Factors influencing the effectiveness of social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions: A study on apparel and footwear fashion marketing in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions in the apparel and footwear fashion sector in Malaysia. It focuses on how influencers' trustworthiness, relatability, and content creation on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube shape consumer behavior within the digital marketing landscape. By integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the research aims to provide a behavioral and technological understanding of factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions. A comprehensive framework was developed to examine the relationships between influencers, brand perception, and advanced technological tools like Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR and VR). Data were collected using online questionnaires shared via WhatsApp and email, employing convenience sampling. Analytical tools such as SPSS, SMARTPLS, correlation statistics, multiple regression, and factor analysis were utilized to establish causal relationships and validate hypotheses. The results indicate that influencer type, brand familiarity, trustworthiness, and the use of AR/VR significantly influence consumer purchase intentions in the fashion industry. In contrast, sponsorship disclosure has minimal impact on purchasing decisions. The findings demonstrate the critical role of social media influencers in shaping brand perception and consumer behavior. This study underscores the importance of leveraging influencers as strategic partners in digital marketing campaigns within the fashion sector. It highlights the interplay between psychological and technological elements, providing a deeper understanding of how influencer characteristics and innovative tools like AR/VR drive consumer purchase intentions. The research offers actionable insights for marketers and brands seeking to enhance their digital marketing strategies. By collaborating with credible influencers and incorporating advanced technologies, marketers can effectively engage with their target audience and improve purchase outcomes. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for brands to prioritize trustworthiness and authenticity in their influencer partnerships to strengthen consumer-brand relationships.

1. Introduction

In the modern digital marketing era, social media has revolutionized the way marketers communicate with consumers. The advent of influencer marketing has now evolved into a $10 billion industry in 2024 in Malaysia and is expected to grow at a 10.5% CAGR [1]. Sectors like fashion, beauty, and food are particularly impacted by social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, which dominate marketing campaigns [2]. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption, reshaping consumer behavior as businesses and individuals turned to social media for engagement during lockdowns [3, 4]. Social Media Influencers (SMIs) leverage their online presence to amplify brand messages, shape consumer preferences, and create targeted, curated content [5]. In Malaysia, the growing digital fashion landscape reflects this shift, driven by 98% internet penetration and a mobile-first population where 96% access the web via smartphones. As of 2024, 83.1% of Malaysians are active online, with platforms like TikTok gaining popularity as hubs for fashion trends and consumer engagement [6]. Influencers play key roles in driving unplanned purchases and shaping lifestyle preferences through their curated content [7, 8].

The emergence of social media influencer, marketing has transformed the way brands engage with consumers, especially in the fashion sector. Trustworthiness, content quality, and entertainment have emerged as key factors influencing purchase intentions [9]. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, enable fashion brands to promote trends and purchases through exclusivity, emotional satisfaction, and high-quality imagery. However, concerns remain about whether influencer marketing diminishes luxury brands' exclusivity [10]. While a Malaysian study involving 450 respondents explored these dynamics Yap and Ismail [11] it represents a fraction of Malaysia's 28.68 million social media users, highlighting the need for broader research [12].

A key issue within influencer marketing is authenticity, which directly impacts the trust and purchase intentions of consumers. Influencers foster trust through electronic word-of-mouth recommendations, which influence consumer behavior across generations [13]. Frequent interactions with influencers via likes, comments, and shares enhance trust, particularly in fashion; consumers perceive these interactions as authentic. However, the misuse of automation tools like Instagress, which generates false engagement, dilutes this trust. Although 74% of Malaysians consult online reviews before making purchases, only 34% rely on influencer recommendations, emphasizing the need to better understand how authenticity impacts consumer trust and purchase intentions [14].

There is a growing gap in understanding the effectiveness of social media influencers compared to traditional influencers in the fashion industry. Brands are increasingly relying on social media influencers, such as fitness experts, food bloggers, beauty enthusiasts, and fashion influencers, to promote their advertisements through platforms like Instagram, where they engage in native advertising or sponsored content to spark viral discussions about brands. Despite growing recognition of their marketing impact, research on social media influencer marketing remains limited compared to the well-established study of celebrity endorsements, leaving a significant gap given the substantial investments brands make in influencer collaborations Kay, et al. [15].

