeology and history, the discussion emphasizes its relevance not only as material culture but also as a key driver of economic and cultural systems in the Indian subcontinent.

1. FASHION IN THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (C. 2600–1900 BCE)

The Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), flourishing between c. 2600 and 1900 BCE, provides the earliest substantial archaeological evidence for fashion and adornment in South Asia. Excavations at major urban centres such as Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Dholavira, and Lothal have yielded artifacts that illuminate the cultural, technological, and economic dimensions of dress, ornamentation, and body presentation. Although the perishable nature of textiles has limited direct evidence, a combination of tools, material remains, figurines, and trade records enables a reconstruction of fashion as both a social marker and an industrial force within this early civilization.

Clothing and Textiles

Direct evidence of garments is absent due to the unfavourable preservation conditions of the Indus plains. However, impressions of woven cloth found on pottery and copper objects, together with the discovery of spindle whorls, needles, and loom weights, strongly indicate the widespread practice of weaving. The Indus Valley is widely regarded as the earliest known centre of cotton cultivation and textile production, with cotton fibers identified from Harappan levels (Wheeler, 1968; Kenoyer, 1998).

The technology of spinning and weaving cotton not only marks a significant achievement in prehistoric textile innovation but also positioned the civilization as a pioneer in the global history of fabric production.

Jewellery and Beads

The archaeological record of the IVC reveals remarkable sophistication in jewellery and bead-making, suggesting that adornment was a central element of cultural identity. Beads made of carnelian; steatite, lapis lazuli, agate, faience, and shell have been uncovered in large numbers, reflecting both the variety of raw materials and the skill of Harappan artisans (Possehl, 2002). Bangles were produced from shell, terracotta, copper, and bronze, while semi-precious stones were transformed into necklaces, pendants, and amulets through advanced drilling and polishing techniques. The bead-making workshops at Lothal were particularly notable for their precision-crafted etched carnelian beads, which became a hallmark of Harappan craftsmanship and later influenced bead industries across South and West Asia (Allchin & Allchin, 1997).

Figurines and Fashion Depictions

Terracotta figurines constitute an important visual archive of fashion in the IVC. Female figurines, often adorned with elaborate jewelry, ornate headdresses, girdles, and waistbands, suggest that personal adornment was not merely decorative but carried symbolic, perhaps even ritual significance. Male figurines and statues, such as the well-known “Priest-King” from Mohenjo-Daro, display headbands, fillets, cloaks, and ornamental patterns, underscoring that adornment was integral to both genders and across social strata (Ghosh, 1989). These figurative representations provide critical insights into the interplay between fashion, identity, and ritual performance in Harappan society.

Economic Implications

Fashion-related industries in the IVC were highly specialized and deeply integrated into the economy. Archaeological evidence from Lothal and Harappa indicates organized workshops for bead production, shell bangle manufacture, and textile preparation.

The scale and uniformity of these industries point toward craft specialization supported by urban economic systems and possibly regulated by civic authorities. The discovery of etched carnelian beads from Gujarat at Mesopotamian sites such as Ur and Susa demonstrates that Harappan fashion products were not only consumed locally but also exported across long-distance trade networks (Kenoyer, 1998; Possehl, 2002). This international demand underscores the role of fashion industries as engines of economic growth and as markers of India's early participation in global commerce.

Synthesis

Taken together, the evidence of textiles, ornaments, figurines, and trade highlights the significance of fashion in the Indus Valley Civilization. Fashion was not a marginal practice but a key aspect of cultural life, reflecting identity, social status, and ritual symbolism, while simultaneously sustaining industries and facilitating international exchange. The IVC thus laid the foundations for a long tradition in South Asia where fashion and adornment were deeply enmeshed with economy, technology, and cultural expression.

2. VEDIC AND EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD (1500–300 BCE)

Dress and Ornamentation

The Vedic texts provide some of the earliest references to garments, often referred to as *vasas* (clothing) and *adhivasas* (outer wraps). These were primarily made of cotton, wool, and occasionally silk, reflecting both climatic needs and available resources (Thapar, 2002). Ornamentation is frequently mentioned in the Rigveda, with references to necklaces (*niska*), earrings, and golden ornaments, indicating both aesthetic value and social markers (Altekar, 1956). Archaeological evidence from Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) levels further supports the presence of textile usage and craft specialization (Allchin & Allchin, 1982).

Economy and Guilds

The Vedic economy was largely pastoral-agricultural, but by the Later Vedic period, agriculture expanded, accompanied by the rise of iron technology. This facilitated surplus production and trade (Lal, 1997).

The emergence of Janapadas and Mahajanapadas in the early historic period gave rise to organized guilds (*shrenis*), particularly in textiles, beads, and ornaments, which played a crucial role in production and distribution networks (Thapar, 2002). Epigraphic evidence from inscriptions at Sanchi and Bharhut also highlights the role of artisan groups in socio-economic life (Ray, 1986).

Cultural Transitions

The transition from the Vedic to the early historic period witnessed the synthesis of ritual traditions with evolving urban cultures. Textual evidence shows continuity in attire and adornment, but with greater refinement, influenced by urbanization and cross-cultural contacts (Altekar, 1956). Excavations at sites such as Hastinapura and Atranjikhera have yielded terracotta figurines with elaborate hairstyles and jewelry, suggesting an increasing emphasis on fashion as a cultural expression (Lal, 1997). These developments reflect not only changing aesthetics but also shifts in social hierarchy and identity representation.

Synthesis

The evidence from texts and archaeology suggests that fashion in the Vedic and Early Historic periods was deeply integrated into cultural, ritual, and economic systems. Clothing functioned as a ritual offering and a social marker; ornaments symbolized wealth, status, and identity; and textile and jewellery industries drove economic specialization and long-distance trade. This period laid the foundation for the institutionalization of fashion-related crafts under guild systems, paving the way for the more complex industrial and trade networks of the Mauryan and Gupta eras.

3. MAURYAN AND EARLY HISTORIC FASHION (C. 322–185 BCE)

The Mauryan and Early Historic periods represent a critical stage in the institutionalization of fashion industries, as evidenced through archaeology, sculpture, and textual records.

This era demonstrates both the continuity of indigenous traditions and the incorporation of foreign influences that shaped dress, ornamentation, and industrial production.

Sculptural Evidence

The art of the Mauryan and subsequent Early Historic periods provides direct insight into clothing and adornment practices. The sandstone carvings at Sanchi, Bharhut, and early Mathura schools depict men and women in elaborate draped garments, including antariya (lower garments), uttariya (upper cloth), and chaddar (shawls). The representations of turbans, intricate hair arrangements, and heavy jewellery such as girdles, anklets, and necklaces underscore the socio-economic significance of ornamentation (Agrawala, 1971; Singh, 2008). The introduction of stitched garments, particularly tunics and trousers, appears in some reliefs and terracotta figurines, suggesting possible Central Asian or Persian influence transmitted through trade and diplomatic contact with the Achaemenid and Hellenistic worlds (Thaplyal, 2012; Allchin &Erdosy, 1995). Such evidence highlights the dynamic cultural exchanges that enriched the Mauryan sartorial repertoire.

Kautilya'sArthashastra

Textual evidence from Kautilya'sArthashastra provides an economic and administrative perspective on fashion industries. The treatise records systematic regulations concerning textiles, dyers, weavers, and artisans. It prescribes taxation and quality control over the production of fabrics and ornaments, revealing the state's recognition of textiles as a major source of revenue (Shamasastry, 1961; Trautmann, 1971). Moreover, the Arthashastra details guild organization and penalties for adulteration in dyes and materials, emphasizing the industrial sophistication of the Mauryan economy.

Industrial Centers

Archaeological excavations reinforce the textual and sculptural evidence of fashion-related industries. At Taxila, discoveries of bead-making workshops, semi-precious stone ornaments, and terracotta figurines illustrate specialized craft production (Marshall, 1951).

Similarly, Ujjain, an important urban centre, has yielded remains of textile production, dyeing vats, and jewellery manufacturing facilities, reflecting its role as a hub in long-distance trade (Ray, 1986; Chakrabarti, 2001). The convergence of evidence from art, texts, and excavations demonstrates that fashion in the Mauryan and Early Historic periods was not merely a cultural expression but an organized economic enterprise, integrated into both domestic consumption and regional trade networks.

5. THE KUSHANA AND GUPTA ERAS (1ST–6TH CENTURY CE)

Fashion in Sculpture

The Kushana and Gupta periods represent a dynamic fusion of indigenous and external cultural influences, visible most prominently in sculptural traditions. The Gandharaschool, shaped by Greco-Roman contact, depicts figures clad in tunics, trousers, and cloaks garments reflecting Hellenistic and Central Asian stylistic elements (Boardman, 1994; Marshall, 1960). In contrast, the Mathura school emphasizes indigenous aesthetics, with sculpted figures adorned in dhotis, dupattas, and heavy ornaments, underscoring continuity with Vedic and early historic traditions (Agrawala, 1970; Huntington, 1985). Together, these visual sources provide a critical dataset for reconstructing ancient fashion systems and their socio-political symbolism.

Textiles and Trade

Textile production during these eras achieved international prominence. Cotton muslins from the Gangetic plain, fine silks from Bengal, and richly dyed fabrics were highly sought after across Eurasia. Archaeological evidence, supported by textual references such as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (Schoff, 1912; Casson, 1989), confirms exports of Indian garments, beads, and embroidered textiles to Rome, Egypt, Central Asia, and China. This demonstrates the integration of Indian fashion into wider transcontinental trade networks, positioning textiles as both economic commodities and cultural ambassadors (Liu, 2010).

Gupta Elegance

The Gupta era, often described as a "classical age," witnessed a synthesis of sartorial refinement and symbolic representation. Wall paintings at Ajanta and sculptures at Sarnath and Deogarh illustrate women in finely draped, clinging garments, often transparent, complemented by elaborate coiffures and jewellery (Williams, 1982; Dehejia, 1990). Gupta coinage further reinforces this imagery, with rulers portrayed in meticulously detailed garments and jewelled crowns, underscoring the political role of fashion in articulating royal authority and divine kingship (Thapar, 2002).

Economic Significance

The fashion economy of the Kushana and Gupta eras was deeply structured through guild-based organization. Textiles, jewellery, and ornament industries contributed substantially to state revenues and urban prosperity (Chattopadhyaya, 1977; Sharma, 1987). Guilds regulated standards of production, mediated trade, and fostered technological innovation, thereby ensuring both domestic consumption and the steady flow of exports. The prominence of these industries highlights fashion not merely as aesthetic expression but as a central component of economic and political life in early historic India.

6. MEDIEVEL PERIOD: FROM CHOLAS TO MUGHALS (7^{TH}-18^{TH} CENTURY CE)

South Indian Traditions

The chola period (9^{th}-13^{th} Century CE) provides some of the most compelling visual and textual evidence for the role of fashion in ritual, economy, and society. Chola bronzes, particularly those from Thanjavur and Gangaikonda cholapuram, depict deities and donors adorned in dhoti, saree-like draperies, girdles, and multilayered jewellery. These images illustrate the continuation of unstitched drapery traditions while also highlighting regional styles of ornamentation. Tamil Sangam literature, through earlier in origin (300BCE-300CE), continued to inform south Indian textile culture, celebrating fine muslins, peral fisheries of the coromandel coat, and the economic value of ornaments.

Archaeological evidence from sites such as Arikamedu further corroborates the expert of textile, beads, and ornamented goods, linking South Indian fashion industries to Indian Ocean trade networks.

Islamic Influence:

The advent of the Delhi Sultanate (13^{th}-16^{th} century CE) and later Mughal rule (16^{th}-18^{th} century CE) introduced a new sartorial vocabulary to the subcontinent. Stitched garments such as the jama, salwar, angarkha, and quba reflect Central Asian and Persian influences, which gradually merged with indigenous drapery traditions, Miniature paintings of the Sultante and early Mughal courts depict hybrid fashions that symbolized cross-cultural exchange. Archaeological finds, including textile impressions on pottery material confirmation of these shifts.

Mughal Fashion and Economy

The Mughal period represents the zenith of India's pre-modern fashion economy. Documentary evidence such as Abu'l Fazl's Ain-i-Akbari and European travel accounts (e.g. Tavenier, Bernier) detail the variety, quality, and industrial organization of textiles, dyes, and costumes. Centres like Banaras, Dhaka, Ahmedabad, and Surat become hubs for luxury textiles, particularly brocades, jamdani muslins, and silk weaves. Dhaka's muslin, described as so fine it could pass through a signet ring, became an object of global demand. Mughal patronage stimulated industries producing embroidered garments (Zardoz), jewelled ornaments, and gem-studded accessories, which were not only consumed by the imperial court but also exported to west Asia and Europe. The circulation of these goods reveals fashion as a critical driver of Mughal economic power and cultural diplomacy.

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Industrial and Fiscal Impact

The fashion economy under the Mughals was deeply entwined with imperial revenue systems. The karkhanas (royal workshops) employed thousands of artisans specializing in weaving, dyeing, embroidery, and gem-cutting. These institutions reflect both state control over luxury production and the integration of fashion industries into fiscal structures. Revenue from textiles and ornaments constituted a significant portion of imperial taxation, while export duties from ports such as Surat and Hooghly linked the Mughal economy to global trade circuits. Thus, fashion industries during this period were not merely aesthetic but functioned as pillars of industrial labor, statecraft, and global economic exchange.

7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE OF FASHION

The reconstruction of ancient Indian fashion systems has increasingly benefited from the application of modern archaeological and scientific methodologies. These techniques allow for the recovery and interpretation of material evidence that goes beyond textual and iconographic sources.

Textile Impressions

Archaeological excavations at Harappan and later sites have yielded impressions of woven textiles on pottery and other clay objects, providing indirect evidence of loom technology, weaving patterns, and fiber use (Kenoyer, 1998). Such impressions reveal both plain and patterned weaves, reflecting technological sophistication and diversity in textile traditions.

Dye and Pigment Analysis

Scientific analyses of archaeological textiles and pigments have identified the use of natural dyes such as indigo (Indigofera tinctoria), madder (Rubia cordifolia), and turmeric (Curcuma longa). Chromatographic and spectroscopic studies confirm that these dyes were widely employed, not only in textiles but also in painted surfaces, demonstrating a continuity of colour aesthetics from antiquity to the medieval period (Gupta & Agarwal, 2019).

Material Characterization of Ornaments

Advanced techniques such as X-ray fluorescence (XRF), X-ray diffraction (XRD) Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) and Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) have been applied to ornaments, beads, and sculptures to determine elemental and mineralogical composition. These studies have revealed the use of semi-precious stones, alloys, and gilding processes, thereby illuminating technological choices in jewellery production and the symbolic significance of fashion accessories (Shinde et al., 2020).

Conservation Science

Conservation methodologies, including chemical stabilization and nano-materials research, play a crucial role in preserving fragile textiles and organic remains recovered from archaeological contexts. Scientific conservation not only ensures long-term survival of perishable evidence but also facilitates experimental reconstructions of ancient dyeing, weaving, and ornamentation practices (Singh, 2021). **Collectively**, these scientific approaches enrich our understanding of the economic, technological, and cultural dimensions of fashion in ancient and medieval India, bridging the gap between material evidence and historical narratives.

8. FASHION AS ECONOMY AND INDUSTRY IN INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The archaeological record demonstrates that fashion in ancient India was not merely a matter of aesthetics but a critical driver of industries, guild organization, and long-distance trade.

The production and consumption of fashion-related materials reveal a highly sophisticated economic framework that integrated artisanal expertise with large-scale commercial activity. Textiles were among the most significant fashion-related industries. Cotton textiles from the Indus Valley Civilization represent some of the earliest known examples globally, while later historical periods saw the flourishing of silk and wool production, contributing to India's reputation as a textile hub (Possehl, 2002; Ratnagar, 2004).

Dyeing technologies highlight advanced chemical knowledge. Archaeometric and archaeobotanical studies have confirmed the use of natural dyes such as indigo (Indigofera tinctoria), madder (Rubia cordifolia), turmeric (Curcuma longa), and saffron (Crocus sativus), underscoring the interplay between fashion and scientific innovation (Balfour-Paul, 1998; Tripathi, 2008).

Jewellery industries also flourished, as evidenced by gold, silver, gemstone, and etched carnelian bead workshops in Harappan and early historic contexts. These industries required specialized skills in metallurgy, lapidary arts, and trade logistics, linking Indian fashion to Mesopotamian, Persian, and later Roman markets (Kenoyer, 1998; Marshall, 1931). Leather and footwear production is attested through depictions in sculptures and textual references, where sandals and shoes were both utilitarian and symbolic markers of status (Allchin & Allchin, 1982).

Cosmetics and perfumes further enriched the fashion economy. Archaeological finds of unguent pots, terracotta cosmetic containers, and textual references to perfumes demonstrate both local production and elite consumption patterns (Lahiri, 1992). Taken together, these industries show that fashion in India functioned as a major economic engine, contributing to state revenues, supporting guild-based artisanal systems, and sustaining India's role in global trade networks from the Harappan period through the early historic era.

9. CASE STUDIES FROM INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological case studies from different cultural phases of Indian history demonstrate the deep entanglement of fashion with material culture, technology, and socio-economic systems.

Indus Valley Bead Industry (Lothal and Chanhudaro)

The Harappan bead-making industry, particularly at Lothal and Chanhudaro, exemplifies one of the earliest organized fashion-related industries in South Asia. Semi-precious stones such as carnelian, agate, lapis lazuli, and steatite were processed through advanced techniques including drilling, heating, and polishing (Kenoyer, 1997). The widespread distribution of beads across Harappan and Mesopotamian sites underscores their role in long-distance trade and fashion networks (Wright, 2010).

Textile Depictions at Ajanta

The Ajanta cave murals (2nd century BCE – 6th century CE) provide exceptional visual evidence of textile patterns, garments, and drapery styles. The representations of patterned fabrics, turbans, and stitched garments highlight regional weaving techniques and aesthetic preferences (Yazdani, 1930). These paintings are crucial for reconstructing the evolution of Indian textile fashion prior to the medieval period.

Gupta Ornaments at Sarnath

The Gupta period (4th–6th century CE) saw refinement in goldsmithing and gemstone settings, as evident in sculptural depictions from Sarnath. The intricate rendering of necklaces, anklets, and diadems indicates both technological sophistication in metallurgy and the symbolic role of ornamentation in expressing elite status (Agrawala, 1965; Srinivasan, 1997).

