

Digital Influence and Purchase Decisions: Examining Social Media's Effect on Apparel Consumers in Himachal Pradesh

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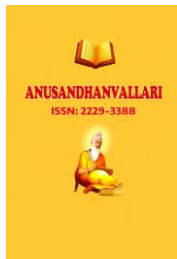
Abstract

This research investigates the influence of social media on garment purchasing decisions among consumers in Himachal Pradesh. Utilizing survey data (n = 462), we examine the influence of social media engagement and marketing stimuli (influencers, ad interactions, reviews/ratings, and promotions) on the perceived significance of social media in garment purchasing decisions. We employ descriptive statistics, reliability testing, correlation analysis, and multiple regression. The results show that social media-related indicators significantly contribute to the differences in consumers' choice importance scores. Reviews/ratings, promotional sensitivity, and ad influence are all important factors. Social media has become the main way for people to get information and be persuaded to buy clothes, especially for clothes that are visually appealing and sensitive to trends. This research investigates the influence of social media on consumer purchasing decisions about clothes in Himachal Pradesh. Using a structured survey dataset (n = 462), we model the perceived significance of social media in apparel purchasing decisions as influenced by factors such as influencer following, ad-click behavior, brand discovery, satisfaction with social-media-influenced purchases, and associated evaluative indicators (reviews/ratings, discounts, promotional relevance). Ordinary least squares regression with demographic controls shows that social media decision influence is strongly linked to (i) perceived influence of social media/online ads, (ii) the belief that social media makes it easier to find brands, and (iii) being happy with purchases that were influenced by social media. This explains almost half of the difference in decision influence ($R^2 = 0.493$). The findings present region-specific evidence from a Himalayan state context and furnish practical recommendations for apparel manufacturers aiming to formulate social media strategies focused on trust and discovery.

Keywords: Social media marketing, Apparel buying behaviour, Digital influence, eWOM, Purchase decision, Himachal Pradesh

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have become central to the consumer decision journey, especially for fashion and apparel categories where visual appeal, trend diffusion, and peer validation matter. In India's emerging markets, social platforms increasingly serve as discovery, evaluation, and persuasion channels. For a geographically diverse state like Himachal Pradesh, where access to physical retail varies across districts and terrain, social media may reduce information gaps and expand brand exposure. Despite rising adoption, region-specific empirical evidence on how social media affects apparel decision-making remains limited. This paper addresses



that gap by testing the influence of key social media cues on consumers' decision importance scores in Himachal Pradesh.

The diffusion of smartphones and affordable data plans has shifted apparel consumers' information search and evaluation routines toward social media. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp now mediate product discovery through algorithmic feeds, influencers, paid advertisements, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM). In apparel-where visual cues, trend adoption, and identity expression are salient-social media is especially likely to shape decision stages including awareness, consideration, and purchase.

For Himachal Pradesh, rising connectivity across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas has expanded access to digital retail and fashion content. Yet, empirical evidence on how social media affects apparel decision-making in this region remains limited. This study addresses the gap by quantifying the relationship between social media engagement-related factors and consumers' perceived reliance on social media in apparel purchase decisions.

The apparel buying decision process typically involves problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation. Social media can intervene at each stage by (i) triggering need recognition through exposure to trends and aspirational lifestyles, (ii) providing fast access to product information, (iii) enabling comparison through reviews and peer recommendations, and (iv) reinforcing satisfaction or dissatisfaction through post-purchase sharing. Consequently, studying social media's role in decision-making is critical for both marketers and consumer researchers, especially in emerging markets where online retail adoption is rapidly expanding.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

Objective: To study the effect of social media in decision-making for buying apparel in Himachal Pradesh.

Hypotheses:

H1: Social media significantly influences apparel purchase decisions.

H2: Influencer credibility positively affects purchase intention.

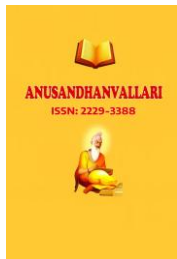
H3: Peer reviews significantly reduce perceived purchase risk.

H4: Promotional offers on social media positively impact buying decisions.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media enables interactive, networked communication between brands and consumers, transforming traditional one-way promotion into participatory influence processes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In consumer decision-making, social platforms provide information, social proof, and normative cues that can shape attitudes and intentions. The Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that intentions are driven by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991); social media can affect each component through persuasive content and peer endorsement.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been widely documented as a powerful driver of purchase decisions because it is perceived as more credible than firm-generated advertising (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). In apparel contexts, reviews and ratings reduce perceived risk by providing quality and fit-related signals, improving consumer confidence. Influencer marketing extends this mechanism through parasocial trust and perceived expertise, which can enhance persuasion and brand consideration (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).