SMIs align with fashion and luxury brands by promoting lifestyles that resonate with audiences, offering a greater sense of authenticity and closer consumer connections compared to traditional influencers, mainly due to their smaller, targeted followings [16]. This trend is especially prominent in Malaysia, where a survey found that more than 50% of participants interacted with brands and made online purchases via TikTok, a platform that has become highly popular, with 17 million users in the country [1].

Over the past decade, studies on the impact of SMIs on consumer purchase intentions in the apparel and footwear industry have remained limited. Due to this, it remains unclear how different elements of social media influencers marketing effect consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry. Consequently, this study investigates deeper into elements such as the type of influencers, brand familiarity, sponsorship disclosure, trustworthiness, and the integration of augmented reality and virtual reality. Investigating these elements is critical to understanding how they affect consumer behavior and purchase decisions in apparel and footwear fashion marketing.

1.1. Research Objectives

The study aims to investigate the factors influencing the effectiveness of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intentions in the clothing and footwear fashion industry. The specific objectives are:

i.   Examine the relationship between influencer type and consumer purchase intentions.
ii. Explore the connection between brand familiarity and consumer purchase intentions.

iii.   Assess the impact of sponsorship disclosure on consumer purchase intentions.
iv.   Investigate the role of trustworthiness in consumer purchase intentions.
v.   Determine the influence of AR and VR on consumer purchase intentions.
vi.   Evaluate whether influencer type, brand familiarity, sponsorship disclosure, trustworthiness, and AR/VR predict purchase intentions.

1.2. Research Questions

The key research question is what are the factors that are influencing the effectiveness of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intentions in the clothing and footwear fashion industry? To answer this, the following supplementary questions are included in the study as follows:

i.   Is there a significant relationship between influencer type and consumers' purchase intentions?
ii.   Does brand familiarity significantly affect consumer purchase intentions?
iii. Does sponsorship disclosure impact consumer purchase intentions?
iv.   Is trustworthiness significantly related to consumer purchase intentions?
v.   Does AR/VR significantly influence consumer purchase intentions?
vi.   Can influencer type, brand familiarity, sponsorship disclosure, trustworthiness, and AR/VR predict consumer purchase intentions?

1.3. Significance of Study

Influencer marketing, once a niche trend, has rapidly grown into a $10 billion industry in 2024, in which 75% of marketers depend on influencers. Influencers are professionals in creating content that enhances consumer interaction, increases social media reach, and drives purchase intentions in consumers [17]. With the increasing popularity of influencer marketing, especially in brand recognition, businesses adapt to strong influencer marketing strategies by understanding key elements that impact consumer behavior. This study investigates how influencer marketing elements affect the fashion industry, thereby helping businesses refine their marketing strategies.

This study explores the role of consumers' attitudes and subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and adoption of technology in the context of purchase intention through the lens of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the technology acceptance model (TAM). Ajzen and Kruglanski [18] summarized the advantages of the TPB in understanding how attitudes, social norms, and control influence behavioral intentions. Saeidi, et al. [19] suggested that TAM theory could explain the adoption of technology based on its perceived usefulness and ease of use. This research can examine the effectiveness of SMIs compared to traditional celebrities in shaping consumer attitudes and norms. It can also explore the impact of sponsorships or endorsements on consumers' perceptions of trust and control. Additionally, it can investigate the influence of technological innovations, such as virtual fitting rooms, on consumer behavior. The research examines the effects of influencer marketing in the apparel and footwear industry by expanding such theoretical frameworks and provides a recommendation to companies about building brand awareness, trust, and growth. This research is extremely relevant as social media influencer marketing starts to reshape the business world and allows a better understanding of the target audience, being guided by facts about today's market.

The study is structured into six distinct chapters, each addressing specific aspects of the research. The introduction establishes the foundation of the research, outlining its purpose, objectives, and significance. The literature review synthesizes existing theories and studies relevant to social media influencers, consumer behavior, and the adoption of AR/VR technologies. The methodology chapter details the research design, data collection techniques, and analytical methods employed. Following this, the data analysis and findings chapter presents the results derived from statistical tests and their interpretation. Lastly, the conclusion and recommendations chapter summarizes the key insights, discusses theoretical and managerial implications, highlights limitations, and provides directions for future research.

2. Review of Literature

A thorough review of the literature was carried out regarding theories and factors affecting consumer behavior. The study covered the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which provide the key aspects of influencer marketing efficacy. Some of these include consumer purchase intention, types of influencers, brand familiarity, sponsorship disclosure, trustworthiness, and the role of AR and VR in the formation of consumer decisions.