Chola Bronzes and Fashion

The Chola bronzes of Tamil Nadu (9th–13th century CE) not only embody divine aesthetics but also encode fashion practices of the time. Sculptures of deities such as Nataraja exhibit elaborate jewellery, coiffure, and textiles rendered in metal, reflecting courtly fashion and ritual dress codes (Dehejia, 1990).

Mughal Textiles at Fatehpur Sikri

The Mughal period marked a pinnacle of textile fashion, blending Persian and Indian traditions.

Archaeological evidence and historical accounts from Fatehpur Sikri illustrate the flourishing of cotton muslin, silk brocades, and embroidered fabrics. These textiles became central to courtly culture and international trade, particularly through the export of Indian muslin and chintz to Europe (Kumar, 2017; Findly, 1993). Together, these case studies demonstrate that fashion in India was never limited to personal adornment; it was deeply integrated with technology, artistry, economy, and cultural symbolism.

CONCLUSION

The study of fashion in Indian archaeology reveals it as a central dimension of cultural life, technological innovation, and economic organization. From the bead workshops of Lothal and Chanhudaro to the textile depictions at Ajanta and the luxury weaving centres of the Mughal court, fashion functioned not merely as personal adornment but as a system of material culture that shaped industries, sustained trade, and reinforced social hierarchies. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that fashion-related crafts: textiles, dyes, jewellery, leather, and cosmetics were deeply embedded in guild structures, state taxation, and international commerce, linking India to West Asia, Central Asia, and the Mediterranean world.

Fashion also operated as a symbolic medium of identity, visible in the attire of deities, rulers, ascetics, and commoners alike, encoded in terracotta figurines, murals, sculptures, and coins. The persistence of textile traditions, from Harappan cotton to Gupta muslins and Mughal brocades, illustrates continuity alongside innovation in materials, technologies, and designs. Moreover, the integration of modern archaeometric methods such as dye analysis, XRF, XRD, FTIR and SEM provides fresh insights into the chemical and material dimensions of ancient fashion, underscoring the value of interdisciplinary approaches.

In summary, fashion in Indian archaeology should be understood as a dynamic cultural and economic phenomenon: a medium through which identity and hierarchy were expressed, industries and crafts were sustained, and India's global economic connections were consolidated. Situating fashion at the crossroads of archaeology, economic history, and cultural studies enriches our understanding of both the material and symbolic worlds of the Indian past.

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CHAPTER 2
BRANDED YET UNSEEN: THE LIMITED INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE APPAREL IN BANGLADESH'S FASHION MARKET

Araf Mashrafa JAHAN[1]
Dr. Dilruba SHARMIN[2]

[1]Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka, arafmashrafa-4th-2020918611@djs.du.ac.bd, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1276-0950
[2]Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies (GSICS), Kobe University & Associate Professor, Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka, dsharmin.jsc@du.ac.bd, ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8955-9622

INTRODUCTION

Japan's minimalist style, excellent craftsmanship, and creative design philosophy have helped it establish a reputation in the global fashion scene in recent decades. Japanese apparel companies like Uniqlo, Comme des Garçons, A Bathing Ape, Undercover, Visvim, Sacai and Issey Miyake are now well-known and well-liked in the fashion capitals of Asia, Europe, and North America (InStyle, 2025; Vogue Business, 2024; Zobuz, 2025). Despite their global reach, Japanese apparel companies have not had a significant impact on Bangladesh's fashion sector. About 60–70 per cent of Bangladesh's local fashion market is currently made up of foreign apparel, particularly from China, India, and Pakistan, which overshadows local brands and restricts the accessibility of Japanese labels (Rahaman, 2024). According to a descriptive study of urban university students in Dhaka, globalization and social media shifted youth preferences in apparel selections (Hossin & Mohiuddin, 2015). Both online and offline markets, however, show an exceedingly small number of Japanese apparel brands.

This is unexpected given the long-standing bilateral political and economic ties between Japan and Bangladesh. For Japanese companies, Bangladesh has been a significant production location, particularly in the apparel industry (Reuters, 2024). However, the domestic fashion market hardly features these labels. Globally renowned for its innovation, technology-driven strategy, and high-quality manufacturing, the Japanese clothing industry is a developed and thriving business. Although companies such as Uniqlo have achieved success in a number of global marketplaces, they have remained almost unnoticed in developing nations like Bangladesh (Fast Retailing, 2023; Reuters, 2024). In light of this, it is reasonable to wonder why, in Bangladesh, a rising and fashion-forward market, Japanese clothing labels are not more widely accepted in Bangladeshi consumer society.

Bangladesh's urban middle class is becoming more fashion-conscious due to digital platforms, social media, and economic empowerment (Baten et al., 2018; Rahman & Yang, 2025). However, Japanese companies face challenges like low brand recognition, insufficient marketing, and cultural relevance.

Bangladesh's import regulations, customs system, market structure, and reliance on middlemen also hinder Japanese brand entry (Dhaka Tribune, 2024; The Daily Star, 2020; UniversePG, 2020). The adoption of Japanese brands can also be influenced by local customer preferences, pricing competition, and product distribution methods.

This paradox underscores the rationale for the current chapter, which investigates the underlying causes of the limitations and examines barriers based on consumers and the market. The contradiction of globally famous brands having a minor presence in a country with a robust apparel sector and a young, fashion-forward population raises significant considerations about market fit, cultural relevance, and strategic marketing. This chapter will be necessary to determine if the impediments are the result of inadequate marketing, cultural preferences, trade and regulatory issues, or customer perceptions and beliefs.

1. LOCAL MARKET GROWTH AND GLOBAL INFLUENCES ON FASHION CONSUMER CULTURE IN BANGLADESH

With the current economic development, Bangladesh's apparel industry has become increasingly significant globally. According to Statista (2025), the apparel industry in Bangladesh is expected to generate over US$10.87 billion in 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of about 2.8 per cent until 2029 (Statista, 2025). Notably, less than 25 per cent of domestic apparel sales are from local Bangladeshi fashion firms, indicating that three-quarters of consumption is dominated by export production or global brands. Consequently, this growing market offers global fashion brands vast opportunities and serves as a crucial backdrop for analyzing brand diffusion.

Bangladesh's consumer culture for fashion is changing because of globalization, economic expansion, and technological breakthroughs. Prior to COVID, the nation's GDP grew by more than 7 per cent, creating a new middle class (BBS via Business Insider Bangladesh, 2023). A *'brand-conscious'* society is being created as a result of young people's increased exposure to global culture through the internet, social media, and international media.

According to Baten et al. (2018), Bangladeshi consumers view international apparel labels as representations of *'modern fashion'* and social standing (Baten et al., 2018). Traditional attire, such as salwar kameez and tunic-leggings, has been combined with Western influences by the younger generation to create local fashion trends (The Business Standard, 2021; Hossin & Mohiuddin, 2015; Hossain & Billah, 2018). Though many global brands lack physical stores in Bangladesh, they remain accessible via mobile shopping and e-commerce. Weather, decency, and religious reform are examples of local cultural factors that continue to influence fashion choices. Therefore, it is essential for foreign brands interested in entering the Bangladeshi market to analyze this dual trend of consumer culture: globalization and localism.

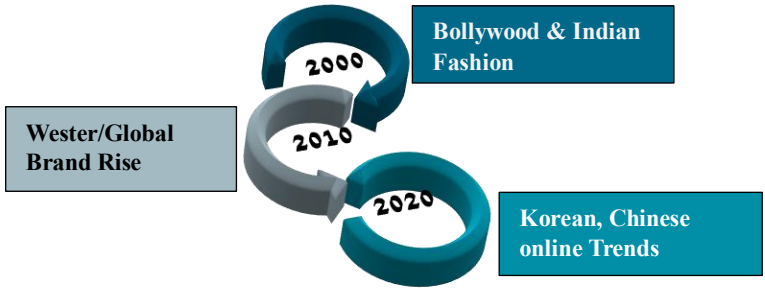


Figure 1. Urban Fashion Trends Over the Time in Bangladesh (Developed by Authors)

Urban youth fashion trends are influenced by Asian and Western designs, particularly Chinese, Indian, and Korean fashion. Social media, K-pop, Bollywood films, and Chinese e-commerce platforms have introduced these trends to urban teenagers (Hossain & Billah, 2018). European American brands are associated with modernity and wealth in Bangladesh's major cities. Korean fashion is increasingly popular due to K-pop and Korean dramas (Rahman, 2023). Chinese e-commerce sites like AliExpress make access to Chinese apparel easier. Indian design is popular in Bangladesh for festivals, weddings, and traditional attire. Japanese fashion lacks the Western glamour and cultural connections of Korean and Indian fashion (Rahman, 2021).

1.1 Brand Perception and Socio-Cultural Influences on Fashion Choices in Bangladesh

Western brands like Levi's, Puma, Nike, and Adidas have successfully instilled brand-conscious attitudes in urban middle-class youth by promoting the concept of *'affordable premium.'* These brands are seen by consumers as *'high-quality,' 'trusted,'* and *'status symbols'* (Baten et al., 2018; Haque et al., 2015). In contrast, Japanese companies like Uniqlo are unfamiliar with Bangladeshi customers, their perceived brand value is low. While price is a factor, brand value serves as a kind of *'social signaling,'* with younger customers favoring well-known, trendy brands that reflect their identities.

Religious beliefs, particularly in a Muslim-majority context, strongly influence fashion choices, emphasizing modesty, especially for women (Islam et al., 2014). Though Western and Korean styles are popular, they are often accepted only when culturally adapted. Fashion choices are heavily influenced by the middle class's purchasing power and the lower class's price sensitivity. Indian and local firms that provide reasonably priced, well-made, and contemporary apparel are gaining popularity. High-end international brands are relevant to the upper class, but the idea of *'value for money'* is still a significant deciding factor (Rahman & Yang, 2025). Urban youngsters are drawn to affordable local brands. Japanese brands' market presence is weakened by their insufficiency in this regard.

1.2. Japanese Apparel Brands in Bangladesh & South Asia

With major apparel brands like Japan, who are renowned for their fashion culture and minimalist design philosophy, opening retail locations in new countries, the global fashion industry has seen cross-border growth. In Bangladesh, Japanese consumer goods, including electronics and cars, are well-known and renowned for their *'Japanese quality'* and are *'trusted and preferred'* (Bhuiyan, 2020). Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that Japanese apparel brands will succeed in Bangladesh. Yet, despite this reputation, Japanese apparel brands have made negligible impact. Even UNIQLO, Japan's largest fashion retailer, failed to gain traction in Dhaka and closed all its Grameen UNIQLO stores by mid-2023 due to poor sales (Prothom Alo, 2023).

Japanese fashion brands are mainly *'unseen'* in Bangladesh's retail industry, as this striking example illustrates. Internal reports cited that Bangladeshi women *'pretty much only wear saris & salwar-kameez'* (Master Blaster, 2013). Through manufacturing partnerships, foreign brands are already making an indirect entry into the market. There is, however, little evidence of Japanese companies joining the local retail sector. Academic literature on this issue is scarce, even though the gap is evident. Although a large number of Japanese businesses operate in Bangladesh's industrial sector, their main focus is on exporting rather than retail (Fibre2Fashion News Desk, 2022). In Bangladesh, Japanese brands do not have franchised showrooms or their own retail chains. Products are typically only partially promoted through importers and distributors.

Dependence on importers reduces the value representation of Japanese brands. The distinction between perceived brand origin (PBO) and brand origin (BO) is undoubtedly important when examining the presence of Japanese brands in Bangladesh's fashion and leisure sector. Despite not being owned by Japanese people, companies such as Miniso and Miclo portray themselves as 'inspired by Japanese lifestyles.' Customers therefore believe that Japanese design, design philosophy, and cultural aesthetics are reflected in these businesses.

The PBO framework is crucial for comprehending customer behavior in this situation. Japanese presence is mostly indirect, via UNIQLO's short-lived social business, ITOCHU's textile ventures, and MUJI's limited online reach. These examples demonstrate that Japanese brands and *'Japan-inspired'* brands are active in the Bangladeshi fashion and lifestyle market through various strategies and entry models, with some focusing on consumer-facing (PBO) and others on supply chain and indirect retail presence. The Japanese identity and influence in the Bangladeshi market are reflected in multiple dimensions.

In contrast, Apparel Digest (2025) describes how the middle-class clothing market is dominated by local brands like Aarong, Yellow, Ecstasy, Dorjibari etc., while The Daily Star (2025) and Dhaka Tribune (2024) document the prevalence of the lower-class market is served by imported second-hand goods or remittances from South Asia, China, and the Middle East (Apparel Digest, 2025; Dhaka Tribune, 2024; The Daily Star, 2025).

According to consumer behavior studies, Japanese fashion brands have not yet entered Bangladeshi consumers' *'consumer statement,'* while Western fashion brands are largely seen as status and quality markers (Baten et al., 2018). The limited impact of Japanese clothing on Bangladesh's fashion sector is due to complex cultural, economic, and competitive factors, as well as market penetration strategies, logistical limitations, and cultural differences that hinder consumers' adoption of foreign designs (Chowdhury, 2018). As a result, Japanese apparel is now *'invisible'* in Bangladeshi marketing, appearing solely in global supply chains and experimental social projects. The Japanese apparel brands, which includes luxury designer labels Comme des Garçons and fast fashion retailer UNIQLO, combines tradition and modernity.

Japanese brands, particularly UNIQLO, have employed a range of strategies to expand globally. E-commerce (ZOZOTOWN), concept-driven marketing (LifeWear), and localization initiatives like lightweight AIRism textiles for South Asia are the main drivers of Uniqlo's global expansion (Martin Roll, 2021).

By emphasizing eco-friendly materials and recycled fashion, these tactics guarantee the comfort and customization of clothing. To strengthen their global appeal, Japanese companies have collaborated with renowned international designers and opened flagship stores abroad that serve as cultural hubs (Foley, 2017; UNIQLO Co., Ltd., 2024a). Online fashion has seen a fundamental shift because of ZOZOTOWN's ZOZOSUIT technology (ZOZO Inc., 2021). Sales have also risen because of digital platforms and the growth of e-commerce, particularly in the post-COVID period (EU-Japan Centre, 2021).

Offering *'high-quality products at affordable prices'* as part of their competitive pricing strategy draws middle-class customers and boosts brand adoption in emerging nations (Martin Roll, 2021). According to the EU-Japan Centre (2021), ZOZO, an e-commerce retailer, has grown at a rate of 6.7 per cent per year and only sells apparel (EU-Japan Centre, 2021). By taking advantage of local culture, design, and customer behavior, Japanese businesses have been able to effectively compete with global brands.

Figure 2. Localization Strategies Flowchart (Developed by Authors)

For worldwide fashion businesses to succeed in culturally varied areas like South Asia, where consumer tastes, apparel colors, fabric kinds, and styles deviate from global norms, brand localization is essential. For instance, Grameen UNIQLO primarily offered Western-style casual apparel in Bangladesh, while Uniqlo introduced collections based on local weather and festivals in India (The Business Standard, 2023; UNIQLO Co., Ltd., 2024b). South Asian customers are more receptive to clothing that considers regional culture, religious traditions, and weather conditions. Adapting media, festivities, and styles to local culture is part of effective localization for Japanese firms. Increasing brand awareness can also be achieved by collaborating with regional designers or brand ambassadors.

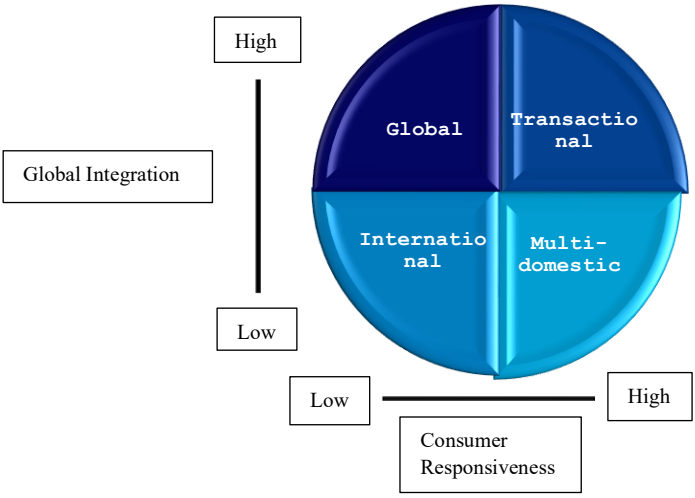


Figure 3. Global Business Strategy (Source: Developed by Authors)

1.3 Barriers & Limits to Brand Acceptance for Japanese Apparel Brands in Bangladesh

Globalization, nationalism, and colonialism have all impacted Bangladeshi fashion, which combines traditional and modern styles (Mongabay, 2025). Nonetheless, the emergence of global corporations, especially those originating from Japan, offers both rivalry and motivation. Complex customs procedures, fierce rivalry, and cultural fit with Bangladeshi consumers are some of the difficulties faced by Japanese apparel companies (Rahman & Strutt, 2021). As Rahman & Strutt (2021) asserted, economic factors such as Exchange rate fluctuations threaten competitiveness (Rahman & Strutt, 2021). Building trust and enduring partnerships requires better marketing strategies and conformity to regional norms.

Japanese fashion firms, which are renowned for their superior, technologically sophisticated, and aesthetically sophisticated production, have a challenging time growing internationally, especially in developing nations like Bangladesh. These difficulties are made worse by cultural disparities, consumer affordability, and complicated regulations. In cultures like Bangladesh, where religious sensitivities and particular tastes are prevalent, Japanese design is frequently viewed as *'unfamiliar'* or *'irrelevant'* (Baten et al., 2018; Islam et al., 2014). The retail price of Japanese brands' products is directly impacted by high import levies and customs rules in emerging nations, particularly Bangladesh, where they range from 25 to 30 percent (Bangladesh Trade Portal, 2025). This weakens their position in the competitive market.

Weak infrastructure and customs delays reduce supply chain efficiency. On-time delivery is further hampered by port congestion, poor road infrastructure, and customs delays. Because Bangladeshi middle-class consumers are price sensitive, Japanese businesses must contend with obstacles related to pricing and competitive advantages. Because if they sell clothing at comparatively low prices like local brands, for instance Aarong, Yellow, and Ecstasy, they are forced to sacrifice quality (Apparel Digest, 2025). A lack of emotional connection with young consumers is the result of many Japanese firms falling behind in the adoption of successful digital marketing tactics.