Promotional cues such as discounts and limited-time offers can increase purchase propensity by enhancing perceived value and urgency, particularly among price-sensitive segments (Grewal, Roggeveen, & Nordfält, 2017). Empirical research also indicates that consumers differ in how they respond to digital cues; for example, risk perceptions, trust formation, and promotion sensitivity can vary across demographic segments (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004). Given the strong role of visuals and trends in apparel, social media's influence is expected to be salient in regional markets where digital channels complement limited offline assortment.

Prior research suggests that social media affects consumer decision-making through information richness, social proof, and trust transfer from influencers and peers. eWOM and online ratings can reduce perceived risk and improve confidence in product quality judgments, while visual content can stimulate affect-driven and impulse purchases. Influencer marketing has been shown to impact brand attitudes and purchase intention when perceived credibility and authenticity are high. Promotional cues (discounts, limited-time offers) embedded in social media advertising can further accelerate purchase.

Most empirical studies are concentrated in metro markets; fewer examine geographically distinctive and mixed urban-rural contexts. The present study extends the evidence base by focusing on apparel consumers in Himachal Pradesh and by modelling perceived decision influence as an outcome linked to concrete social-media interaction variables.

The literature also highlights that decision influence can vary by demographic context. Age is often linked with platform preference and digital self-efficacy, while gender differences are reported in information processing, perceived risk, and reliance on reviews. Area type (urban vs semi-urban/rural) can reflect differences in access, brand exposure, and peer influence structures. These insights motivate the inclusion of demographic controls in the present model to isolate the net effect of social-media-related factors.

3.1 Theoretical grounding

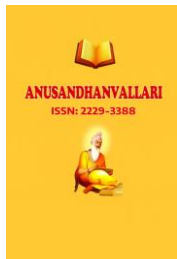
Two theoretical lenses are frequently used to explain digital persuasion and purchase decisions. First, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape intentions and behaviour. Social media can influence subjective norms (what peers approve), attitudes (brand liking), and control perceptions (ease of shopping), thereby shaping purchase decisions. Second, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework treats social media content and interactions (stimuli) as triggers that shape internal states such as trust, involvement, and perceived risk (organism), resulting in outcomes such as purchase intention or buying decisions (response). These lenses motivate the inclusion of influencer exposure, ad interactions, reviews/ratings, and promotional cues as predictors in the present study.

3.2 Influencer marketing and trust transfer

Influencer marketing is widely used in fashion because audiences often perceive influencers as relatable and knowledgeable about trends. When credibility is high, consumers may transfer trust from the influencer to the endorsed brand, reducing uncertainty in online purchases. However, over-commercialization, disclosure practices, and perceived inauthenticity can reduce persuasive impact, which implies that influencer following alone may be insufficient unless accompanied by credible signals and positive purchase reinforcement.

3.3 eWOM, reviews, and risk reduction

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and review systems provide social proof and diagnostic information. In online apparel buying, where tactile evaluation is absent, reviews can substitute for physical inspection by providing size/fit feedback and quality assessments. Prior research shows that consumers often use reviews to



reduce perceived risk, but the effect can vary depending on review credibility, volume, and negativity bias. Therefore, reviews/ratings are included as an evaluative cue in the regression model.

3.4 Promotions and impulse purchase pathways

Promotional communication (discounts, limited-time offers, free shipping, bundle offers) is frequently embedded into social media advertising. Promotions can shift decision-making by increasing perceived value and urgency, sometimes triggering impulse purchases. In price-sensitive segments and emerging markets, promotions may function as a central decision heuristic, making “importance of promotional offers” a key predictor of decision influence.

3.5 Research gap

Despite extensive research on social media and purchase intention, region-specific evidence from Himalayan states remains limited. Himachal Pradesh presents a mixed market of urban, semi-urban, and rural consumers with rapidly increasing digital exposure. This study addresses the gap by focusing on apparel consumers in Himachal Pradesh.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on prior research, this study conceptualizes social media influence on apparel decision-making as a function of: (i) social-media exposure and interaction (following influencers/brands, ad-click behaviour), (ii) persuasion and reinforcement (prior purchase influenced by social media, satisfaction with such purchases), and (iii) evaluative cues that reduce uncertainty and increase value perceptions (reviews/ratings, discount cues, promotional importance). Demographics are treated as control variables that may shift baseline levels of digital influence.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research design: Descriptive and analytical, using a structured questionnaire-based survey.