2.1. Theory of Planned Behavior

TPB is relevant in understanding the relationship between behavior and attitudes, augmenting the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which increases its capacity. As depicted in Figure 1, TPB has three components: attitude towards the behavior, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. It is also used in determining the effects of consumer beliefs on purchase intention (PI) of a particular brand or commodity. Purchase intention, which is a sign of willingness to purchase a product, reflects a positive attitude that a consumer has towards the product [20]. This theory centers around perceived behavioral control, which identifies the attitudes of customers and their ability to act in a particular situation that helps in psychological adjustment and control [21].

In the case of ethical fashion, which focuses on fair trade, the use of green materials, and safeguarding workers' environments, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) contributes to the understanding of sustainable purchasing decisions towards socially responsible and greener company practices. Studies applying TPB have analyzed sustainable behaviors such as green purchasing and organic food consumption, highlighting its relevance to ethical consumption trends [22]. Meanwhile,

the Malaysian fast fashion industry, valued at $2.73 billion in 2022, is driven by brands like Xuan, et al. [23], with cultural and geographical factors shaping consumer behavior and the youth demographic (18-25 years) emerging as the dominant market segment [24]. By linking attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and actions, TPB effectively provides insights into consumer decision-making within the rapidly evolving fashion landscape.
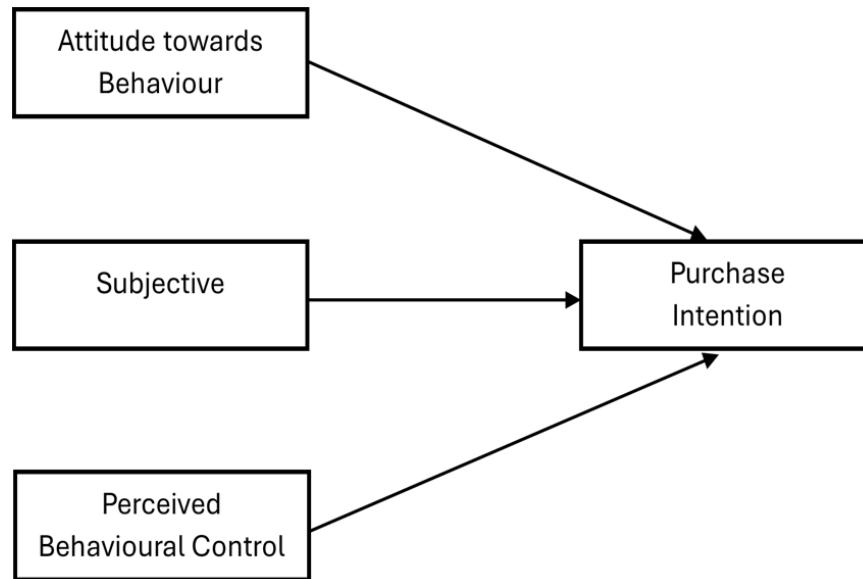

Figure 1.
Theory of Planned Behavior.
Source: Wing, et al. [24]

2.2. Technology Acceptance Model

TAM model presented in Figure 2 describes how external variables shape users' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions in adopting technology, focusing primarily on perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) to drive technology adoption [25]. PU refers to the belief that technology enhances performance, while PEOU reflects its ease of use. These factors shape users' attitudes, which subsequently influence behavioral intentions [26]. TAM has also been extended in e-commerce to reinforce trust in websites and vendors, which is fundamental for online businesses. TAM is also considered in the fashion industry, the adoption of smart technologies and product designs in-stores, however, the research related to linking perceived usefulness with trust in online fashion retail is relatively limited [27]. The adoption of technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) in fashion and e-commerce is driven by their usefulness and ease of use, which enhances engagement. TAM is particularly relevant in Malaysia's growing online fashion and beauty markets, where it effectively predicts online purchase intentions and offers insights into consumer behavior [28].
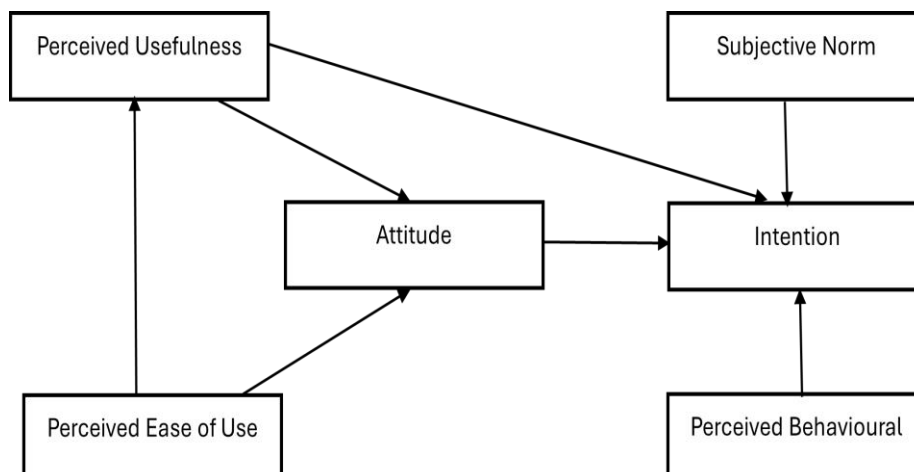
Figure 2.
Technology Acceptance Model.
Source: Hua and Wang [26]