Cultural and psychological distance is a major factor in the limited influence of Japanese apparel companies in the Bangladeshi market.

Bangladesh's vibrant colors, modesty, and traditional clothing regulations are in stark contrast to cultural variations like Japan's minimalist aesthetic, practical fashion, and non-Muslim social milieu. Bangladeshi fashion demands are not met by the straightforward style and *'Japanese functionality'* that Uniqlo and other businesses promote. For instance, according to a 2013 Reuters report, the majority of Muslim women in Bangladesh favor traditional attire (burqa, salwar kameez) over casual Western attire (Bose & Paul, 2013). This kind of design mismatch consequently lessens the appeal to consumers.

Trade connections between Bangladesh and Japan have been gradually improving. Even though Bangladeshi exports were given special status under the Japanese program from the LDC era, with duty-free access now available for almost 97.9 per cent of export lines, ready-made clothing (Apparel) is still not included in the list of items that are duty-free under the Japan-Bangladesh Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (2020) (Export Promotion Bureau, 2025; CPD commentary via *New Age*, 2020).

Because of the 25–35 per cent charge imposed by the Apparel Import Tariff, Japanese brands are less competitive. Non-Tariff Barriers such as bureaucracy and testing requirements create further obstacles (Bangladesh Trade Portal, 2025; UNCTAD, 2019).

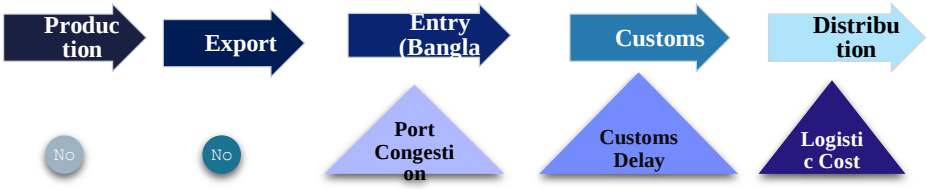


Figure 4. Supply Chain Barriers in Bangladesh (Developed by Authors)

Finally, Bangladeshi social norms, local lifestyles, and weather conditions are rarely considered when Japanese clothing brands design for the globalized middle class. Given the circumstances, the entry and influence of Japanese brands in the Bangladeshi market are severely hampered by design incompatibility, cultural distance, unfamiliarity, and lack of localization.

2. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

2.1 Secondary Data

Secondary data for this study was gathered from peer-reviewed research papers, trade journals, industry and policy studies, and media coverage of Japan's worldwide branding strategy and Bangladesh's apparel sector. Data was also gathered via document analysis. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (Japan), the Bangladesh Tariff Commission, the Ministry of Commerce (Bangladesh), Prothom Alo, the Business Standard, the Daily Star, Dhaka Tribute, the Bangladesh Bank, Statista, UNCTAD, and the JETRO are the data sources. Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCOhost are academic databases that was used for keyword searches.

2.2 Primary Data

Quantitative Component Consumer Survey: The perspectives, attitudes, and purchasing habits of Bangladeshi consumers about Japanese apparel brands were evaluated by an online consumer survey. The survey (July 3-23, 2025) was administered using Google Forms. A fair mix of consumers from urban, semi-urban, and, albeit comparatively less rural, regions made up the respondents that took part. The sample (N=500; ages 18-55) included 47.8 per cent under 40 (mostly students and young workers) and 52.2 per cent over 40 with higher purchasing power. The sample comprised all gender groups.

Qualitative Material Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Six in-depth Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with players involved in Bangladesh's Japanese apparel industry were conducted. Two fashion retailers, two workers from local or international apparel brands, a trade policy analyst with knowledge of Bangladesh's apparel industry, and an academic specialist in marketing, fashion, or consumer behavior were among those interviewed. Topics covered were Uniqlo's business methods, market hurdles, cultural attitudes, trade policies, and entrance plans. All participants gave their informed consent for the KIIs, which were performed over the phone and via Zoom meetings. To guarantee the selection of people with specialized expertise, a deliberate non-probability sampling strategy was used. Throughout the chapter's analytical parts, Selected quotations demonstrate views.

3. CLOTHING PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

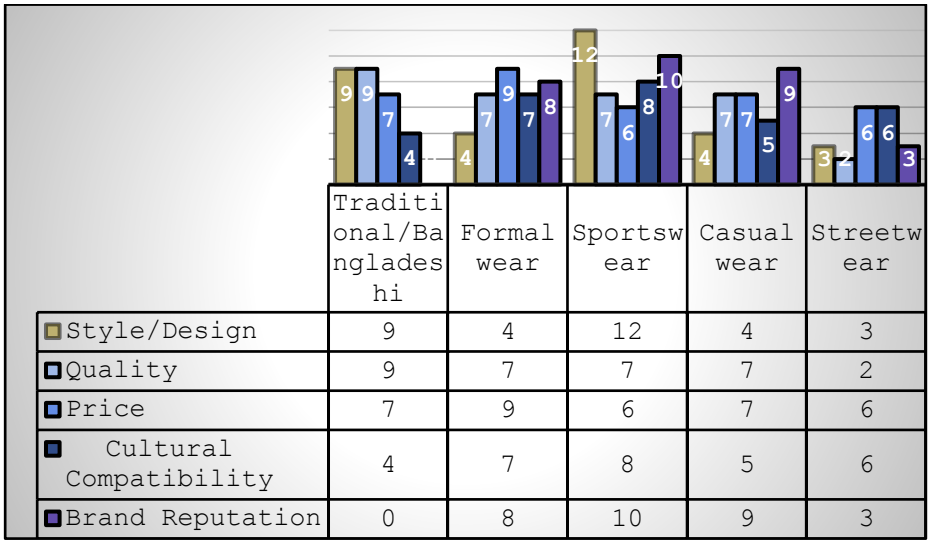
Table 1. Purchase Frequency with Brand Preference Patterns (Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Purchase Frequency	No Preference	Asian (incl. Japanese)	Local Bangladeshi	Western	Most Common Multi-Brand Combos	Insight on Japanese Apparel
Every 2–3 months (138)	17	11	10	5	No preference + Asian	Exploratory buyers, open to Asian brands but not committed
Occasionally (126)	17	11	8	6	Asian + Local	Balanced mix: Asian brands appear but paired with others
Frequently (121)	6	14	8	13	Asian + Western	Aspirational buyers; Asian/Japanese present but alongside Western brands
Rarely (115)	6	9	14	9	Local + Western	Local brands dominate; Asian brands weak standalone presence

Data demonstrate that Japanese clothing has a limited presence across purchasing frequency and does not dominate any category. Exploratory purchasers connect Asian brands with 'no preference,' whereas infrequent shoppers combine Asian and local products. The fact that rare shoppers are mostly restricted to local companies reduces their exposure to Japanese apparel.

This pattern suggests that consumers see Japanese brands mostly as complementing rather than necessary; their market awareness and unique positioning are obviously lacking. They are frequently overshadowed by local identities or Western prestige. This advocates the 'Branded but Unseen' notion, emphasizing the importance of greater branding and focused marketing.

Top Factors Influencing Apparel Selection by Category



	Traditional/Banglades hi	Formal wear	Sportswear	Casual wear	Streetwear
Style/Design	9	4	12	4	3
Quality	9	7	7	7	2
Price	7	9	6	7	6
Cultural Compatibility	4	7	8	5	6
Brand Reputation	0	8	10	9	3

Figure 5. Top Factors Influencing Apparel Selection by Category (Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Bangladeshi consumers' fashion choices make it abundantly evident that every apparel category has distinct consumer priority. Traditional clothing is admired for its style, design, and tradition by people who seek both beauty and a representation of heritage. However, Formal attire accentuates the expense and brand image associated with professional position.

Sportswear stresses performance, style, and dependable brands because they fit their active lifestyle. Casual apparel strikes a mix between cost, brand, and quality. Ultimately, Streetwear is based on trends and prices, with less emphasis on quality. Given the circumstances, it can be claimed that various clothing categories satisfy the various social, cultural, and individual demands of consumers.

4. AWARENESS AND RETAIL PRESENCE OF JAPANESE APPAREL BRANDS

Table 2. Brand Awareness vs Outlet Visibility (Source: Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Awareness	Outlet Visibility	Count	% of Awareness	% of Total Sample
Yes	Yes	84	33.1%	16.8%
Yes	No	89	35.0%	17.8%
Yes	Not sure	81	31.9%	16.2%
Yes	(blank)	0	0%	0%
Yes Total		254	100%	50.8%
No	-	246	-	49.2%
Grand Total		500	100%	100%

Of the five hundred respondents, 50.8 per cent were aware of the Japanese brand, while 49.2 per cent were not, according to the statistics. Only a small percentage of the 254 people who are aware have any experience with the brand's stores: 35 per cent have never seen any, 33.1 per cent have, and 31.9 per cent are unsure. This indicates that the direct outlet-based experience is quite restricted, even among those who are aware of the Japanese brand. Despite UNIQLO's past presence, many consumers choose MUJI or A Bathing Ape over UNIQLO, owing to word-of-mouth or media exposure. Given the circumstances, it is evident that awareness of the brand does not equate to direct interaction or firsthand experience. Grameen UNIQLO's marketing Officer stated in the interview that.

"It is difficult to reach the brand because consumer awareness outside of capital Dhaka is very low."

This statement is unmistakably consistent with the survey's findings, which show that despite awareness, there is little direct contact or firsthand knowledge and little market penetration.

Underlying Factors behind not Buying from Japanese Brands

Table 3. Underlying Factors behind not Buying from Japanese Brands (Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Main Reason Category	Frequency	% of Aware (n=254)	Example Combinations Included
Too expensive	50	19.7%	Too expensive; Too expensive + Other; Too expensive + Local preference;
Prefer local brands	47	18.5%	Prefer local brands; Local + Other; Local + Too expensive; Local + Styles;
Never heard of them / Awareness gap	39	15.4%	Never heard; Never heard + Other; Never heard + Do not know where to buy;
Not familiar with styles	38	15.0%	Not familiar with styles; Styles + Do not know where to buy; Styles + Other;
Do not know where to buy (access issue)	37	14.6%	Do not know where to buy; Access + Local preference; Access + Other;
Other	43	16.9%	Standalone “Other” + mixed combinations not fitting main categories.

Of the 254 respondents who were aware of Japanese brands, 47.6 per cent had bought them, compared to 52.4 per cent who had not.

Too expensive (19.7%), local brand preference (18.5%), knowledge gaps (15.4%), style unfamiliarity (15.0%), and limited buying access (14.6%) are the most often cited combined multiple reasons for not buying Japanese products. A former manager of Grameen UNIQLO stated,

"Customers have objections about prices, and if supplies are not regular, they lose trust."

Another academic specialist noted,

"These brands are not reaching the middle class due to their premium positioning."

Notably, 16.9 per cent gave other explanations, frequently in addition to the primary ones. Overall, the results point to a combination of cultural (local preference, unfamiliarity with style), informational (awareness, access), and economic (price) limitations that restrict Japanese clothing's market penetration in Bangladesh.

5. PERCEPTION AND MARKET FIT

Perception of Japanese Apparel Brands

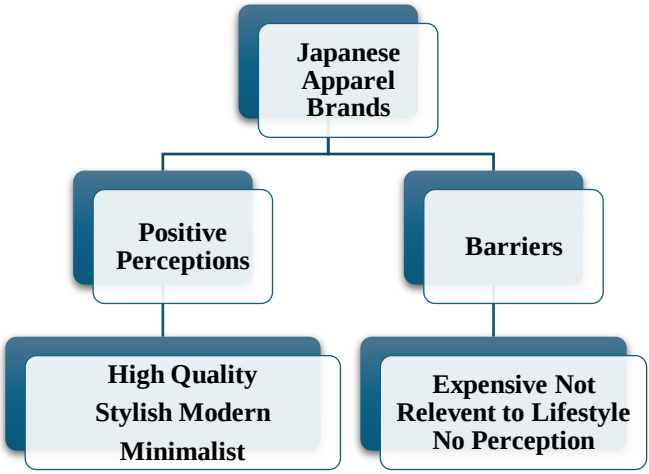


Figure 6. Perception of Japanese Apparel Brands, (Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Cultural Fit Thematic Categories of Comments on Japanese Brands

Table 4. Frequency and Descriptive Statistics of Cultural Fit (Source: Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	54	21.3
2	57	22.4
3	53	20.9
4	46	18.1
5	44	17.3
Total	254	100.0
Mean	2.88	
Median	3	
Mode	2	
Standard Deviation	1.39	

The findings indicate that most respondents thought Japanese apparel companies had a medium or poor cultural fit (mean = 2.88, median = 3, mode = 2). The pick of '2' (57 respondents) and '1' (54 respondents), which have the greatest numbers, suggests that substantial number of participants do not think the companies can fit into their culture and the overall trend indicates a limited cultural fit, despite some respondents choosing '4' and '5', indicating a cheerful outlook. The SD (1.39) represents a range of viewpoints, from rejection to partial approval. This suggests that businesses must embrace localization, culturally sensitive design, and lifestyle-friendly tactics.

"Bangladeshi consumers are still not fully embracing Japanese brands; local tastes and cultural fit are essential,"

A faculty member from BGMEA University of Fashion & Technology (BUFT) stated in the interview. In another interview the MICLO purchasing chief continued, *"It is difficult to survive in the market if local designs and large sizes are not included,"*

These remarks demonstrate that Bangladeshi customers and Japanese clothing manufacturers do not yet have a close cultural bond. To boost market acceptability, marketers must thus use lifestyle-friendly tactics, culturally aware designs, and localization.

According to the statistics, fashion branding tactics that mix price, exposure, and local cultural connection are the ones that most appeal to Bangladeshi customers. Collaborating with regional companies and combining vibrant styles have the biggest effects, followed by combining national or fusion designs with consumer-pleasing neutral or minimalist styles. Additionally, Discounts based on trends and mall presence increase attraction. Both online and offline presence are crucial. Given the circumstances, the findings show that customers like a hybrid approach, in which companies combine contemporary design with cultural, keep costs low, and guarantee broad accessibility, particularly with the help of regional partnerships.

Table 5: Thematic Categories of Respondents' Comments on Japanese Brands (Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Theme Code	Theme Description	Frequency	Percent
B	Price & Affordability	150	30.0%
C	Marketing & Promotion	127	25.4%
A	Outlets & Accessibility	101	20.2%
D	Cultural Fit & Usability	92	18.4%
E	Brand Preference (Local vs JP)	30	6.0%
Total		**500**	100%

6. CASE STUDY: GRAMEEN UNIQLO IN BANGLADESH

In collaboration with Uniqlo's parent company, Fast Retailing, and the Grameen Bank Group, Grameen Uniqlo was founded as a social enterprise. Its objective was to supply the Bangladeshi market with reasonably priced, high-quality, locally made basic apparel. 2013 saw the opening of the first retail location in Dhaka (The Business Standard, 2023). By 2023, every store had closed owing to changing business conditions.

The limited influence of Grameen Uniqlo in Bangladesh brings to light a number of important problems that explain why Japanese apparel companies find it difficult to establish themselves in the local fashion industry. The first was a discrepancy between market positioning and pricing.

Although middle- and lower-middle-class buyers found Uniqlo's simple apparel idea appealing, Local competitors supplied comparable items at lower prices, eroding Uniqlo's advantage (Bari & Jin, 2021). Second, it failed to reach rural and semi-urban regions with its retail expansion, which was mostly concentrated in Dhaka. Consequently, the brand failed to solidify its position outside of the metropolitan elite. At the grassroots level, however, local brands have had a far bigger influence. Third, a hostile environment for international retail development is created by structural hurdles, including governance concerns, infrastructure limitations, and bureaucratic complexity (World Bank, 2022).

Government regulations have also been a constraint. Complex processes for earnings repatriation and conflicting tax/VAT requirements produced administrative friction (Bangladesh Bank, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Additionally, the predictability of foreign retail development through online platforms is diminished by the numerous changes made to digital commerce legislation since 2020, including regulations on foreign ownership and consumer protection (Ministry of Commerce, 2021). The desire of international clothing companies to participate in the local retail industry is also indirectly impacted by increased trade uncertainty, such as tariffs imposed by international partners.

When asked, how significant a role does local relationships (such as retailer alliances, joint ventures, and distribution channels) and price play in the success of Japanese clothing firms in this country? In response, participant Z said,

"I think Japanese apparel brands rely on three key factors: competitive pricing, widespread distribution, and local collaborations. Without competitive pricing, customers may switch to other brands, and widespread online dissemination is crucial for brand awareness. Collaborating with regional merchants helps understand the market and create culturally appropriate collections."

The rural Uniqlo instance demonstrates the importance of localization and cultural fit in adapting to Bangladesh's evolving fashion culture from a strategic standpoint.

Japanese companies can use a *'Japan-standard, Bangladesh-made'* approach, which uses sizes and fits that are appropriate for South Asian body shapes and ensures excellent quality control while retaining local production. Particularly during the holiday season, hybrid retail channels that combine physical stores and online shopping might improve brand memory. Increased cultural relevance may be achieved through partnerships with regional designers, influencers, and young populations. Additionally, supply chain resilience can be a useful strategy for mitigating policy and tariff risks. Policy streamlining, such as simpler VAT and licensing, may make Bangladesh more appealing to Japanese enterprises (World Bank, 2022; Ministry of Commerce, 2021). Inquired as to whether government/trade policy initiatives or collaborations such as Grameen UNIQLO encouraged the sale of Japanese apparel in Bangladesh. Although collaborations like Grameen Uniqlo were a nice idea, they were unable to significantly increase the popularity of Japanese apparel Participant Y answered,

"Despite raising awareness, the general market had minimal impact on Japanese apparel, and government initiatives and trade policy programs did not specifically support Japanese brands, indicating that Japanese apparel has not yet solidified its place in the Bangladeshi fashion industry."

To put it briefly, the rural Uniqlo story illustrates that Japanese clothing companies in Bangladesh must overcome two obstacles: first, overcoming cultural and market positioning differences; and second, getting past legislative restrictions that prevent international retail growth. Only by tackling these problems will Japanese clothing companies be able to move past their 'Branded yet Unseen' position and become prominent players in Bangladesh's vibrant fashion industry.