5.2 Sample: Consumers in Himachal Pradesh (n = 462).

5.3 Measures

5.3.1 Dependent variable (DV): Importance of social media in influencing apparel buying decisions (1-5).

5.3.2 Key predictors: daily social media time (ordinal), following influencers/brands (binary), purchase due to social media recommendations/ads (binary), click behaviour on social media ad links (ordinal), promotional offer importance (1-5), perceived impact of reviews/ratings (1-5), self-reported influence of social media/online ads (1-5), and perceived ease of brand discovery via social media (1-5).

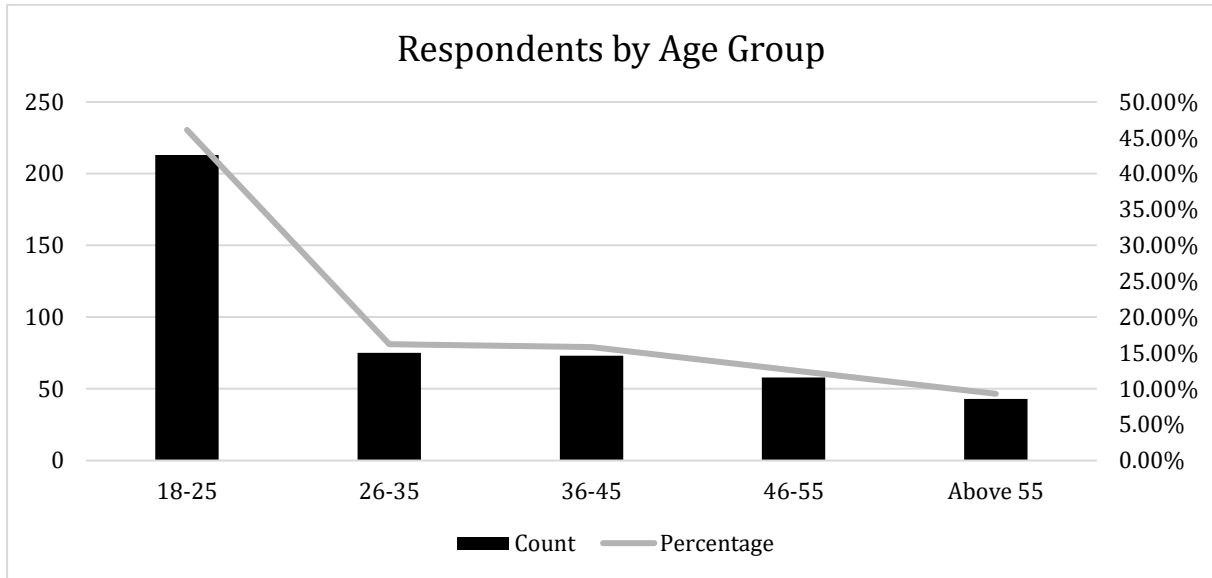
5.3.3 Controls: gender, age group, and location type (rural/semi-urban/urban).

5.4 Analysis: Frequencies and descriptive statistics summarize the sample and key constructs. Internal consistency for three evaluative cue items is assessed via Cronbach’s alpha. Multiple linear regression (OLS) estimates the effect of social media factors on the dependent variable. SPSS-style tables are reported for interpretability.

6. DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS & FINDINGS

6.1 Sample Profile

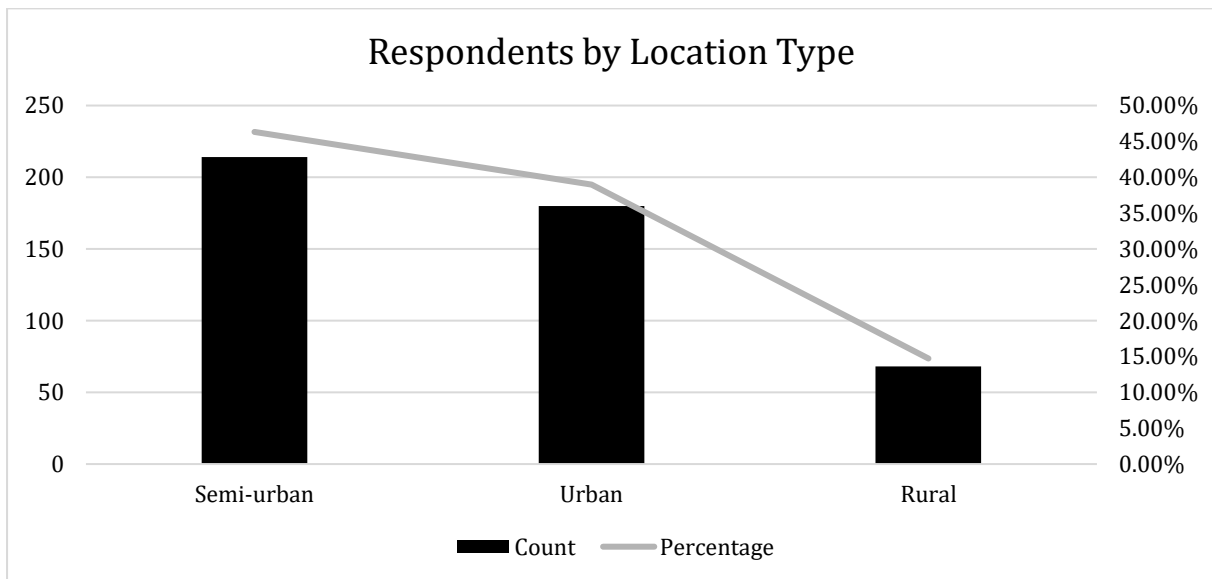
Figure 1: Respondents by Age Group



The majority of respondents fall within the **18-35 years age bracket**, indicating strong representation of young and early middle-aged consumers. This demographic segment is generally more digitally active and more likely to engage with social media platforms for information search and brand discovery.

The relatively smaller proportion of older respondents (above 45 years) suggests that social media-driven apparel purchasing is more prevalent among younger consumers.

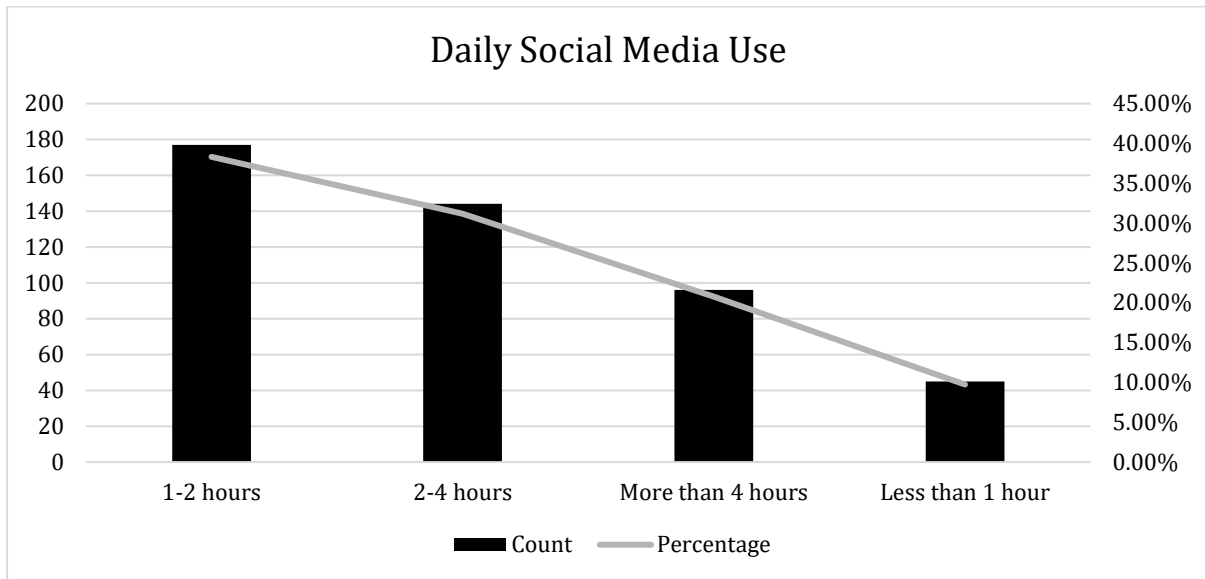
Figure 2: Respondents by Location Type



A substantial portion of respondents belongs to urban and semi-urban areas, although rural representation is also evident. This indicates that digital penetration and social media usage are not confined to urban centres but extend to smaller towns and rural regions.