2.3. Influencer Marketing

The digital era has significantly transformed marketing practices and consumer behavior in the fashion industry, where purchasing patterns and consumer awareness have been altered significantly [29]. Influencer marketing involves businesses selecting and incentivizing online influencers to promote products or services to their followers, but there is limited research

on the costs and engagement elasticity associated with this strategy. Uncertainty persists regarding how marketers optimize influencer marketing through strategic influencer selection, targeted follower engagement, or content management [30].

The ongoing globalization and shifting economic landscapes continue to influence industries, with fashion being notably impacted by digital transformation [31]. Instagram, as the leading platform for influencer marketing, allows influencers, or opinion leaders, to share elements of their lives, skills, and opinions, giving marketers more control and insights into campaign performance compared to traditional word-of-mouth marketing [32]. Celebrity endorsements, a traditional form of influencer marketing, have been widely studied for their effectiveness in building consumer interest and brand loyalty, with research focusing on celebrity credibility [33]. There are two types of influencers that help fashion businesses market their products to a wide array of customers, they are, SMIs and traditional celebrities [34].

2.3.1. Social Media Influencers

Instagram has turned into a marketing platform for promoting fashion products and luxury brands, making it a key tool for fashion businesses. This study applies equity theory to explore payment equity, where consumers' perceptions of service evolve over time, influencing their sense of fairness in interactions with service providers. Usage frequency of social networking, banking, and e-commerce platforms plays a significant role in shaping favorable consumer behavior, the behavioral model theory is utilized to analyze how e-commerce, social network, and website designs affect perceived value, engagement behavior, and positive electronic word-of-mouth intentions in enhancing understanding of consumer behavior. Instagram's features enable influencers to build followers, connect with brands, and foster social interactions, making Instagram an ideal platform for promoting luxury brands. Instafamous personalities leverage their narratives to resonate with audiences and promote products and trends while driving their sales [35].

The Meaning Transfer Model articulates how celebrities transfer cultural capital to the brands under which they endorse. Likewise, fashion bloggers on Instagram do this by creating and building cultural value through their images about their lives and identities. The Source Credibility Model underscores how trust matters in influencers because a strong connection with one's audience is what creates this trust [36]. With being predominantly a visual platform, the attractiveness of Instagram as a mode of advertising is rather easily explained. The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model helps in understanding how customers are exposed to online, how affects their thoughts, and how one will buy merchandise [37]. Influencers continue to play a major role, especially with fashion goods. Often for luxury goods, influencer recommendations are trusted significantly higher than old-fashioned advertising [38]. Successful fashion bloggers at Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok understand the language of storytelling; hence engage their followers with great interest. It bases itself on the "Revised Communication Model for Advertising" which highlights genuine storytelling and interaction in which the influencer's message needs to connect with the personality that the public building with the influencer.

2.3.2. Traditional Celebrities

Traditional Celebrities, who have significant achievements in fields like acting, sports, or media, use their established reputation to promote brands. They essentially transfer desirable virtues like glamour and uniqueness to the products, and make those products more interesting. Source Credibility Theory explains how their trustworthiness, expertise, and public characteristics influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions across traditional and digital platforms [39]. In Malaysia, traditional celebrity endorsements have proven to be highly effective, boosting revenue by approximately 4% per endorsement. Leveraging their fan base, these endorsements play a significant role in influencing purchasing decisions [40]. However, the lack of active engagement on social media can weaken their influence, as impersonal or scripted posts reduce reliability and trust.