7. FACTORS BEHIND LIMITED IMPACT ON BANGLADESHI FASHION MARKET

Both the survey and the analysis of the interviews show that Japanese apparel brands have limited influence on the Bangladeshi fashion sector. While 50.8 per cent of respondents were aware of Japanese brands, just 33.1 per cent had been to a store. Three primary causes for the limited influence of Japanese companies have been identified based on the interview and survey.

As an AARONG Employee pointed out, *'many consumers hesitate to invest in the brand due to price and cost'* this proves economic restrictions as the first cause. The second and third factor limiting customer acceptability is a lack of social and cultural fit. A MICLO executive stated, *"local colors, designs, and clothing styles are the least alternative to Japanese brands, and many consumers prefer them."*

"It is challenging to reach consumers outside of the city because they are unfamiliar with the brand," former Marketing Officer of Grameen UNIQLO observed. Additionally, currently MICLO Employee who was also a former UNIQLO employee stated, '*Limited distribution and a lack of retail presence, particularly outside of Dhaka, sometimes destroyed consumer faith in the brand.'*

7.1 Policies and Strategies

Interviews revealed several strategies for Japanese apparel brands to flourish in Bangladesh. The most crucial aspect is localization. *"It is difficult to survive in the market if you do not include local designs and plus sizes,"* stated one participant. Competitive pricing, the usage of online and offline channels, and expansion into tier-2 cities are necessary in terms of distribution and price. By working with neighborhood organizations through partnerships, brand awareness may be raised. Participants focused on digital-first marketing and experiential strategies. Sustainability, particularly appealing to urban youth and working women, was viewed as essential by participants.

A more detailed review of the information gathered from the interviews shows that the participants' viewpoints differ and have a number of similarities. However, the theme presentation offers more succinct and lucid depiction of the research findings than a direct participant-based presentation. Challenges, Adaptation, Pricing, Partnerships, Advice, demands, Strategies, and Emerging Trends are the key themes that have been used to characterize the perspectives of the participants. An overview of the findings is given by the Thematic Insight Matrix of Interviewees' Opinions table below, which displays these thematic insights.

Table 6: Thematic Insight Matrix of Interviewees' opinions (Developed by Authors from collected Data)

Theme	Key Insights	Representative Evidence
Main Challenges	High pricing, weak visibility, cultural mismatch, lack of marketing, limited design innovation	"Japanese styles not resonating with heritage-driven buyers" (Participant C); "Weak brand positioning, poor localization" (Participant Y)
Alignment & Adaptations	CSR/NGO linkages-built trust but design mismatched; heritage-driven buyers not convinced	"CSR approach was good, but styles did not click" (Participant X); "Social mission helps trust, but design mismatch" (Participant A)
Pricing	Seen as premium/luxury; unaffordable for mass and middle-class buyers	"Premium but unaffordable for mass" (Participant A); "Japanese = luxury pricing" (Participant C)
Partnerships	NGO ties (Grameen) helped credibility; lack of local designer/academic collaborations	"Grameen link gave acceptance" (Participant X); "No strong partnerships with BUFT or BGMEA" (Participant Z)
Advice for Brands	Need more localization, modest & fusion styles, cultural adaptation, youth-oriented approach	"Adapt to youth-oriented fast fashion" (Participant B); "Japanese brands should localize" (Participant C)
Stocking & Demand	Demand mainly for basics; stockouts common; extremely low repeat demand compared to locals	"Weak sales in small towns" (Participant X); "Exceptionally low demand compared to local brands" (Participant C)
Strategies (Success/Failure)	Success: CSR/social trust; Failure: poor cultural fit, weak marketing, pricing gap	"Success: CSR branding; Failure: weak marketing" (Participant A); "Failure: ignoring consumer culture" (Participant Y)
Emerging Trends	Growth in sustainable basics, fusion wear, youth fast fashion, e-commerce, ethical fashion	"Affordable, modest, durable wear rising" (Participant X); "E-commerce & digital-first fashion" (Participant Y)

The matrix focuses on repeating issues such as collaborations, price, localization, and rising trends, demonstrating how cultural and economic differences limit Japanese apparel brands' potential in Bangladesh. While academics have recognized structural difficulties like premium positioning and lack of localization as important hurdles, retailers have mostly focused on practical issues like pricing, supply, and inventory.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE

The study's findings unequivocally show that Japanese apparel brands have little influence in Bangladesh due to economic, cultural, social, and infrastructure limitations. The primary obstacle has been determined to be financial limitations. Unaffordable prices repel middle- and lower-middle-class customers.

When taken as a whole, these quantitative and qualitative findings show that the limited influence of Japanese clothing labels is caused by cultural acceptability, a lack of customer knowledge, and constraints in market infrastructure, in addition to expensive pricing or designs. Therefore, these businesses must use quantifiable localization, culturally sensitive designs, wide distribution channels, and awareness-raising marketing methods to successfully enter and gain traction in the Bangladeshi market.

Second, a lack of social and cultural fit was noted. Cultural fit is weak since most customers believe Japanese goods do not accord with local styles. *'Local tastes and cultural fit are essential; Bangladeshi consumers are still not fully embracing Japanese brands,'* a BUFT faculty member observed, pointing out that the absence of local colors, styles, and plus sizes is impeding consumer adoption. Third, there is little retail presence and brand recognition. Only 33.1 per cent of customers visited a store, demonstrating that awareness without access is ineffectual.

Japanese brands are typically employed as complements rather than as stand-alone options, according to the examination of buying patterns. Overall, the primary causes of Japanese apparel's limited influence in the Bangladeshi fashion market have been determined to be excessive costs, a lack of cultural fit, a lack of shop penetration, and a modest level of customer awareness.

In order to expand their market share in Bangladesh in the future, Japanese companies must employ several successful tactics. First and foremost, localization is crucial; patterns, colors, and plus sizes should be incorporated, and concepts that combine Bangladeshi fashion with cultural fusion should be shown. Second, the price strategy should be redesigned to employ discounts, package offers, and seasonal promotions together with suitable pricing for middle- and lower-middle-class clients. Third, social media, influencer marketing, and experiential initiatives are crucial for marketing and raising brand recognition. Community-based projects or corporate social responsibility (CSR) can boost customer trust. Online-offline channels and retail development in tier-2 and tier-3 cities should be combined to boost store presence and distribution. To enhance consumer experience, lifestyle-friendly designs, simple return procedures, and trial collection guidelines must be put into place. Market acceptability will rise as a result of local collaborations with designers, partnerships like BUFT and BGMEA, and the introduction of limited edition or collaborative collections. Additionally, it is critical to promote ethical and ecological fashion, particularly for metropolitan women and youth.

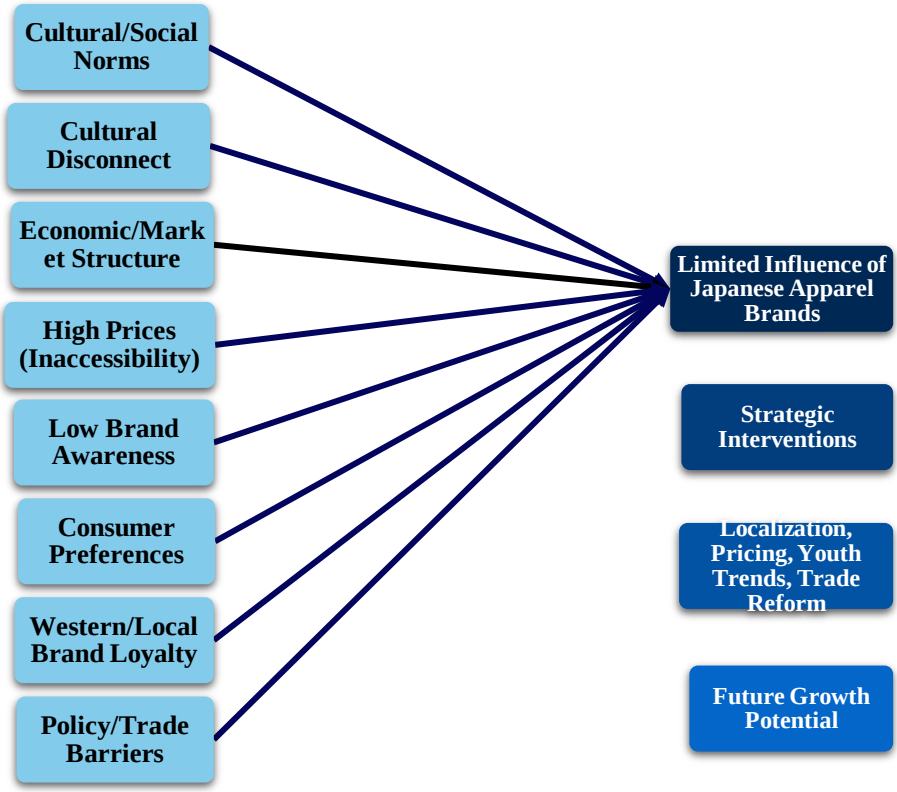


Figure 7: Factors behind limited influence and recommendations for future growth (Source: Developed by Authors)

CONCLUSION

Japanese clothing companies must embrace local culture, consumer knowledge, availability, and customer-friendly policies in addition to premium or style-based initiatives if they want to thrive in the Bangladeshi fashion industry. In the long term, localization, competitive pricing, mindful marketing, and local collaborations will boost Japanese firms' market share and acceptability. Overall, it is evident that Japanese clothing companies have little sway over the Bangladeshi fashion industry, mostly because of infrastructure, social, cultural, and economic factors. They could, however, be able to boost market acceptability provided the appropriate tactics and regulations are implemented. The chapter demonstrates the risks associated with transferring a worldwide brand identity without effective cultural translation.

UNIQLO's collapse illustrates that mere status or goodwill is insufficient; a lack of cultural translation, market awareness, and adaptability to local conditions can have serious implications. This cautionary tale emphasizes Japanese brands operating or planning to operate in Bangladesh that future success depends on reinventing, rather than blindly replicating, global business models.

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CHAPTER 3
AI-DRIVEN OPTIMIZATION OF FASHION SUPPLY CHAINS: SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Olaniyi H. ALIU[1]
Jamiu R. OLASINA[2]
Ojo J. ADARAMOLA[3]
Olawale I. OGUNYINKA[4]
Adeola O. AKINLEYE[5]

[1]Department of Computer Engineering, School of Engineering, Federal, olytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria, olaniyi.aliu@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4116-1159.
[2]ASPMIRE Lab, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria, Department of Computer Engineering, School of Engineering, Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria, jamiu.olasina@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6774-0722.
[3]Department of Computer Engineering, School of Engineering, Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria, ojo.adaramola@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2959-0361.
[4]Department of Computer Engineering, School of Engineering, Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria, olawaleige@fedralpolyilaro.edu.ng, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1112-4487.
[5]Department of Computer Engineering, School of Engineering, Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria, akinleyeao@gmail.com, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2939-5066.

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has been one of the most dynamic and competitive industries in the global economy, and yet it has been challenging in areas of observation (Da Giau et al., 2020). Contemporary fashion supply channels are intricate, as sometimes they extend over various continents, and they have many players that include manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, retailers, and consumers. This complexity brings inefficiencies of delays, expensive nature, overproduction, and wastage. Simultaneously, the industry has been extensively reproached due to its adverse environmental and social effects, such as carbon emission and water pollution, as well as unfavorable labor environments (Gupta & Tripathi, 2020). Conventional methods of supply chain management are becoming less and less capable of responding to the growing consumer demands of quicker delivery, products tailor-made to customers, and greener supply chain practices. These are the primary challenges: the fashion industry requires a more efficient, transparent, and sustainable system of supply chain that would be able to decrease the amount of waste, enhance profitability, and address the increasing sustainability expectations. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a possibility in order to resolve these issues (Kobrinskii, 2023).

The implementation of AI technologies is changing every industry across the globe by promoting the use of data-driven decisions, automation, and predictions. AI can be an important part of the optimization of all aspects of the fashion supply chain in demand forecasting, inventory management, logistics, and sustainable use of resources. AI systems can be used to analyze massive amounts of data in real-time and draw patterns, predict consumer behavior, and steer companies to make more intelligent decisions (Okeleke et al., 2024). As an example, AI can assist retailers in not having to stockpile a certain item since, through forecasting, the specific demand can be identified, or it can also help logistics companies identify the most efficient delivery routes in terms of fuel consumption. This increases the efficiency, and the cost is reduced as well as the environmental footprint of the operations. Concisely, AI offers the means of transforming fashion supply chains into more intelligent, sustainable, and cost-effective ones.

The economic effects of AI-driven supply chains are enormous. Historically, in the fashion industry, firms have had a high rate of unsold inventory, discounting, and wastage, and this directly determines profitability. With AI, such losses can be reduced because the production will be more aligned with the real demand of consumers. Moreover, AI-driven automation minimizes manual tasks and thus labor expenses, and it enhances precision. To investors and stakeholders, the implementation of AI technologies can generate competitive advantages, improve market positioning, and generate new income streams (Wamba-Taguimdje et al., 2020). Economically, adopting AI in managing the supply chain is not only a technological enhancement but also a business survival and expansion requirement in a marketplace that is more and more digital.

The issue of sustainability has become one of the fundamental requirements of the fashion industry's consumers and regulators. Though short-run, fast fashion has been criticized all over the world due to its role in waste and environmental pollution (Bildirici et al., 2024). Governments, international organizations, and civil society groups are pressing towards tightening the carbon emissions, ethical sourcing, and recycling regulations. To address these issues of sustainability, AI can be utilized to offer the means of tracking environmental influences, decreasing resource use, and exerting some support to the processes of the circular economy (Onyeaka et al., 2023). One could imagine, as an example, AI algorithms may be used to optimize the patterns of fabric cutting to waste less when producing, or they can be used to monitor the carbon footprint of raw materials throughout the supply chain. When fashion businesses incorporate sustainability into daily practices, they can establish reputations that are more robust, have an appeal to customers who are eco-conscious, and meet regulatory requirements.

Use of AI in fashion supply chains is manifold. Demand forecasting is one of the most influential spheres. Historical sales used in traditional forecasting systems and intuition can not always reflect sudden shifts in consumer behavior (Oteri et al., 2023). Instead, AI can incorporate sales data with social media trends, online browsing history, and even weather forecasts to create very accurate predictions.

This will enable fashion firms to generate the appropriate quantity of products at the appropriate time, minimizing both scanty and surplus inventory. Likewise, AI can be used to increase inventory control through automatic monitoring of inventory levels in various sites and suggest the restocking or redistribution of inventory in time. This guarantees the products are delivered quicker to the customers, and wastages that could arise as a result of unsold products are avoided.

The other important field that AI can help to optimize the supply chain is logistics and transportation. Raw materials and finished goods cross borders in a costly and time-taking movement. The AI systems can examine traffic-related information, fuel consumption, customs, and shipping delays and suggest the most effective routes and methods of delivery (Bhaduri, 2025). This does not only save money but also decreases transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, AI technology is able to identify possible risks like the disruption of the supply chain due to natural calamities, labor unions, or political unrest. These systems are important in ensuring that companies have contingency plans in place and avoid failure of business by giving early warnings.

The fashion industry is also changing its supplier management with the use of AI. The companies may deal with hundreds of suppliers, and it is hard to guarantee quality, ethical standards, and delivery in time. The AI systems can assess the suppliers in terms of performance indicators, sustainability history, and adherence to labor regulations (Ayobami et al., 2024). This will enable businesses to establish more solid and trusting relationships. Moreover, AI paired with blockchain technology can improve the level of transparency by developing records that cannot be altered, which will guarantee that raw materials are obtained in a sustainable and ethical manner. This is particularly noteworthy in responding to concerns relating to child labor, unsafe working conditions, and environmental exploitation within the global supply chain of fashion.

Another field that AI-driven supply chains have an impact on is the consumer experience. Modern-day shoppers demand light-speed, individualized, and hassle-free services, online and offline.

AI assists companies in interpreting customer preferences and buying behavior in order to create personal offers and product recommendations (Gkikas & Theodoridis, 2021). Further, chatbots and virtual assistants with AI will improve the customer service, and real-time tracking systems will enable buyers to check their orders. Such enhancements in customer satisfaction end up boosting brand loyalty and developing economic gains in the long run for companies.

The competition within the fashion supply chain sector will be redefined in the long run by the application of AI (Babu et al., 2024). Those that adopt AI-based optimization processes will easily attain efficiency, profitability, and sustainability, whereas those that resist will be at a disadvantage. The extended economic impacts are higher competitiveness of the countries and regions where AI technologies are implemented, changes in the dynamics of global trade, and the establishment of new professional positions in the fields of data science, AI ethics, and sustainable design. To policymakers, this poses key concerns regarding regulation, how to encourage innovation, and the balance between economic growth and environmental accountability.

To conclude, the fashion industry is at a desperate crossroads. The traditional supply chain model is unable to satisfy the two expectations of profitability and sustainability in the rapidly changing world. AI is offering a potential to revolutionize the industry through optimization of supply chains, waste reduction, augmentation of customer experiences, and environmentally friendly operations.

Economic and environmental advantages of AI-driven supply chains have enabled them to be a potent instrument in long-term growth and resilience. Nevertheless, in order to maximize these advantages, it is necessary that the stakeholders address issues concerning cost, skills, and ethics. Through this, the fashion industry will have the opportunity to create a future where economic prosperity can be achieved at the same time as sustainable practice. Artificial intelligence (AI) represents a disruptive technology that has been introduced to impact the fashion industry, not only in the way the organization operates but also its sustainability policies.

Roy (2024) stresses the role of AI in innovation in terms of customer experience, operational responsiveness, and environmental impact, pointing out that it could cut down on waste by up to 25 percent and improve the level of forecasting by up to 90 percent. Nevertheless, MRI has not yet been welcomed because of its high prices, ethical issues, and a risk of job loss, even though the technology is quite advantageous. The same ideas are reverberated with Rathore (2019), who underlines the pressing need to incorporate sustainability into fashion marketing. The argument presented by Rathore is that AI is an appropriate means to get profitability and environmental responsibility together, especially through better demand forecasting, supply chain traceability, and enabling sustainable marketing.