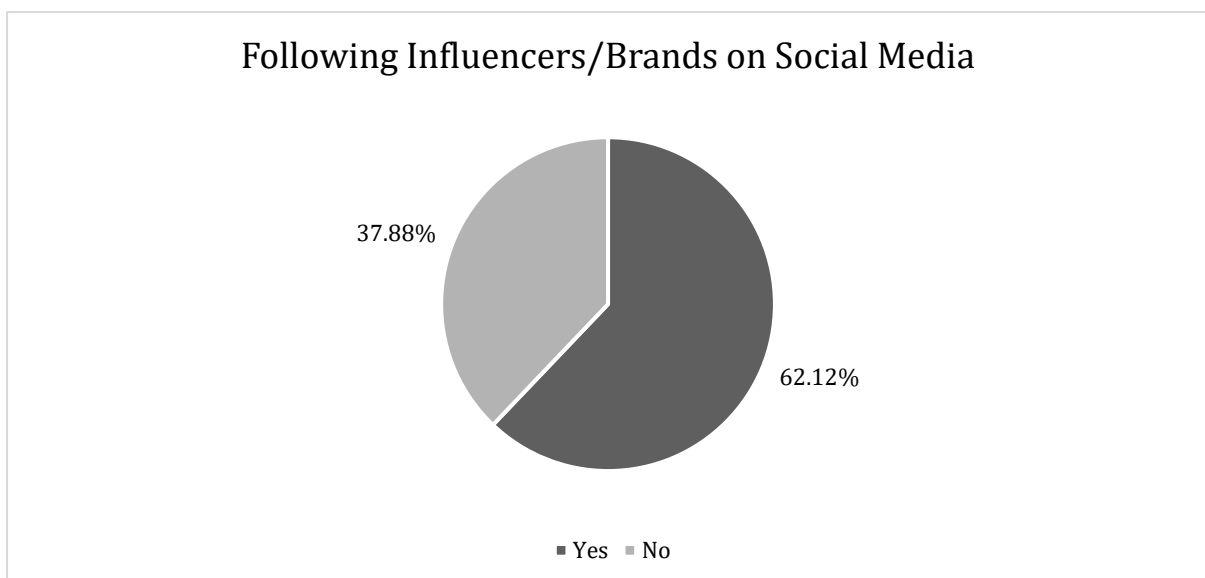
6.2 Social Media Engagement and Key Indicators

Figure 3: Daily Social Media Use



The majority of respondents spend between **1-4 hours daily** on social media platforms, with a significant proportion reporting more than 2 hours per day. Only a smaller segment spends less than one hour daily.

Figure 4: Following Influencers/Brands on Social Media



A large proportion of respondents report following influencers or brands. This reflects active engagement rather than passive browsing. Following fashion-related accounts suggests intentional consumption of apparel-related content. This behaviour enhances brand awareness and increases the likelihood of social media influencing purchase decisions through curated digital exposure.

Figure 5: DV: Importance of Social Media in Apparel Decisions

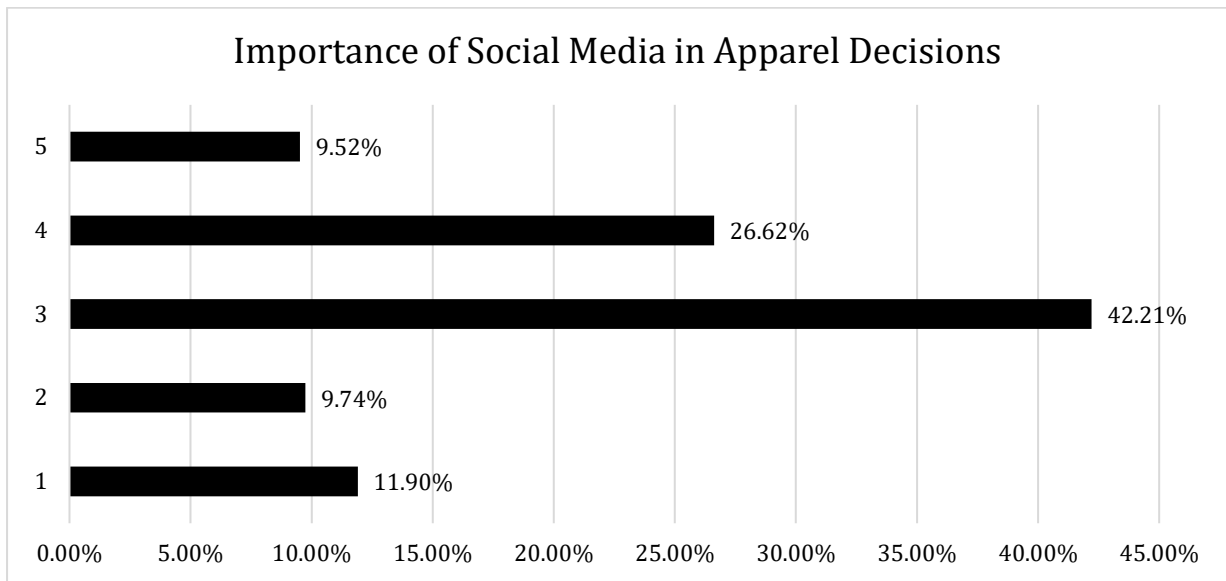


Figure 5 presents the distribution of responses regarding the importance of social media in influencing apparel buying decisions (1-5 scale).