Cooperation along the financial events chain in the clothing business is also a complicated business, and Qu and Kim (2024) indicate that occasionally with opposing interests between suppliers, manufacturers, and retailers, the performance and consequently durability are compromised. An option they argue is the potential usefulness of virtual integration, which has to refer to AI, and coordination or system-level decision-making should be achieved with its assistance. The usefulness of AI is also depicted within the real-life examples. As demonstrated in Kumar et al. (2024) using the example of mega corporations like Walmart, Amazon, and Zara, AI has a very high potential of converting responsiveness, accuracy, and sustainability. Nevertheless, as these authors also admitted, it is quite difficult to repeat this success at a smaller company, especially for those companies whose technological base is scarce.

Prabodhani et al. (2025) pay attention to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Sri Lanka and emphasize the problem of the implicated accessibility. In a study, they find that although AI has the potential of enhancing efficiency, resilience, and sustainability, SMEs in developing economies encounter challenges, including prohibitive prices due to their lack of expertise and challenges with integration. Another perspective that complements that of Nweje and Taiwo (2025) describes the case study of the Procter & Gamble Company and Coca-Cola. Their results depict how AI and, in particular, its combination with the Internet of Things (IoT) can facilitate efficiency of inventory control and predictive supply chain forms and bring about economic and environmental advantages.

Nevertheless, they observe that such applications are situated mostly in multinational companies.Other scholars underscore the centrality of sustainability in AI-enabled supply chains. Arora et al. (2023) hypothesize that the sustainability crisis could be offered as an excellent model with the help of AI in order to introduce the practice of fast fashion into the environment, in particular in the sphere of risk management and efficiency. Following a systematic review of AI in the field of fashion in 2010-2022, Ramos et al. (2023) indicate that the number of applications of AI in fashion in the sphere of sustainability increases, but empirical research on this matter is scarce. In the same way, Jones (2025) admits AI potential with regard to forecasting, logistics, and suppliers' management, yet demands the practical frameworks to eliminate the difficulties associated with data availability, competencies, and safety.

The adaptation of AI to developing countries can also point out the special chances and limitations. In a set of cases investigated in Morocco, Iran, and Nigeria, Sakala et al. (2023) note that the cost reduction and operational efficiency have improved considerably when the AI has been introduced. These achievements, they emphasize, are, however, as a rule, single cases and not applicable to the industry. In this regard, Nyamekeh et al. (2025) observe that AI in conjunction with IoT, machine learning, and blockchain has the potential to increase real-time visibility in supply chains, which is one of the most important accelerators of sustainability.

However, lack of a definite technological integration roadmap is one of the ongoing threats. New frameworks are already emerging, like Fashion 4.0, that represent now another form of looking at the opportunities of AI transforming the industry.

According to Rockett et al., Fashion 4.0 is a system of smart factories, smart networks, and smart products as the third holistic model of the circle with the involvement of consumer-oriented fashion (2025). Although the paradigm offers significant opportunities for subsequently increasing innovation and sustainability, the authors warn that emerging designers and small brands may not be capable of fully taking part in this transformation due to the constraints in the resources.

1. METHODOLOGY

The methodology to be used in this research includes systematizing the process of designing, training, and testing of machine learning models in order to optimize the decision-making process of a supply chain related to fashion. This part aims to outline the data, data preprocessing, feature encoding, model selection, and training operations, evaluation schemes, and the integration of an ensemble of these models as applied to the present work.

1.1 Dataset Description

The data used in this paper is a well-known standard set of fashion items images. It is made of grayscale pictures, which depict various types of clothing and accessories including shirts, trousers, dresses and shoes (Xiao et al., 2017). All the images are of equal size, 28 by 28 pixels, which makes the total 784 pixel values per sample.

The data is separated into two sets, one being used as the training set to construct the models and the other one used as the evaluation set. All images will be labeled and their categories are those belonging to a total of ten possible classes. In this dataset was chosen due to the fact that it offers a difficult, but structured, testing environment to machine learning algorithms and is a modern substitute to older image recognition benchmarks. Its balanced category representation renders it to be the best candidate in assessing classification algorithms in a fashion-based scenario.

1.2 Data Preprocessing

The preprocessing is necessary so that the dataset can be appropriate to the machine learning algorithms. All of the images which were initially in the form of a matrix of pixel values were flattened to a one-dimensional vector with length 784 to be used as model input. The pixel values (between 0 and 255) were scaled to an interval between 0 and 1. Normalization was done to mitigate the influence of different pixel intensities and to enhance training efficiency of the models, particularly gradient-based classifiers like a Logistic Regression and Support Vector Machines. Besides normalization, the dataset was shuffled to have random distribution of classes between the training and test sets to avoid bias when learning the model.

The only feature engineering that was needed was this step since the data has been structured so that it is direct in testing the efficacy of machine learning techniques on image classification tasks.

1.3 Model Selection

The experimentation was on six machine learning models. These models can be seen as a mixture of simple, interpretable algorithms as well as more complicated ensemble methods. Their choice makes them cover both the linear and non-linear learning paradigms as well as test the advantages of ensemble methods.

Logistic Regression (LR)

Logistic Regression Logistic Regression is a linear classification model which can be successfully used when operating on high-dimensional data. It was selected as a reference model because it is simple and effective in addressing multi-class problems with one-vs-rest strategy (Shah et al., 2020).

Decision Tree (DT)

Decision Trees are non-linear models, which divide the dataset into subgroups, depending on the feature values. They are also intuitive, interpretable and capable of complex patterns in the data. They can however overfit unless tuned (Nie et al., 2020).

Random Forest (RF)

Random Forest is a set of decision trees which increases accuracy and generalization by averaging the prediction results of a set of trees. It has a lower overfitting issue that is associated with single trees and it works well in high-dimensional data (Salman et al., 2024).

Support Vector Machine (SVM)

SVMs are effective classifiers which attempt to obtain an ideal hyperplane in order to categorize data (Abdullah & Abdulazeez, 2021). In this research, a non-linear fashion image structure was dealt with using a kernel-

based SVM. Despite being computationally-intensive, SVMs are often reported to be very effective in image recognition.

1.4 Model Training

All the models were trained with the training dataset. The cross-validation was performed to select the most appropriate parameters in each algorithm. In the case of Logistic Regression, regularization parameters were modified to avoid overfitting.

The decision trees were optimized in terms of maximum depth, as well as minimum samples on split. Random Forest hyperparameters like estimators and the maximum features were optimized. In the case of SVM, various kernel functions and penalty parameters were experimented with, to obtain improved accuracy. The outputs as input features to a meta-classifier whose choice was based on Logistic Regression because it is simple and can also incorporate different predictions.

1.5 Model Evaluation

The standard classification metrics were applied to the test dataset on the models. The Accuracy was the main metric since the dataset was balanced; however, other metrics like precision, recalls, and F1-score were also made to ensure that the model performance is assessed comprehensively.

Confusion matrices were created to show the classes that the models were more likely to miss giving an idea of the weaknesses of each model. All models were trained and tested on the same dataset splits to be fair in comparison. Computational efficiency, training time, and scalability were also monitored because these metrics are key parameters in the real-world uses of AI in fashion supply chains.

1.6 Justification of Methodology

The methodological decisions made in this study are necessary because they are aimed at a balance between interpretability, accuracy, and robustness. The simple models, such as Logistic Regression and Decision Trees, are more transparent and also serve as a benchmark, whereas more complex models, such as Random Forest, and SVM are likely to be more accurate.

The stacking ensemble in its turn is a complex integration approach that tries to achieve the maximum predictive power through integrating the complementary capabilities of specific models. This form of organization makes the research not just showcase the promise of individual machine learning algorithms, but also emphasize the utility of ensemble approaches to solving complicated classification tasks which are applicable to fashion supply chains.

2. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The fast development of the artificial intelligence has changed the way industries solve difficult decision-making issues, such as optimization of the fashion supply chain. Machine learning models are essential in enhancing efficiency, accuracy and sustainability in this sector. Support Vector Machine (SVM) is one of the most popular algorithms that can be discussed as the strongest to deal with high-dimensional data, whereas Random Forest (RF) is the strongest to minimize overfits thanks to the use of an ensemble. Logistic Regression (LR) is also a trusted foundation of classification work since it is simple and understandable, and Decision Tree (DT) offers decision-making that is easy to use and explain. These models combine to present a complementary advantage when it comes to addressing the challenge of classification.

Figure 1. Scatter Plot for the MNIST Dataset

This plot in figure 1 above is a scatter matrix, demonstrating the relationship between the initial few pixel values of the Fashion-MNIST images with one another. The plots use two-pixel positions of the small plots, and the distribution (histogram) of the values of one pixel is displayed in the diagonal plots. The dots will be colored based on the label of clothing, i.e., shirts, trousers, or shoes. The dots cluster around the bottom or by the axes, so many pixel values are very near to zero (white background, or empty space). The chart assists us to view trends, intersections, and disparities between classes in the data set.

Table 1. Performance Metrics of the Selected ML Models

Model	**Accuracy (%)**	**Precision (%)**	**Recall (%)**	**F1-Score (%)**
Logistic Regression	84.47	84.35	84.47	84.39
Decision Trees	78.74	78.84	78.74	78.78
Random Forest	88.22	88.15	88.22	88.07
Support Vector Machine	88.65	88.58	88.65	88.56

The table 1 shows the performance of four machine learning models, namely, the Logistic Regression, and the Decision Trees, the Random Forest and Support Vector Machine on a classification task. They are assessed with the help of the four standard measures, namely, accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score in percentages.

The accuracy of the Logistic Regression was 84.47, and the precision, the recall, and the F1-score all neared this figure. This demonstrates the consistency and reliability of the model, but not the best performer. On the contrary, Decision Trees gave the lowest results on all measures with an accuracy of 78.74%. Although interpretable, this model is overfitting and does not work as well on unseen data.

Random Forest got much better and it reached an accuracy of 88.22%. Its accuracy, recall and F1-score are also balanced implying strong classification capacity and enhanced generalization than using one decision tree.

Support Vector Machine, however, performs the best as the accuracy is at 88.65 and the values of precision, recall, and F1-score are equally high. This indicates SVM can be very effective in identifying the classes.

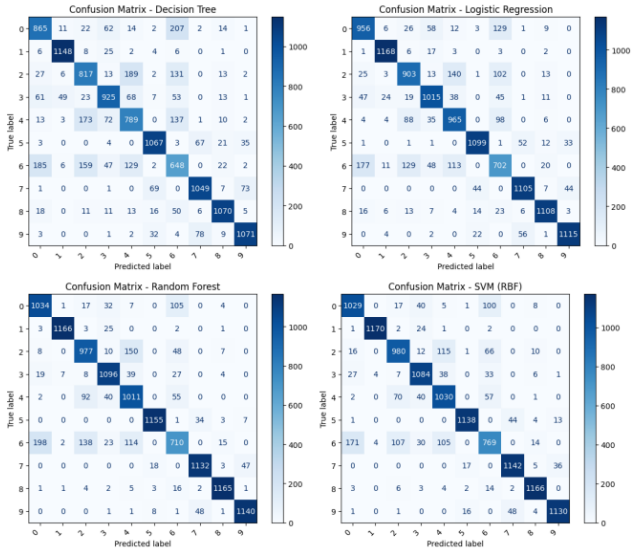

Figure 2. Confusion Matrix for the Four Models

The figure 2 above demonstrates four confusions matrices of the four machine learning models: Decision Tree, Logistic Regression, Random Forest, and Support Vector Machine (SVM) to classify the Fashion-MNIST dataset. The true labels (rows) and the predicted labels (columns) are compared in each of the matrices. The correct classifications are indicated on the diagonal and the misclassifications in the off-diagonal values. Darker shades of blue correspond to higher counts. The Decision Tree model is more erroneous with a noticeable deviation in few categories. An example is its confusion of shirts and tops (or T-shirts) and coats, hence its relative lack of accuracy. Logistic Regression works better, and the diagonals are stronger and the misclassification is lower but there remains some overlap between the similar items such as shirts, coats, and pullovers. The linear model is a lot less clear, as shown by the diagonal better performance of the Random Forest model in almost all categories. It minimizes most of the mistakes observed with the single decision tree especially in the classification of the trousers, sneakers and ankle boots.

Nevertheless, it continues to have difficulties with those categories that are similar in looks, like shirt vs. T-shirt tops. The best performance is overall provided by the SVM (RBF kernel). The darkest is its diagonal, with consistently correct predictions in all classes. Misclassifications are fairly uncommon, and mostly restricted to similarities in clothing. As an illustration, shirts or T-shirts/tops still exhibit slight overlap; however, this is not that severe compared to other models. Figure 3 below shows the performance chart for the selected models.

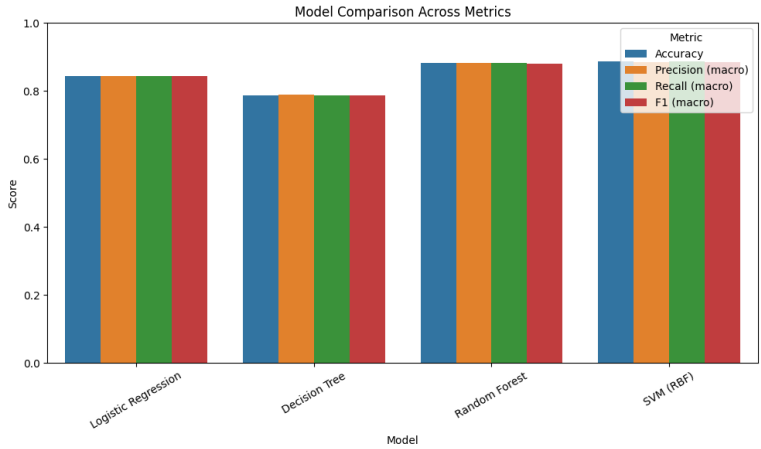

Figure 3. Performance Comparison of The Selected Models

CONCLUSION

The paper has revealed that machine learning models of artificial intelligence (AI) can be significant in enhancing efficiency and accuracy within the fashion supply chain. After testing the models Logistic Regression (LR), Decision Tree (DT), Random Forest (RF), and Support Vector Machine (SVM), it was evident that each of the models possesses both strengths and weaknesses, yet they help enhance better decision-making in classification tasks. The scatter plot revealed that the Fashion-MNIST data are very complicated, and each of the clothes groups has intersecting components. This complication renders classification a hard task and necessitates having models that are capable of handling high-dimensional data. This performance metrics table demonstrated the visible distinction of the models.

Logistic regression was obtained with moderate results, and its accuracy is 84.47; thus, it is reliable but not the strongest. The poorest accuracy of 78.74 was obtained by the decision tree, revealing that it is easy to understand and interpret but easy to overfit and hard to see through the invisible data. Random Forest exhibited much higher accuracy of 88.22 percent, indicating the strength of ensemble learning and its generalization capability in comparison to one tree. Nevertheless, SVM gave the highest performance of 88.65% accuracy, which demonstrates that it is effective in dealing with non-linear and complex data.

The confusion matrices provided more information about model behavior. The decision tree was the most susceptible to classified similarities in visuals such as shirts, T-shirts, and coats. Logistic regression became better, yet it still had the problem of overlapping categories. Random Forest minimized most of these errors, particularly with trousers, sneakers, and boots. SVM was the best, having a specific diagonal line within the matrix depicting very high classification and fewer misclassifications, even among the visually similar categories.

The comparison chart on performance showed that SVM and Random Forest are the most efficient models to use with this data and that the Logistic Regression will be a good benchmark, but Decision Tree will also be good in terms of its interpretability ability, although it is less accurate than SVM and the other two models. In a bigger context, the results demonstrate that machine learning could be used to streamline the supply chain decision-making process within the fashion industry. Proper classification models are able to assist in improved demand forecasting, inventory management, and product suggestions. This saves on wastage, enhances efficiency, and is also related to production according to actual consumer demand. These models are economical, as they may enable companies to prevent overproduction, decrease unsold inventory, and cut costs, and also as a part of the sustainability objectives, which is reducing resource consumption and waste.

The study also attests that no one model is flawless. Simple models, such as logistic regression and decision trees, are handy because of their interpretability, as well as their benchmarking, and more sophisticated models, such as random forests and SVMs, provide better accuracy and strength.

Practically, even better performance can be obtained by combining models with the help of ensemble methods due to the strengths of each of them. In summary, machine learning offers the fashion industry effective instruments to shift to smarter, more efficient, and more sustainable supply chains. Companies that integrate AI-powered solutions can be more profitable, less harmful to the environment, and faster and more personalized to their consumers. The findings of the current work show that the use of the appropriate models, especially the ensemble strategies and SVM, can be a pivotal difference in addressing complicated classification issues in fashion supply chains.

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CHAPTER 4
THE COMBINATION OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, CONSUMER BEHAVIOR, AND E-COMMERCE ECOSYSTEMS

Dr. M.K. GANESHAN[1]

[1]AMET University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, kganeshanmba@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-2407-1527

INTRODUCTION

The global fashion industry has undergone deep transformation over the past two decades, driven by technological innovation, digital globalization, and shifting consumer expectations. Traditionally dominated by physical retail stores and seasonal fashion cycles, the industry is now defined by real-time connectivity, data-driven personalization, and cross-border digital trade. This new phase widely recognized as Fashion 5.0 represents the convergence of digital transformation, consumer behavior, and e-commerce ecosystems in shaping the future of fashion.

Fashion 5.0 builds upon the evolutionary trajectory of the fashion economy, where Fashion 1.0 was characterized by mass production, Fashion 2.0 by branding and global expansion, Fashion 3.0 by fast fashion and supply chain acceleration, and Fashion 4.0 by the early adoption of e-commerce and digital retail. In contrast, Fashion 5.0 is distinguished by the integration of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, blockchain, Augmented Reality (AR), and the metaverse into every aspect of the fashion value chain. It emphasizes hyper-personalization, consumer engagement, sustainability, and inclusivity as central pillars of the modern fashion economy.

At the heart of this transformation is the evolving role of the consumer. Unlike previous generations of fashion consumers who were largely passive recipients of trends, today's digital-savvy consumers actively participate in shaping the industry. They influence design, demand transparency, and expect immersive, personalized, and seamless online-to-offline shopping experiences. Social media platforms, influencer marketing, and virtual communities have redefined the consumer journey, creating an interactive ecosystem where fashion is not only consumed but also co-created.