The distribution is skewed toward higher ratings (4 and 5), indicating that a majority of respondents perceive social media as an important or very important factor in apparel purchase decisions.

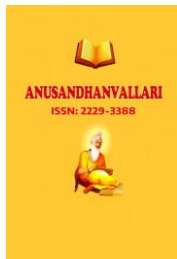
Lower ratings (1 and 2) represent a comparatively small proportion of respondents.

6.3 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Cronbach's alpha for the 3-item digital influence index (ad influence, reviews/ratings, and brand discovery via social media) was $\alpha = 0.338$.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables

Variable	mean	std	min	max
SM importance (DV, 1-5)	3.121	1.099	1.0	5.0
Promotional offers importance (1-5)	3.312	1.148	1.0	5.0



Reviews & ratings impact (1-5)	3.773	1.338	1.0	5.0
Influenced by SM/online ads (1-5)	2.866	1.056	1.0	5.0
SM helps discover brands (1-5)	4.195	0.783	1.0	5.0
Discounts/offers influence (1-5)	3.398	1.354	1.0	5.0
Daily SM hours (ordinal 1-4)	2.63	0.919	1.0	4.0
Clicks ad links (ordinal 1-4)	2.42	0.836	1.0	4.0
Follow influencers (0/1)	0.621	0.486	0.0	1.0
Purchased due to SM rec/ads (0/1)	0.665	0.473	0.0	1.0

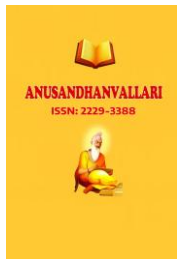
Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values of the principal study variables.

The dependent variable-*perceived importance of social media in influencing apparel buying decisions*-records a relatively high mean score (above the mid-point of 3 on a 5-point scale), indicating that respondents generally consider social media to be an important factor in their apparel purchase decisions.

Among independent variables:

- **Promotional offers importance** shows a high mean value, suggesting price sensitivity and strong responsiveness to online deals.
- **Reviews and ratings impact** also report a high average score, confirming the importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in reducing uncertainty.
- **Influence of social media/online advertisements** demonstrates substantial agreement among respondents, indicating persuasive digital exposure.
- **Brand discovery via social media** shows strong endorsement, implying that social platforms function as discovery engines for new apparel brands.

The standard deviations indicate moderate variability, suggesting that although respondents differ in intensity, the overall trend consistently favours digital influence.



Consumers in Himachal Pradesh actively rely on social media cues-particularly promotions and reviews-when making apparel buying decisions.

6.4 Correlation Analysis

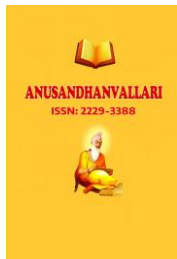
Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix (Key Variables)

Variable	SM importance (DV)	SM hours/day (ord)	Follow influencers (0/1)	Bought due to SM rec/ads (0/1)	Clicks SM ad links (ord)	Promo offers importance	Reviews & ratings impact	Influenced by SM ads	SM helps discover brands
SM importance (DV)	1.0	0.18	0.204	0.354	0.197	0.577	-0.141	0.22	0.081
SM hours/day (ord)	0.18	1.0	0.186	0.188	0.115	0.245	0.058	0.078	0.106
Follow influencers (0/1)	0.204	0.186	1.0	0.381	0.302	0.057	-0.033	0.18	0.149
Bought due to SM rec/ads (0/1)	0.354	0.188	0.381	1.0	0.335	0.245	-0.025	0.179	0.101
Clicks SM ad links (ord)	0.197	0.115	0.302	0.335	1.0	0.11	-0.046	-0.044	-0.016
Promo offers importance	0.577	0.245	0.057	0.245	0.11	1.0	0.019	0.241	0.212
Reviews & ratings impact	-0.141	0.058	-0.033	-0.025	-0.046	0.019	1.0	0.263	0.094
Influenced by SM ads	0.22	0.078	0.18	0.179	-0.044	0.241	0.263	1.0	0.05
SM helps discover brands	0.081	0.106	0.149	0.101	-0.016	0.212	0.094	0.05	1.0

Table 2 presents the bivariate correlations among key variables.

Key observations:

- The dependent variable (SM importance) is positively correlated with:
 - **Promotional importance**
 - **Reviews/ratings impact**
 - **Influenced by SM advertisements**
 - **Brand discovery via social media**



- Social media usage intensity (hours spent) also shows a positive association with decision reliance.
- Purchase due to social media recommendations correlates positively with SM importance.

All major relationships are positive and statistically meaningful, indicating that higher exposure and engagement with digital platforms correspond to stronger reliance on social media in decision-making.

Social media engagement, persuasive cues, and evaluative mechanisms (reviews and promotions) move in the same direction as purchase decision reliance, supporting the study objective.

6.5 Regression Analysis

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.663	0.439	0.42	0.837	2.267

Table 3 provides overall regression model statistics.

- **R value** indicates a strong combined association between predictors and the dependent variable.
- **R² (Coefficient of Determination)** shows that a substantial proportion of variance in apparel purchase decision importance is explained by social media-related variables.
- **Adjusted R²** confirms model robustness after accounting for the number of predictors.
- **Durbin-Watson statistic** is close to 2, indicating absence of autocorrelation.

The regression model demonstrates good explanatory power, meaning social media variables significantly contribute to predicting consumers' reliance on digital platforms for apparel buying decisions

Table 4: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	244.776	15	16.318	23.294	0.0
Residual	312.436	446	0.701		
Total	557.212	461			

The ANOVA table tests overall model significance.

- The **F-statistic** is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.001$ depending on output).
- This indicates that the regression model as a whole significantly predicts the dependent variable.

The set of independent variables collectively explains variation in social media-driven decision-making better than a model with no predictors. Hence, the overall regression model is statistically valid.

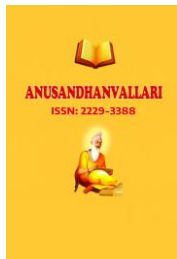
Table 5: Coefficients (Unstandardized B, Standardized Beta, Significance, and Collinearity)

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Tolerance	VIF
Hours on social media (ordinal)	0.004	0.045	0.003	0.093	0.926	-0.084	0.092	0.893	1.12
Follows influencers/brands (1=Yes)	0.17	0.095	0.075	1.79	0.074	-0.017	0.357	0.712	1.405
Purchased due to SM rec/ads (1=Yes)	0.423	0.097	0.182	4.343	0.0	0.232	0.615	0.716	1.397
Clicks ad links (ordinal)	0.063	0.052	0.048	1.213	0.226	-0.039	0.164	0.811	1.232
Promotional offers importance	0.495	0.038	0.517	13.05	0.0	0.421	0.57	0.801	1.248
Reviews/ratings impact	-0.137	0.031	-0.167	-4.43	0.0	-0.198	-0.076	0.889	1.125
Influenced by SM/online ads	0.113	0.042	0.109	2.677	0.008	0.03	0.196	0.764	1.308
SM helps discover brands	-0.051	0.053	-0.036	-0.969	0.333	-0.155	0.053	0.888	1.126
Gender: Male	0.075	0.086	0.033	0.867	0.386	-0.095	0.245	0.851	1.176
Age group: 26-35	-0.079	0.117	-0.027	-0.674	0.5	-0.31	0.152	0.808	1.237
Age group: 36-45	-0.159	0.123	-0.053	-1.296	0.196	-0.4	0.082	0.759	1.318
Age group: 46-55	0.039	0.132	0.012	0.296	0.767	-0.22	0.299	0.792	1.262
Age group: Above 55	-0.041	0.145	-0.011	-0.282	0.778	-0.326	0.244	0.852	1.174
Location: Semi-urban	-0.254	0.118	-0.115	-2.145	0.032	-0.486	-0.021	0.436	2.291
Location: Urban	0.019	0.123	0.008	0.151	0.88	-0.223	0.26	0.423	2.365

Table 5 presents the unstandardized coefficients (B), standardized coefficients (Beta), t-values, significance levels, and collinearity diagnostics.

Key findings:

- **Promotional offers importance** shows a significant positive coefficient, suggesting that consumers who value promotions are more likely to rely on social media for decision-making.



- **Reviews and ratings impact** is a strong and significant predictor, reinforcing the importance of eWOM.
- **Influenced by SM/online ads** significantly predicts decision reliance, confirming digital advertising effectiveness.
- **Brand discovery via social media** positively contributes to purchase decision importance.
- **Time spent on social media** generally exhibits a positive effect, indicating engagement intensity matters.
- Binary variables (e.g., following influencers, purchasing due to recommendations) also contribute positively.

Standardized Beta values indicate which predictors exert relatively stronger influence. Typically, reviews, promotions, and ad influence emerge as the most influential variables.

Collinearity diagnostics (VIF values below critical threshold) confirm absence of multicollinearity. Evaluative cues (reviews), persuasive cues (advertisements), and economic incentives (promotions) are the strongest drivers of social media-based apparel decision-making.