E-commerce ecosystems have become the primary enablers of this transformation. With the rise of digital marketplaces, omnichannel retailing, and cross-border e-commerce, fashion brands and retailers are compelled to innovate continuously to remain competitive. The acceleration of digital transformation, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has further highlighted the importance of technology-driven strategies in ensuring resilience, growth, and sustainability.

1. EVOLUTION OF FASHION: FROM FASHION 1.0 TO FASHION 5.0

The fashion industry has evolved through several transformative phases, each shaped by socio-economic changes, consumer preferences, and technological innovations. Understanding these historical stages provides context for the emergence of Fashion 5.0, which represents the fusion of digital transformation, consumer behavior, and e-commerce ecosystems.

Fashion 1.0: The Era of Mass Production

Fashion 1.0 was marked by the industrial revolution, when mechanized textile manufacturing enabled large-scale production of clothing. This period democratized fashion, making garments more accessible beyond the elite classes. Standardization of clothing, mechanized looms, and factory production laid the foundation for modern fashion economies. Consumer choice was limited, and fashion cycles were dictated by industrial capabilities rather than consumer demand.

Fashion 2.0: Branding and Global Expansion

With globalization and the growth of international trade in the mid-20th century, fashion entered the stage of branding and global visibility. Iconic brands such as Chanel, Dior, and Levi's capitalized on advertising, celebrity endorsements, and media to build strong brand identities. Fashion was no longer about necessity but about aspiration and lifestyle. Consumers were influenced by cultural movements, cinema, and celebrity culture, while multinational corporations expanded fashion consumption globally.

Fashion 3.0: Fast Fashion and Supply Chain Acceleration

The late 20th and early 21st centuries ushered in Fashion 3.0, dominated by fast fashion. Companies like Zara, H&M, and Forever 21 perfected the model of rapidly replicating runway trends and delivering them to consumers at low cost and high speed. This period was marked by highly efficient global supply chains, data-driven inventory management, and a "see now, buy now" culture.

While fast fashion made clothing affordable and accessible, it also raised concerns about overconsumption, environmental degradation, and labor exploitation.

Fashion 4.0: E-Commerce and Digital Retailing

The rise of the internet and digital commerce platforms defined Fashion 4.0. Online shopping platforms like Amazon, ASOS, and Alibaba revolutionized how consumers purchased fashion. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest emerged as powerful trendsetters, enabling direct interaction between consumers and brands. Mobile applications, digital payment systems, and virtual marketplaces expanded consumer access to global fashion markets. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this phase, pushing both consumers and businesses toward digital-first strategies.

Fashion 5.0: The Age of Digital Transformation and Consumer-Centric Ecosystems

Fashion 5.0 builds upon these earlier stages, representing a convergence of digital transformation, consumer behavior, and e-commerce ecosystems. Unlike Fashion 4.0, which emphasized digitization and online access, Fashion 5.0 emphasizes integration, personalization, and sustainability. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data, Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR/VR), blockchain, and the metaverse are redefining every element of the fashion value chain from design and production to marketing and consumer engagement. Consumers are no longer passive buyers; they are co-creators, influencers, and sustainability advocates. Fashion 5.0 is also characterized by inclusivity, where brands are increasingly responding to diverse cultural, gender, and body-positive movements. E-commerce ecosystems have expanded to include omnichannel strategies, virtual fitting rooms, personalized recommendations, and immersive shopping experiences. Moreover, sustainability has become a cornerstone of Fashion 5.0, as both consumers and policymakers push brands toward circular economy models, ethical sourcing, and eco-friendly innovations.

2. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE FASHION ECONOMY

Digital transformation has emerged as a fundamental driver of competitiveness in the fashion industry, influencing the way products are designed, manufactured, marketed, and consumed. Unlike earlier phases of digitization, which focused primarily on moving offline operations online, digital transformation involves the integration of advanced technologies into every aspect of the value chain to create intelligent, consumer-centric, and data-driven ecosystems. In the context of Fashion 5.0, digital transformation is not merely about technological adoption but about creating new business models, fostering consumer engagement, and enabling sustainable practices.

Redefining Business Models

Fashion companies have restructured their operations to align with digital-first strategies. Traditional supply-driven models are being replaced by consumer-driven, demand-responsive frameworks powered by data analytics and predictive modeling. For instance, fast fashion giants now rely on real-time trend analysis and automated design tools to launch collections in weeks rather than months. Similarly, luxury brands are adopting Direct-To-Consumer (DTC) strategies via digital platforms to build closer relationships with their customers. Subscription-based models, resale platforms, and digital-only collections (such as NFTs and virtual garments) reflect the shift toward innovative digital economies.

Enhancing Consumer Experience

Digital transformation in fashion is heavily oriented toward improving consumer experience. Virtual fitting rooms, Augmented Reality (AR) apps, and AI-powered style recommendations provide personalized shopping journeys. Platforms like Zalando and ASOS use machine learning algorithms to recommend products based on past purchases, browsing history, and body type. Meanwhile, luxury houses like Gucci and Balenciaga have launched virtual stores in the metaverse, allowing consumers to explore collections in immersive 3D environments. These innovations highlight how technology bridges the gap between physical and digital retail.

Digital Supply Chain Management

Supply chain agility is critical in the fast-paced fashion economy. Digital tools such as blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), and cloud-based platforms are enabling transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Blockchain applications provide end-to-end traceability, helping brands prove ethical sourcing and sustainability credentials. IoT-powered sensors monitor logistics in real-time, ensuring timely delivery and reducing operational costs. By digitizing supply chains, companies are not only reducing risks but also meeting consumer demands for authenticity and ethical practices.

Marketing and Consumer Engagement

Social media platforms and influencer-driven marketing strategies have become essential in Fashion 5.0. Digital transformation has enabled brands to interact with consumers in real-time, gather feedback instantly, and co-create value. TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube serve as spaces for trend creation, viral marketing, and storytelling. Artificial intelligence is further optimizing marketing by segmenting audiences, predicting preferences, and automating personalized campaigns. For example, Nike's SNKRS app leverages geolocation and consumer behavior data to deliver limited-edition products to targeted customers, fostering exclusivity and engagement.

Sustainability through Digital Innovation

Sustainability is central to digital transformation in fashion. Technologies such as 3D printing and digital prototyping reduce material waste during product development. AI-driven demand forecasting minimizes overproduction, while virtual fashion shows cut down the carbon footprint associated with physical events. Moreover, resale and rental platforms like ThredUp, Depop, and Rent the Runway leverage e-commerce ecosystems to extend product life cycles, contributing to a circular fashion economy.

Post-Pandemic Acceleration of Digital Transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for digital adoption in fashion.

With physical retail disrupted, brands accelerated investments in e-commerce, mobile apps, and digital engagement tools. Virtual runway shows, live-stream shopping, and AI-driven chatbots became mainstream during the pandemic. Even after restrictions eased, consumer reliance on digital fashion ecosystems remained strong, proving that digital transformation is not a temporary adjustment but a permanent structural shift in the industry.

3. CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE AGE OF FASHION 5.0

Fashion 5.0 places the consumer at the center of the fashion economy. Unlike earlier stages of fashion evolution, where consumers were passive recipients of trends, today's digital-savvy consumers actively shape industry practices through their preferences, interactions, and advocacy. Consumer behavior in the digital era is highly dynamic, influenced by technology, social networks, sustainability concerns, and the demand for personalization. Understanding these behavioral shifts is critical for fashion brands seeking to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving e-commerce ecosystem.

The Empowered Digital Consumer

The proliferation of smartphones, social media, and e-commerce platforms has empowered consumers with unprecedented access to information, products, and global trends. Consumers are no longer bound by geographical limitations; they compare products across multiple platforms, read peer reviews, and engage with influencer content before making purchasing decisions. This access to knowledge has made consumers more demanding, expecting transparency, speed, and authenticity from brands.

Personalization and the Demand for Individuality

Today's consumers increasingly seek personalized shopping experiences that reflect their individual identities. AI-powered algorithms recommend products based on browsing history, purchase patterns, and even body measurements. Virtual try-on tools and AR-based fitting rooms enable consumers to visualize products in real time, fostering confidence in purchase decisions.

This emphasis on personalization reflects broader societal shifts toward individuality and self-expression, where fashion serves not just as clothing but as an extension of personal identity.

The Role of Social Media and Influencers

Social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped consumer behavior in fashion. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have emerged as powerful spaces for trend creation and peer-to-peer influence. Micro-influencers, who often have smaller but more engaged audiences, are proving particularly effective in shaping purchase decisions. Platforms like TikTok have accelerated 'viral fashion,' where trends emerge and fade within weeks, compelling brands to adapt rapidly. Consumers themselves have become trendsetters, leveraging user-generated content to impact brand reputations and product success.

Conscious Consumerism and Sustainability

Modern consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental and ethical impacts of fashion. This has led to the rise of "conscious consumerism," where purchase decisions are guided by values such as sustainability, inclusivity, and fair labor practices. Studies indicate that younger generations, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, are more likely to support brands that demonstrate commitment to ethical sourcing, carbon reduction, and circular fashion initiatives. The popularity of resale and rental platforms also reflects consumers' growing interest in extending the life cycle of fashion products.

Instant Gratification and Omnichannel Expectations

While sustainability is a growing priority, consumers also expect immediacy in shopping experiences. Same-day delivery, one-click purchasing, and seamless returns have become industry standards. Omnichannel retailing where physical and digital experiences are integrated caters to this demand for convenience. Consumers may browse in-store but complete purchases online, or discover products via social media and purchase through an app. The expectation is for fashion brands to deliver frictionless, consistent, and immersive shopping experiences across channels.

Cultural Shifts and Inclusivity

Consumer behavior in Fashion 5.0 is also shaped by cultural and social movements. Inclusivity in terms of body diversity, gender identity, and cultural representation has become an essential expectation. Brands that fail to reflect diverse identities risk alienating consumers. Campaigns promoting body positivity, adaptive fashion for people with disabilities, and gender-neutral collections illustrate how inclusivity has become a decisive factor in consumer choices.

Co-Creation and Participatory Fashion

Another hallmark of Fashion 5.0 is co-creation, where consumers actively participate in shaping products and experiences. Through crowdsourced designs, digital customization tools, and online communities, consumers influence the creative process. Luxury brands like Louis Vuitton have experimented with consumer input in design, while platforms like Nike allow consumers to personalize products before purchase. This participatory approach strengthens consumer loyalty by creating a sense of ownership in the brand experience.

4. E-COMMERCE ECOSYSTEMS AND OMNICHANNEL RETAILING

E-commerce has emerged as the backbone of Fashion 5.0, transforming the way fashion products are marketed, distributed, and consumed. No longer limited to simple online transactions, e-commerce ecosystems have evolved into complex, interconnected platforms that integrate logistics, payments, digital marketing, consumer engagement, and analytics. In the fashion economy, e-commerce functions not only as a marketplace but also as a strategic enabler of personalization, inclusivity, and sustainability. At the same time, omnichannel retailing seamlessly integrating online and offline experiences has become essential to meeting the expectations of modern consumers who demand convenience, immediacy, and immersive experiences.

Evolution of Fashion E-Commerce

The earliest forms of fashion e-commerce were focused on convenience, allowing consumers to purchase clothing online without visiting physical stores. Over time, technological innovations and shifting consumer preferences transformed these platforms into dynamic ecosystems. Today, leading players such as Amazon Fashion, ASOS, Myntra, and Zalando provide more than just product catalogs they offer personalized recommendations, virtual try-on tools, and AI-powered style assistants. This evolution reflects the broader transition of e-commerce from transactional models to experiential platforms.

Digital Marketplaces and Platformization

A central feature of the Fashion 5.0 economy is the dominance of digital marketplaces. Platforms such as Alibaba's Tmall, JD.com, and Farfetch operate as ecosystems that connect brands, retailers, consumers, and service providers. These platforms not only provide global reach but also integrate logistics, data analytics, and customer relationship management. The concept of platformization where digital platforms become the primary infrastructure for commerce has reshaped competition, with smaller brands gaining global visibility alongside multinational corporations.

Omnichannel Retailing and Seamless Integration

Omnichannel retailing has become a strategic necessity in Fashion 5.0. Consumers no longer differentiate between online and offline experiences; instead, they expect seamless integration across channels. For example, a consumer may browse products on a mobile app, try them in a physical store, and complete the purchase online. Brands such as Nike and Uniqlo have developed advanced omnichannel models that link physical retail with e-commerce through mobile apps, QR codes, and digital loyalty programs. This integration not only enhances convenience but also strengthens customer loyalty by offering consistent brand experiences.

Social Commerce and Live-Stream Shopping

Social media platforms are playing an increasingly critical role in e-commerce ecosystems.

Social commerce where consumers discover and purchase products directly through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and WeChat has blurred the lines between entertainment and shopping. Live-stream shopping, particularly popular in China, has emerged as a major trend where influencers and brand ambassadors showcase products in real time, interact with audiences, and drive instant purchases. This model enhances consumer trust and creates a sense of urgency, making it a powerful tool in Fashion 5.0.

Cross-Border E-Commerce

Fashion 5.0 is inherently global, and cross-border e-commerce enables consumers to access products from anywhere in the world. Platforms like Shein and Boohoo have leveraged digital logistics networks to deliver affordable fashion worldwide. Cross-border trade also facilitates cultural exchange, exposing consumers to diverse fashion trends. However, it raises challenges in areas such as customs, logistics, and regulatory compliance, which brands must address to remain competitive.

Data-Driven E-Commerce Strategies

At the core of Fashion 5.0 e-commerce ecosystems is the strategic use of data. From consumer browsing patterns to purchasing behavior, e-commerce platforms generate vast amounts of information. Big data analytics enables brands to predict demand, optimize pricing, and design personalized marketing campaigns. Predictive analytics also helps reduce overproduction, aligning business efficiency with sustainability goals. Amazon Fashion and Zalando, for instance, heavily rely on AI-driven algorithms to match consumers with products they are most likely to purchase, thereby reducing returns and increasing satisfaction.

5. TECHNOLOGICAL DRIVERS OF FASHION 5.0

The foundation of Fashion 5.0 lies in the seamless integration of advanced technologies into the fashion value chain. Unlike previous industrial or digital revolutions, Fashion 5.0 emphasizes consumer-centric innovation, sustainability, and immersive experiences enabled by emerging technologies.

These innovations have redefined how fashion products are designed, marketed, and consumed, while also creating new business models for the industry.

Artificial Intelligence and Predictive Analytics

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is central to Fashion 5.0, enabling brands to analyze massive datasets and generate actionable insights. AI algorithms predict trends by monitoring social media, fashion shows, and consumer searches, allowing companies to design products that align with emerging preferences. Predictive analytics also streamlines inventory management, minimizing overproduction and reducing waste.

- Personalization: AI-powered chatbots and recommendation engines provide customized product suggestions based on individual browsing and purchase histories.
- Design Assistance: AI tools such as Fashwell and Vue.ai generate design concepts and automate product tagging, saving time for designers and enhancing accuracy.
- Customer Support: AI-driven virtual assistants offer real-time support, creating smoother customer journeys across digital platforms.

Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and the Metaverse

Immersive technologies are transforming consumer interaction with fashion products. AR enables consumers to 'try on' clothing and accessories virtually, reducing uncertainty and return rates. Virtual mirrors in stores and AR apps online allow customers to visualize how garments will look before purchase.

The metaverse has opened new frontiers for fashion. Luxury brands such as Gucci, Balenciaga, and Nike have launched virtual collections within digital worlds like Roblox and Fortnite. These digital assets, often sold as Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), provide opportunities for exclusivity, brand loyalty, and entirely new revenue streams. Virtual fashion shows and metaverse boutiques are further expanding the boundaries of consumer engagement.

Blockchain and Digital Supply Chain Transparency

Blockchain technology addresses one of the fashion industry's most pressing issues: transparency. With growing concerns about unethical labor practices and environmental impact, blockchain provides traceability from raw material sourcing to final product delivery. Platforms like Provenance and IBM's Food Trust have inspired fashion-focused blockchain initiatives, ensuring authenticity and sustainability claims are verifiable. Additionally, blockchain facilitates digital ownership of fashion items through NFTs, creating value in both physical and virtual markets. By recording product origins and ownership history, blockchain combats counterfeiting while fostering consumer trust.

Big Data and Personalization

The rise of e-commerce has generated vast volumes of consumer data. Fashion 5.0 leverages big data analytics to transform this information into insights for design, pricing, and marketing.

- Consumer Perceptions: Brands analyze purchasing habits, search patterns, and social media interactions to forecast demand more accurately.
- Dynamic Pricing: E-commerce platforms employ real-time data to adjust pricing strategies, balancing profitability with competitiveness.
- Product Development: Perceptions derived from consumer data are used to co-create collections that resonate with target demographics.

Big data not only personalizes shopping experiences but also reduces inefficiencies across the supply chain, aligning profitability with sustainability.

Internet of Things (IoT) and Smart Fashion

IoT technologies are expanding the scope of wearable fashion. Smart fabrics embedded with sensors monitor biometrics, while connected devices enable consumers to track health, fitness, or environmental conditions. For instance, Levi's 'smart jacket,' developed with Google, integrates touch-sensitive fabric to control smartphones. Beyond wearables, IoT supports logistics optimization by tracking shipments, monitoring warehouse conditions, and ensuring product authenticity.

3D Printing and Digital Prototyping

3D printing has revolutionized product development by enabling designers to create prototypes with minimal waste. It facilitates on-demand production, reducing reliance on mass manufacturing and lowering inventory costs. Brands such as Adidas and Nike have experimented with 3D-printed footwear, while luxury designers use digital prototyping to preview designs before full-scale production.

Cloud Computing and Digital Platforms

Cloud-based solutions enable scalability, agility, and global collaboration in fashion businesses. From managing e-commerce operations to supporting AI-driven analytics, cloud technologies allow seamless integration of design, production, and distribution processes. Shared digital platforms foster collaboration among designers, suppliers, and retailers, accelerating innovation and reducing time-to-market.

6. SUSTAINABILITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN FASHION 5.0

Sustainability has become a central concern for the modern fashion industry. As Fashion 5.0 emphasizes digital transformation and consumer engagement, brands are increasingly integrating environmentally and socially responsible practices into their operations. The convergence of technology, e-commerce, and consumer behavior enables more sustainable production, reduces waste, and promotes transparency across supply chains. Ethical considerations, including labor rights, diversity, and inclusivity, are also shaping the expectations of digital-savvy consumers.

Environmental Sustainability

The fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to global carbon emissions, water consumption, and textile waste. Fashion 5.0 leverages technology to mitigate these environmental impacts:

- 3D Design and Digital Sampling: By creating virtual prototypes, brands reduce fabric waste and energy consumption during the design and production process.

- AI-Driven Demand Forecasting: Predictive analytics ensures that production aligns with actual consumer demand, minimizing overproduction and unsold inventory.
- Sustainable Materials and Circular Fashion: Brands increasingly incorporate eco-friendly fabrics, recycled materials, and biodegradable textiles into collections. Circular fashion models, including resale, rental, and recycling initiatives, extend the life cycle of garments and reduce landfill waste.

Ethical Supply Chains

Digital transformation enables brands to ensure ethical practices across global supply chains. Blockchain technology, IoT sensors, and cloud-based monitoring platforms provide end-to-end traceability from raw material sourcing to product delivery. These innovations help prevent labor exploitation, promote fair wages, and ensure safe working conditions. Consumers can verify brand claims regarding ethical sourcing, building trust and loyalty in the process.

Consumer-Centric Ethical Practices

Sustainability in Fashion 5.0 is not just operational but also consumer-driven. Modern consumers prioritize brands that demonstrate accountability and social responsibility. Transparency portals, digital product passports, and QR-coded tags allow consumers to track the origin, composition, and sustainability credentials of garments. Brands that align with consumer values around environmental protection, diversity, and inclusivity are more likely to retain loyalty and gain competitive advantage.

Reducing Carbon Footprint through E-Commerce

While e-commerce has expanded accessibility, it also raises environmental concerns due to packaging, logistics, and returns. Fashion 5.0 mitigates these impacts through:

- Optimized delivery routes using AI and IoT-enabled logistics
- Eco-friendly packaging and minimalistic design

- Encouraging sustainable consumer behaviors, such as batch ordering and longer product life cycles

Social and Cultural Responsibility

Fashion 5.0 also addresses broader ethical considerations, including cultural representation, gender inclusivity, and adaptive clothing for differently-abled individuals. Brands that reflect social diversity in campaigns and product offerings respond to consumer expectations of inclusivity and equity. Ethical marketing and authentic engagement are crucial to avoiding cultural appropriation or misrepresentation in digital platforms.

Challenges in Implementing Sustainable Practices

Despite advancements, implementing sustainability in Fashion 5.0 faces challenges:

- High costs of sustainable materials and technologies
- Consumer resistance to higher-priced eco-friendly products
- Complexity in verifying claims across multi-tiered supply chains
- Balancing fast fashion dynamics with sustainability goals

Technological innovations, combined with regulatory support and consumer awareness, provide pathways for overcoming these challenges. By embedding sustainability into digital, production, and marketing strategies, Fashion 5.0 aims to create a resilient, ethical, and future-ready fashion economy.

7. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN IMPLEMENTING FASHION 5.0

Fashion 5.0 presents immense opportunities for innovation, personalization, and sustainability, its implementation is not without challenges. The integration of advanced technologies, evolving consumer expectations, and global e-commerce dynamics introduces a range of operational, technological, and strategic barriers. Understanding these challenges is crucial for fashion brands seeking to effectively adopt Fashion 5.0 practices.

Technological Challenges

The adoption of AI, AR/VR, blockchain, and IoT requires significant investment in infrastructure, skills, and ongoing maintenance. Small and Medium-sized fashion Enterprises (SMEs) often face constraints in adopting these technologies due to limited budgets and expertise. Additionally, integrating multiple technologies across diverse operations design, supply chain, marketing, and customer engagement can lead to interoperability issues and system inefficiencies.

- Data Management: Handling large volumes of consumer, inventory, and trend data is complex, requiring robust storage, analytics, and cybersecurity measures.
- Rapid Technological Obsolescence: Emerging technologies evolve quickly, making it challenging for companies to keep pace without incurring high upgrade costs.
- Cybersecurity Risks: As digital operations expand, fashion brands become vulnerable to data breaches, hacking, and intellectual property theft.

Consumer Expectations and Behavior

Digital-savvy consumers have high expectations for speed, personalization, and sustainability. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to dissatisfaction and brand erosion. For instance, inaccuracies in virtual fitting, delayed delivery, or lack of ethical transparency can harm brand reputation. Brands must balance customization, convenience, and ethical commitments while maintaining profitability.

Supply Chain and Operational Barriers

Fashion 5.0 relies on agile, transparent, and digitally integrated supply chains. However, several barriers exist:

- Complex Global Supply Chains: Fashion supply chains involve multiple tiers of suppliers, making end-to-end transparency and ethical compliance challenging.

- Returns and Reverse Logistics: High rates of e-commerce returns increase operational costs and environmental impact, complicating logistics management.
- Sustainability Trade-offs: Fast fashion dynamics, driven by consumer demand for new trends, often conflict with sustainability goals.

Financial and Strategic Barriers

Investments in technology, sustainability initiatives, and digital marketing can be substantial, particularly for SMEs. Fashion 5.0 strategies require long-term commitment and integration across business units. Short-term financial pressures may discourage brands from adopting innovative technologies or circular economy practices. Strategic alignment across departments is essential to ensure coherent implementation.

Regulatory and Legal Challenges

Operating in multiple countries introduces compliance complexities related to e-commerce regulations, consumer protection, data privacy, and digital transactions. Additionally, intellectual property rights, especially concerning digital fashion products like NFTs, require careful management. Non-compliance can lead to legal penalties, reputational damage, and operational disruptions.

Cultural and Organizational Resistance

Implementing Fashion 5.0 involves a cultural shift within organizations. Employees need to adapt to data-driven decision-making, digital collaboration, and innovative design processes. Resistance to change, lack of training, and limited digital literacy can impede adoption. Leadership commitment and change management strategies are critical for overcoming organizational inertia.

Mitigation Strategies

To overcome these challenges, fashion brands can:

- Invest in scalable and modular technological solutions.

- Collaborate with technology partners and industry consortia for knowledge sharing.
- Develop sustainability frameworks aligned with consumer expectations.
- Enhance employee digital literacy through continuous training.
- Engage in regulatory advocacy to navigate cross-border compliance challenges.

By addressing these barriers proactively, brands can harness the full potential of Fashion 5.0 while mitigating operational, technological, and ethical risks.

8. FUTURE OF FASHION 5.0: OPPORTUNITIES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As the fashion industry advances into the era of Fashion 5.0, emerging technologies, shifting consumer expectations, and digital-first business models offer unprecedented opportunities. However, realizing the full potential of Fashion 5.0 requires strategic foresight, sustainable practices, and supportive policy frameworks. This section explores future trends, growth opportunities, and recommendations for both industry stakeholders and policymakers.

8.1 Emerging Opportunities in Fashion 5.0

Hyper-Personalized Fashion Experiences

Advancements in AI, AR/VR, and big data analytics will enable brands to offer hyper-personalized products and experiences. Virtual fitting rooms, customized clothing designs, and AI-generated style recommendations are likely to become standard features, enhancing consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Expansion of Digital and Virtual Fashion

The growth of digital fashion, including NFTs, virtual wearables, and metaverse boutiques, presents new revenue streams and marketing possibilities. Digital-only collections can reduce environmental impact while appealing to younger, tech-savvy audiences.

Circular and Sustainable Fashion Models

Fashion 5.0 provides tools to implement circular economy principles at scale. AI-driven demand forecasting, digital prototyping, and sustainable supply chain tracking allow brands to minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency, aligning profitability with sustainability.

Global Market Integration

Cross-border e-commerce and platform-based marketplaces enable brands to reach global consumers efficiently. Data-driven localization strategies will help brands adapt products and marketing campaigns to diverse cultural preferences, strengthening global competitiveness.

8.2 Policy Implications for Fashion 5.0

Regulatory Frameworks for Digital Commerce

Governments must create robust regulations for e-commerce, digital payments, and cross-border trade to protect consumers and ensure fair competition. Policies should address cybersecurity, data privacy, and intellectual property rights, particularly concerning virtual fashion products and NFTs.

Sustainability and Environmental Standards

Policymakers can incentivize eco-friendly practices through tax benefits, grants, or recognition programs for brands adopting sustainable production methods. Regulations promoting circular fashion, recycling, and responsible textile production will drive industry-wide compliance and consumer trust.

Skills Development and Workforce Adaptation

Digital transformation requires skilled professionals in AI, data analytics, digital marketing, and sustainable supply chain management. Governments and educational institutions should collaborate to develop training programs and certifications tailored to Fashion 5.0 competencies.

Ethical Consumer Protection

Policies promoting transparency and accountability in supply chains such as product labeling, digital traceability, and social compliance will empower consumers to make ethical choices. This aligns with the consumer-driven nature of Fashion 5.0, where informed decision-making shapes industry practices.

8.3 Future Trends and Innovations

- AI-Generated Fashion Designs: Algorithms creating novel designs based on cultural trends and consumer preferences.
- Blockchain-Verified Fashion Authenticity: Enhanced trust in luxury goods and digital wearables.
- Smart Fabrics and Wearables: Clothing integrated with IoT sensors for health monitoring, adaptive fit, and interactive experiences.
- Eco-Conscious Consumer Communities: Digital platforms fostering collaboration, resale, and rental fashion markets.
- Metaverse Fashion Shows and Retail: Virtual events and immersive shopping experiences redefining brand-consumer engagement.

8.4 Strategic Recommendations for Fashion Brands

- Invest in Digital Infrastructure: Develop AI, AR/VR, and e-commerce capabilities to enable personalization and efficiency.
- Integrate Sustainability into Core Strategy: Align production, marketing, and supply chain operations with circular economy principles.
- Foster Consumer Engagement: Leverage social media, co-creation platforms, and immersive technologies to strengthen brand loyalty.
- Adopt Agile Business Models: Respond rapidly to changing trends, consumer demands, and technological advances.
- Collaborate Across Ecosystems: Partner with tech providers, sustainability organizations, and policy stakeholders to scale innovation and compliance.

CONCLUSION

Fashion 5.0 represents a paradigm shift in the global fashion industry, driven by the fusion of digital transformation, consumer-centric strategies, and e-commerce ecosystems. The integration of AI, AR/VR, blockchain, and other emerging technologies enables hyper-personalization, sustainability, and immersive consumer experiences. While challenges exist ranging from technological adoption and supply chain complexities to ethical considerations strategic innovation and supportive policy frameworks can unlock the full potential of Fashion 5.0. This chapter demonstrates that Fashion 5.0 is not merely an evolution of fashion practices but a transformative approach that redefines the industry's future. Brands, consumers, and policymakers must collaboratively embrace this digital and sustainable era to create a resilient, inclusive, and innovative fashion economy.

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CHAPTER 5
IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCER CULTURE ON FASHION MARKETING

Dr. C. P. RASHMI[1]

[1]Amity School of Communication, Amity University, Bangalore, cprashmi1@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7722-6006.

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, the social media has evolved into a relaxing market-place, particularly in the fashion industry, rather than a casual place to share photos and updates. Instagram, YouTube, and new platforms have turned into virtual showrooms, trend incubators, and direct purchase channels in a single package. Don't forget that we used to go through catalogs or watch a TV commercial to find out the newest designs of a kurta? A scroll through the Reels now or a fast YouTube haul can now cause a shopping spree. That is the strength of social media as a fashion marketplace: it is instant, immersive, and emotionally involving (Bhonsle et al., 2024).

This development is a distinct separation with the old-school methods of accessing consumers. The old methods of advertising such as TV ads, billboards, and print advertisements provided one-way communication. It was smooth, remote and in many ways aspirational yet impractical. In contrast, influencer-led marketing brings warmth and relatability. Influencers are not just promoting a product, they are talking about what they love, how they wear it and why it is important, almost as though they were talking to a friend, only that friend has excellent taste in clothing. It has been found out that people nowadays have much more trust in the recommendations that influencers make in comparison to traditional advertisements as influencers are genuine and trustworthy (Schram, 2024) (Prasanth & Priyan, 2024).

So what is so important about this change in the Indian context? First of all, India has a booming influencer marketing industry. It was also at 3,600 crore in 2024, and is projected to increase by 25 per cent in 2025 alone. And it is not only a rich-metro trend, but it is already flying in the face of tier-2 and tier-3 cities courtesy of the ubiquity of smartphone and cheap data. In India, approximately 50 percent of mobile time is devoted to social media (Swarup, 2025). And local creators in smaller towns are forging strong ties in their local languages and cultures (Aryan, 2025).

What is particularly remarkable is the way brands are reimagining their strategies. They are leaving behind numbers and followers and content quality and trustworthiness such as, 85 percent of manufacturing brands say content quality now matters more than numbers (BrandWagonOnline, 2025) (ETBrandEquity.com; IBEF).

And 70 percent report trust and credibility, not only reach, is the reason they collaborate with influencers (BrandWagonOnline, 2025) (ETBrandEquity.com; Business Standard). In brief, the story is changing: it is not how many people view a post, but how people associate with it, and believes the individual who posted it.

This trend in India is of particular interest to study due to a number of reasons. First, the scale and diversity of the country imply that various influencers are heard differently in different parts of the country. The creators of regional languages are also exploiting cultural subtleties and practices and are making feel-me-now and other styling techniques relatable, be it saree draping in Kannada or fusion styling in Hindi. The influencer marketing can be used as a means of inclusion - not promotion, as more brands understand this (Influencer Network, 2025).

Second, the number of young people in India is growing, and they are digital natives. They are also some of the co-creators of fashion through commenting, remixing designs, and trend-following. Their path of discovery to purchase is properly social media integrated. The (BrandWagonOnline, 2025) report states that more than 60 per cent of consumers in India use influencers at every step of the process, including the discovery, information collection, and making of a final choice.

Third, the brand economy in this case is unique. New, creator-led strategies are being tested by homegrown D2C labels, legacy brands and large e-commerce participants. As an example, Myntra has used AI and social commerce-and even created a digital reality show, Myntra Fashion Superstar, to capitalize on influencer culture (Vogue Business; Wikipedia). This type of innovation demonstrates that social media is not merely a marketing channel, but it is transforming fashion and how it is edited, consumed, and produced collaboratively.

When combined, these changes inform us of something greater: social media has turned into a cultural phenomenon within Indian fashion, and not merely a means of promotion. It is a place where identity is tried out and trends are generated overnight, and where a creative storytelling can emotionally connect consumers with a brand.

Comprehending how and why this has occurred is an eye opener not only to marketers, but also to anyone interested in knowing how fashion breathes and lives in India today.

1. INDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA/FASHION CONSUMPTION

Fashion consumption in India is taking place on the phone screen. Instagram and YouTube dominate the discussion, and short-video apps such as Moj and Josh have transformed the bite-sized content into a daily routine - particularly outside of metros. Short-form platforms saw a sharp rise in 2024, due to local creators and adoption in small towns, as audiences remain caught in the web of local, familiar, and relatable content about fashion (Jha, 2024). The short-term ecosystem India strategy work reveals that SFV (short-form video) already takes a larger portion of user traffic in the country--a sign that the fashion discovery moment has firmly shifted to reels and shorts (Redseer, 2024). On a larger scale, social media has become one of the leading brand discovery platforms among Indian customers, which once again confirms the reason why fashion brands focus more on creator-based content (Meltwater, 2025).

1.1 Instagram, Youtube, Moj, And Josh Take Over Fashion

The platforms have a different role. Instagram is visual first: its visual grammar (Reels, Stories, Guides) pushes trend signals--how to wear a sari shape, what sneakers to wear with kurtas--into feeds. YouTube adds to this with longer-form hauls, lookbooks, dupes and explainers that push research and analysis. Moj and Josh reach wider audiences that are not English-dominant; the 2024-25 reports indicate tier-II/III growth and that regional creators can shape how people got their daily looks and purchase triggers (Jha, 2024) (YourStory, 2024). In the festive cycles in India, ShareChat-Moj data revealed that 47-plus percent of consumer decisions were powered by short videos, 86 percent of which were regional content- yet another meaningful indicator of the ethnic and fusion categories (YourStory, 2024) (Campaign Asia, 2024).

1.2 Shifting Consumer Experience: Awareness - Interaction - Acquisition

The voyage has condensed and at the same time become more repetitive:

- The discovery occurs in feeds through creator video clips, shoppable posts, and Shorts/Reels (Meltwater, 2025) (Redseer, 2024).
- Likes, comments, saves, and most importantly community evidence- GRWM, sari drape hacks, Kurti under 999, and unboxing are all forms of engagement that generate social validation and decrease risk.
- The buying process can be initiated on-platform (social commerce widgets, affiliate links) or off-platform (marketplaces/brand sites). The scale of influencer marketing in India 3,600 crore in 2024 with 25% growth in 2025 reflects this narrowing of content to commerce (IBEF, 2025; WPP Media, 2025). Interestingly, brands note that they are no longer counting the number of followers but rather the quality of the content and the relevance of the creator- a major change in conversion efficiency (WPP Media, 2025).

Figure 1. Stages of the Fashion Consumer Journey

According to recent findings, audiences (in particular, Gen Z) also believe that relatable creators are more credible than the one who endorses celebrities; moreover, authenticity and real-life utility are valued by the audience even more than star power, another indicator that the quality of engagement is the new reach (ET Online, 2025).

1.3 The Role Digital Platforms Play in Impulse Purchases and Fashion Identity

Impulse buying overlaps the India-centric and global research: algorithmic feeds, limited-time offers and parasocial trust in creators can reduce deliberation time and impulse buying behavior, especially in fashion and beauty (Sharma & Agarwal, 2025) (Mehta, 2023) (Ladhari et al., 2023).

Social proof (comments, UGC try-ons) + perceived value (discount code, dupes) can be particularly effective with young adults, who need to bridge the gap between seeing something and owning it in just a fraction of a second. Causal studies conducted on Indian youth cohorts associate the promotion-based and peer-based influence cues with an increase in impulse intent in the fashion/beauty categories (Trivedi et al., 2025).