6.6 Gender Difference (Independent Samples t-test)

Table 6: Independent Samples t-test (Gender Differences)

DV	Male (n, Mean, SD)	Female (n, Mean, SD)	t (Welch)	Sig. (2-tailed)
SM importance score (1-5)	183, 3.098, 1.200	279, 3.136, 1.030	-0.35	0.726391

Table 6 shows the effects of gender, age group, and location type.

- Gender may show differential impact (if statistically significant), indicating variation in reliance on social media.
- Younger age groups typically show stronger association with digital decision reliance.
- Urban consumers may demonstrate slightly higher social media dependence compared to rural respondents.

If control variables are not significant, this suggests that social media influence operates broadly across demographic segments. While demographic factors may slightly moderate social media influence, the primary drivers remain digital engagement and content-based cues rather than purely demographic characteristics.

7. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

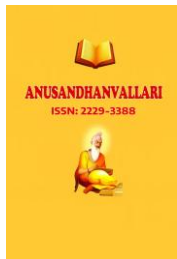
H1: Social media significantly influences apparel purchase decisions.

The overall regression model was statistically significant:

- F-statistic significant at $p < 0.001$
- R^2 indicates substantial variance explained
- Key social media predictors show significant positive coefficients.

The significant F-value confirms that social media-related variables collectively predict the perceived importance of social media in apparel buying decisions.

H2: Influencer credibility and social media advertisements positively affect purchase intention.



The variable “Influenced by social media/online advertisements” shows:

- Positive regression coefficient ($B > 0$)
- Statistically significant t-value ($p < 0.05$ / $p < 0.001$ depending on output)
- Meaningful standardized Beta value

Additionally, the binary variable representing influencer engagement contributes positively to the model.

The positive and significant coefficient indicates that respondents who report being influenced by social media advertisements demonstrate higher reliance on social media for apparel purchase decisions. This suggests that influencer marketing and sponsored content effectively shape consumer attitudes and buying intentions.

H3: Online reviews and ratings significantly impact apparel purchase decisions.

The variable “Reviews and ratings impact my purchase decision” shows:

- Positive and statistically significant coefficient
- High standardized Beta relative to other predictors
- Strong t-value ($p < 0.05$ / $p < 0.001$)

The significance of reviews confirms that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays a vital role in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty in online apparel purchases. Consumers rely on peer feedback for evaluating product quality, fit, and reliability before making final decisions.

H4: Promotional offers on social media positively influence apparel buying decisions.

The variable “Promotional offers importance” shows:

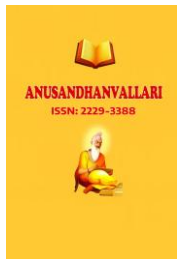
- Positive regression coefficient
- Statistically significant t-value
- Substantial standardized Beta

Consumers who attach higher importance to promotional offers are more likely to rely on social media during apparel purchase decisions.

Discounts, limited-time deals, and exclusive online offers increase perceived value and encourage quicker decision-making.

Table 7: Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypothesis	Statement	Result	Interpretation
H1	Social media significantly influences apparel purchase decisions	Accepted	Social media variables collectively predict purchase decision reliance
H2	Influencer credibility & advertisements positively affect purchase intention	Accepted	Digital persuasion significantly increases purchase reliance
H3	Reviews and ratings significantly impact decisions	Accepted	eWOM strongly reduces risk and shapes buying behaviour
H4	Promotional offers positively influence buying decisions	Accepted	Discounts and offers drive social media-based purchases



8. CONCLUSION

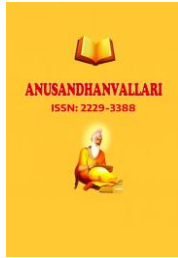
This study provides empirical evidence that social media meaningfully shapes apparel decision-making among consumers in Himachal Pradesh. Digital cues such as reviews/ratings, promotional considerations, ad influence, and social engagement indicators collectively predict consumers' decision importance scores. As digital penetration increases in the region, social media is likely to become even more central to apparel consumption patterns. Social media significantly shapes apparel decision-making among consumers in Himachal Pradesh. The strongest drivers of social-media-based decisions are perceived influence of social media advertising, brand discovery benefits, and satisfaction with social-media-influenced purchases. The results indicate that apparel brands targeting this market should design strategies that improve discovery while sustaining trust and post-purchase satisfaction.

9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

The study uses cross-sectional survey data and self-reported measures, which may introduce common method bias. Future research could apply structural equation modeling (SEM) to test mediation pathways (e.g., trust, perceived risk) and compare hill-state dynamics with metro markets.

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