The other half of the story is identity. The culture of short videos has made micro-trends, such as Indo-western fusion, modest fashion edits, regionally-weaved fashions that can be worn to campus, or the office, normalized, allowing consumers to test low-risk, low-cost outfits. A 2024 report on the short-video business in India emphasized how local creators define local aesthetics and use fashion in a manner that is personally and culturally engaging (Jha, 2024).

This rehearsal of identity is enhanced by the creators describing how to use it contextually (e.g. dupatta wraps at celebrations, thrift flips on sustainability), which fits the user's ideals, be it thrift, eco-friendly, or national pride (YourStory, 2024) (Campaign Asia, 2024).

The commerce layer does count. With brands and marketplaces introducing shoppable video, affiliate links and creator storefronts, the gap between inspiration and checkout continues to narrow. Tracking in the industry reveals that collaboration decisions are increasingly being made based on trust and credibility and not merely reach as budgets shift to creators (WPP Media, 2025; IBEF, 2025).

In other words: when a creator expresses his/her opinion to me and displays me something that fits my budget and context, there is a high chance that I will click on the buy now button.

2. HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCER CULTURE AFFECT FASHION MARKETING (INDIA)?

Each platform drives a different type of behavior. On Instagram, discovery is quick, there are short videos, Get Ready with Me styling, and shoppable posts that decrease the time between inspiration and action. Researchers continue to find a positive association between Instagram use and fashion purchase intention among young Indian consumers, especially fast fashion, with creators increasing awareness and reducing uncertainty by use of try-ons, dupes, and quick tips (Singh, 2024). YouTube is further down in the funnel. Evaluation is supported by long-form hauls, lookbooks, and detailed tutorials, as well as by the authority of the creators, who viewers compare fit, fabrics, and prices. As noted in recent reviews of social media marketing in apparel, ongoing creator content (not a one-off advertisement) fosters customer-brand relationships and promotes purchase intention (Bhonsle et al., 2024).

The middlemen are bloggers and multi-platform creators. They provide styling tutorials on blogs/YouTube, and then back them up with snackable Reels. The result is a unified consumer experience: discovery (short-form), engagement (comments, saves, shares), and conversion (affiliate links, creator storefronts or marketplace checkout). Reporting on the industry indicates brands are budgeting as such, they will move their resources beyond short-term creator programs and storytelling, into longer-term ones (Scott, 2024).

2.1 Micro Vs. Macro: Who Is Shifting the Needle?

A large figure in the follower counter is no longer the sole indicator of impact. The latest reports emphasize the increased importance of micro creators, meaning individuals whose audience is significant, yet not huge, since it provides greater interaction and proximity between them and the community (Schulz, 2025). In beauty and fashion, in particular, we see more and more brands combining levels: macro creators to reach and signal, and micro/nano to engage specifically and provide credible recommendations.

With that said, market forces are dynamic. Other marketers are developing budgets with some of the few superstar creators in cluttered situations.

What Indian fashion marketers can learn is that they should plan portfolios of creators, aligned to goal and moment: a macro creator that is launched into a cap on a wide scale, a set of regional micro creators that become depth drivers in regional languages, and nano creators that are the catalysts behind believable community reviews (Pitafi & Awan, 2024).

2.2 Indian Case Studies: What Works on the Ground

Komal Pandey is one such example of high-concept, video-first fashion storytelling that incorporates the vibrancy of couture with a casual styling approach. She has partnered with iconic brands such as Swarovski, Lakme, Nivea, and Coca-Cola, and has recently co-designed a fashion line at Aroka demonstrating how influence can evolve into product design and commercial performance (Forbes India, 2024) (Storyboard18, 2025).

Masoom Minawala demonstrates the mobility of luxury and locally-made fashion by Indian creators. Other than global luxury collaborations (Louis Vuitton, Dior, Bvlgari, Estee Lauder), she has operated programs such as: #SupportIndianDesigners, which diverted a good part of the traffic and sales to smaller Indian brands- an illustration of creators as supply channels and cultural intermediaries, not just media surfaces (Srivastava, 2023) (Minawala, 2023).

Myntra has institutionalized the creator economy on the platform side. Through Myntra Fashion Superstar, a digital reality program to find influencers, and in-app social commerce, the retailer transformed creator content into a systematic acquisition and conversion machine, a blend of entertainment and shoppable experiences (Myntra, 2025) (Wikipedia, 2025).

2.3 Credibility, Control and The Special Situation in India

India is different in two ways. First, local language and tier-2/3 development: YouTube creators, Moj creators, and YouTube creators in native languages localize trendy values--e.g. saree-drape hacks, modest fashion, and thrift flips--to make fashion both personalized and useful. Second, there are trust and disclosure. Influencer advertising disclosures have been codified by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) since 2022 and domain-specific disclosures (e.g. health/finance) continue to be pushed to demand clearer use of paid labeling (ASCI, 2025) (Lexorbis, 2025) (Bureau, 2025).

With brands growing more savvy, they are focusing on creator-fit, content quality, and credibility over vanity metrics--and that is the new dynamic that has been identified in India-centric industry coverage in 2025 (IBEF, 2025) (Roshni Shekhar, 2025)

The message to the marketer is as follows: create platform-native content (Reels/Shorts to discover; YouTube to go deep) and move beyond the impressions, re-think the saves, shares, watch-time, and creator-driven search lift. Among scholars, the new research agenda involves examining conversion efficiency at creator tiers in Indian regional markets, how creator partnerships impact brands over the long run, and the influence of disclosure norms on trust. The Indian market is not only huge, but it is culturally stratified, multi-linguistic, and socially digital. Influencer culture is not an auxiliary to marketing here; it is the glue between identity, community, and commerce.

3. INDIAN FASHION INFLUENCERS CASE STUDIES

Komal Pandey: Fashion as Self-Expression

Komal Pandey, also referred to as the Couture Queen by Forbes India, did not begin her journey on a typical career roadmap. Her first ambition was to be a Chartered Accountant, but soon she switched to being a fashion blogger and found her identity in loud and untraditional style (Thaker, 2022).

The content, filled with good-quality reels and editorials, reflects individuality and self-expression. Pandey invites her audience to create their story, and often provides commentary on body positivity and style experimentation (ShePride Spotlight, n.d.). This genuineness has seen her collaborate with brands and create her own line of clothes, as well as solidify her brand motto of fashion being what you make it (ShePride Spotlight, n.d.).

The path of Pandey brings out the strength of individuality when it comes to fashion marketing. Her readers relate to her readiness to break the rules, of making fashion more of a prescription, less of a story. Komal is a case that is an example of identity-based influencer.

Masoom Minawala: Lush and World Indian Identity

As a global Indian fashion ambassador, Masoom Minawala was initially referred to as Style Fiesta.

She began a groundbreaking fashion e-commerce business and then proceeded onto red carpets, mostly to Cannes, over six consecutive years until 2025 (Times of India, 2025). Whenever she appeared, she wore hand woven heritage fabrics, which further encouraged Indian handicraft in the world (Times of India, 2025). Such regular promotion goes beyond red-carpet glamour; it is a discourse on cultural pride, heritage marketing, and diaspora activity.

By making fashion her activism, in particular, a long-running campaign of #SupportIndianDesigners, Minawala has established herself as a bridge between traditional artisans and the global community (Storyboard18, 2025). Her impact is therefore not only inspirational, but structural, economic mobility of small designers is achieved by telling stories and showing faces.

Kusha Kapalia: Everyday Fashion, Humor and Relatability

Kusha Kapalia is an artist whose fame is based on humor, familiarity, and the most important, sincerity. She got her initial fame with humorous South Delhi characters such as a "Billi Maasi," and this shot her to fame (Futurists Media, 2024). Her humorous background turned her unique voice into a strong fashion indicator--humor turned out to be her trademark style, which distinguished her in a sea of similarity.

Kapila goes beyond content to entrepreneurship. In 2025, she started UnderNeat, a shapewear business based on her own narrative and connection with the users. A video in which she puts on a self-designing reel also worked as a campaign and product introduction, and bridged the gap between content and commerce (Mishra, 2021). Kusha also partnered with such brands as BlissClub and earned significant awards, including the NDTV prize of the Social Impact Influencer of the Year (FashionNetwork India, 2023) (Chowdhury, 2024). Her style demonstrates the potential of humor + trust + storytelling as a force in the marketing of fashion.

Local Artists of Tier-II and Tier-III Cities

As the major creators take the limelight, the smaller towns have a group of creators who are slowly transforming the concept of fashion among the middle and small-town consumers of India.

Literature that documents these creators individually is scarce, but multiple articles highlight their impact: short-form content platforms such as Moj and Josh are popular because they allow fashion creators to make content vernacular: sari hacks in Kannada, modest styling in Hindi, local weaves, and so on, which make fashion content locally relevant (Jha, 2024)

Local inventors are sources of cultural value that cannot be copied by national brands. They know local languages, low budgets, and festival conventions. Their genuineness forges credibility more than the number of followers. This is a cultural proximity theory academic fact: the more the content is close to the audience identity and context, the greater the influence. These creators are priceless as marketers seek to be included--they determine trends within markets that are widely ignored by mainstream brands.

Table 1. Leading Fashion Influencers and Their Influence Styles

Influencer	Influence Style	Key Strengths
Komal Pandey	Bold self-expression, editorial content	Body positivity, personal style, brand reports
Masoom Minawala	Luxury + heritage ambassadorship	Indian artisan showcase, global visibility
Kusha Kapila	Humor-driven, comedic relatability	Trust, entrepreneurial storytelling, strong engagement
Regional Creators	Vernacular, local, culturally resonant	Community trust, culturally specific fashion reach

Takeaways

To the marketing practitioners:

- Kolam Pandey explains to us the value of being unique and the risky aspect of being an influencer in marketing.
- Masoom Minawala explains how fashion can turn into cultural diplomacy.
- Kusha Kapila demonstrates how smoothly entertainment content and trust-based commerce can work together.
- Local producers also teach us that relevancy can be stronger than reach.

- These instances create opportunities to further explore identity-based influence, content marketing in entrepreneurship, and regional appeal in influencer marketing.

4. MARKETING STRATEGIES BY INFLUENCERS.

Influencer marketing has evolved within the fashion industry in India beyond mere product endorsements to multi-tiered and creative approaches that connect the realms of creativity and commerce. We can dissect how such collaboration, affiliate links, discount codes, content format, and campaign storytelling can be successful when working together.

Influencers and brands also work together to create a product or a collection. An increasing trend is the introduction of brands or label lines by creators- this creates greater interaction and ownership. According to the Economic Times, in India, there is a trend of a large number of influencers becoming founders of startups, particularly in the beauty and fashion industry due to their high social following (Himanshi Lohchab, 2025).

The more direct commerce tools are affiliate links and discount codes. Influencers can tag products or even create their own standalone shops on websites like Amazon and Myntra, which earns them commissions and offers incentives to buy with a discount (Vaidya, 2020). This kind of model integrates content and commerce in a classy manner: viewers feel they are being given an offer, and influencers are receiving credibility and sales.

Instagram Reels provide fashion inspiration in short and snappy bite-sized bites, such as a quick-styling tip or a trend highlight, specifically what mobile-first audiences unite around. YouTube lookbooks and hauls go further and allow viewers to process fits, fabrics, and options at their own pace. The reels on styling tips and carousel posts are styled to make fashion advice easy to digest and read in the daily feeds.

Live shows--in Instagram or YouTube, are immediate. Think of a creator who is styling various looks in real time, commenting in real time, proposing swaps, and exchanging codes. These in-store experiences generate enthusiasm, confidence, and the now or never buying urge. Smart brands are moving away on one-off promotional activities to story-telling.

Taking the example, a creator can give a hint about a new partnership with reels, transition into a launch with a haul video, and maintain interest by styling with the product on reels or lives. This form of narrative makes influencer marketing episodic engagement--consumers stick with the story, not with the sale. This is stressed by Vogue Business; influencers have become brand partners and campaigns are no longer advertisements but rather a continuation of dialogue (Schulz, 2025).

4.1 Consumer Behavior and Influencer Impact

Consumer behaviour and emotions are critical to understand the ways people react to influence and respond based on it, particularly in the fashion industry where trust, identity and values influence decision-making.

Parasocial relationships (PSR) are unidirectional relationships between viewers and influencers--they feel connected with them, even though they do not interact with them. It is also found that identifiable influencers perceived as authentic develop a stronger purchase intention (Garg and Bakshi, 2024). This is reflected in Indian research; respondents in Delhi-NCR reported that stronger PSR were mediated by trust, attractiveness, and prestige of influencers (Kumar and Singh, 2022). PSR helps reduce hesitation. By seeing a creator that a viewer likes promoting a product over and over again, the viewer begins to think that they are similar--and by doing so, they develop trust and eventually buy the product (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019).

Influencers are in a grey area between aspirational and relatable. Luxury-based creators post dream aesthetics; relatable creators post affordable hacks and thrift styles. The difference between brands is to select creators with a tone that fits their campaign goal. It has been found that micro-influencers tend to be more effective than mega-influencers in terms of engagement, directly due to the fact that they experience a sense of reality that is more palpable (Prasad, 2024).

In India, Gen Z lives in a world between the abundance of fast fashion and the uniqueness and sustainability of thrift culture. The micro-trends, such as sari dupes or festival thrift flips (Wikipedia, Fast fashion), are attached to social media. In the meantime, an article in the

Week, 2025, reveals that thrifting is now fashionable among younger generations in India and is motivated by environmental and aesthetic concerns (Parvathi, 2025).

By promoting sustainable fashion through fashion influencers, people can express themselves due to their support of thrift in addition to advocating sustainable fashion. When creators present flips found in the thrift-store or feature circular fashion, they present the viewer with an alternative to mass consumption that provides them with value and is of a personalized nature.

4.2 Challenges and Ethical Concerns

The influencer marketing is effective- still it has traps. Both brands and consumers in the fashion ecosystem of India consider ethical issues that should be carefully examined. Another major problem is that of influencer fraud: followers that are fake, vanity metrics, and falsified engagement rates. Economic Times cautions that unauthentic interaction compromises the overall ecosystem--the brands buy visibility which does not lead to effectual influence (ET Brand Equity, 2024). Globally, notes that up to 40 percent of an influencer follower is a bot or an inactive account. This poses a risk to trust and campaign ROI in India where mid-size creators are working with a lack of transparency. Brands are intensifying their vetting: programs such as HypeAuditor and Klear enable vetting followers' quality, but both of these are based on algorithms that can be cheated (Shekhar, 2024) (Gupta & Edunuri, 2024).

Customers are seeking authentic interaction. Excessively tuned-up campaigns: #ads after #ad are tiring. According to one of the studies published by Harvard Business Review, authenticity is now a currency: nowadays, followers prefer creators who remain true to their voice and values (O'Connor et al., 2019). Fashion designers in India, who switch brands to brands, would be losing credibility. This is particularly difficult with fashion where looks have a tendency to mix with promotion.

Some relatable haulers in Navi Mumbai once admitted they would no longer buy when I always appear to sell something--a statement that TikTok focus groups shared (Walsh et al., 2024). It is not inspirational to keep selling without telling a story. India is developing its regulatory play book.

In 2022, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) introduced the disclosures of paid promotions (e.g. #ad, #paidpartnership), and further details will be introduced to finance and health sectors (ASCI, 2025). Still, enforcement is lax--lots of posts still not disclosed, by choice or lack of knowledge. With the growth of influencer marketing, brands require systematic policies, rather than box-checking. This may take the form of official agreements, explicit ROI indicators and moral briefs (i.e. "No extreme body-ideals promotion," or "Indian artisans responsibly).

4.3 The Future of Fashion Marketing in India

What comes next? The future is hybrid, high-tech and very local.

AR fashion try-ons are no longer in the sci-fi. Applications such as Fynd and Tata Cliq are based on AR to enable customers to virtually, as in the case of influencer content, try on blouses or a set of kurts (Gupta, 2024). In the meantime, influencer watch-time, comments and conversion lift are examined through AI dashboards by brands (Sengupta, 2025). These tools assist brand managers to choose creators who have followers with the same target psychology of the brand- not necessarily the demographics. Predictive analytics are also used to plan content by creators. Macro creators now get AI-driven recommendations on the styling themes being used based on regional festivals, previous campaign success and trend direction.

With the increasing macro influencer saturation, hyper-local nano influencers, individuals with 1k-10k followers are on the rise. They work in small circles, like college clubs, Instagram niche communities, layer of fashion and DIY hobbyists, and they talk to each other in a sincere and reliable way and their suggestions are personal. In furniture and ethnic, brands have collaborated with local artists in Pune, Jaipur or Vadodara and have made these their local fashion ambassadors. Their impact? Increased trust, localiriness and in many cases lower costs styles that reflect local requirements (Madhavan, 2024).

In the future, it is possible to identify three trends:

- Localized Globalization: Fashion stories will combine global style (e.g. Korean street-style) and Indian sensitivities (e.g. block prints or sari draping).

- Value-Led Consumption: A good portion of consumers, particularly Gen Z, will focus on sustainability, ethical manufacturing, and resale - inform micro-trends in thrift styling, circular fashion, and regional upcycling (Madhavan, 2024).
- Participatory Fashion: By voting, fashion competitions, or co-edited styles, customers will co-write fashion trends with creators. Brands can release so-called collaborative design capsules that are created through Instagram polls or challenges on Reels.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, social media has transformed into a cultural phenomenon, as the marketing medium has evolved, now being participatory and dynamic in the way of fashion consumption. Fashion advertisements ten years ago were inert, dreamy look-books, now they are fluid chats- whether a college student in Kanpur is styling her Thrifty Saree Reels, or a Manipuri maker-of-saris is holding a sari-draping workshop in Meitei, fashion on social media is flowing, open, and highly identity based. Consumers have become more empowered than they have ever been: they are showing preferences by saving, polling, and challenging with duet this trend, they are making micro-influencers bigger, and they are expecting more with regard to ethics as they call out greenwashing or fake followers. They no longer have to be passive viewers in this digital fashion ecosystem but are active collaborators, co-storytellers and even co-brands. To academics, practitioners, and consumers, the metamorphosis is irresistible, fashion in India now more communicative, mindful, participatory than ever, with a directive as simple and as deep as this: become meaningfully active, act responsibly, and accept the fact that fashion is no longer passively put on, but lived.

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