In contrast, Instagram influencers create more favorable consumer attitudes toward brands through direct and frequent interaction, which fosters trust and affinity [38]. Social media has overtaken traditional media as the preferred content source, particularly among younger generations. According to Sushivid.com, out of the total influence market, 47.3% of influencers were micro-influencers (5000-20000 followers) while mid-tier (up to 100,000) and macro-influencers (up to 1 million) made up 26.8% and 6.5%, respectively, with only 0.5% having more than one million followers [41]. Social change theory explains how traditional celebrities inspire admiration and identification, especially among individuals with lower self-esteem, creating strong purchasing impacts [42]. Celebrities like Nawi and Faizol [43] who have launched hijab brands, shape perceptions of the hijab as both a fashion and cultural item. Parasocial interaction theory highlights the significant role of celebrity influence - whether from traditional or social media figures in shaping consumer perceptions of cultural symbols, often surpassing formal education in influence [44].

2.4. Brand Familiarity

Brand familiarity is one of the core concepts in consumer behavior that defines how well a consumer can recognize and be assured about a brand. Familiar brands are an in-hand source of information with consumers to make better purchase decisions and ensure brand loyalty. The attachment theory of a brand emphasizes emotional and psychological bonds developed in association with familiar brands to promote a sense of dependence [45]. However, high familiarity is not always favorable because it may at times provide adverse notions of the brand positioning, while the response for lesser-known brands tends to be neutral [46]. Repurchase of the same brand consistently increases loyalty and helps in building consumer confidence as it decreases anxiety and dissonance associated with every purchase [47].

The current study clubs the Theory of Reasoned Action (RA) with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to analyze consumer purchasing behavior, and how both internal and external factors motivate for adoption of new technology. Brand familiarity is based on a variety of touch points that include social media, advertising, and word-of-mouth, which help in

building emotional connection and trust. In Malaysia, particularly for Generation Y, brand familiarity is extremely important as awareness of social media and brands is rising [48]. Brand familiarity is often confused with brand awareness, which focuses on recognition through logos or signs. High brand awareness increases brand equity and will have a huge influence on the purchasing behavior of young customers. This study also draws on self-affirmation theory, explaining how a positive self-image impacts consumer' brand preferences and purchase decisions, especially when their self-esteem is threatened [49].

2.5. Sponsorship Disclosure

Sponsorship disclosure is one of the important factors in driving consumers' interpretation of influencer content, as it impacts their perceptions of authenticity and neutrality of the content. When sponsorships are not disclosed, consumers may consider the content as biased, leading to misinterpretations and misconceptions of the content. For example, The Federal Trade Commission, USA accused Lord & Taylor of paying influencers to promote a dress on social media without sponsorship disclosure. This led to a settlement and a 20-year consent decree mandating transparency in sponsored content.

Traditional research on sponsorship disclosure, using the persuasion knowledge model, suggests that disclosure could negatively affect brand attitudes by highlighting marketing intent. However, recent studies using signaling theory indicate that clear sponsorship disclosures can reduce buyer uncertainty and improve consumer perceptions [50]. The effectiveness of these disclosures depends on their clarity and transparency regarding compensation and brand influence. Parasocial interaction (PSI) further strengthens this positive effect, as followers with a strong connection with influencers tend to view brands more favorably when disclosures are made transparent [51].

Consumers' perceptions of sponsored content, as explained by attribution theory and persuasion knowledge theory, can be negatively impacted by perceived external motivations like compensation [52]. Language Expectancy Theory (LET) further suggests that the emotional intensity of sponsorship disclosures plays a significant role in their effectiveness, and has a stronger influence on purchase intentions [53]. Although influencers on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok can reach vast audiences, especially receptive Millennials, selecting the right influencers and targeting the appropriate audience remains a significant challenge [54].

2.6. Trustworthiness

Customers consider trustworthiness as a precondition to believe the content while buying merchandise. Some studies consider trustworthiness to be more important than expertise, while others think both are important. This research investigates how the trustworthiness of an influencer affects purchase intentions and how they respond to influencer content. Engaging with the audience on a regular basis makes influencers more trustworthy [55]. Once customers think influencers are trustworthy, their endorsements work better than regular advertisements. However, if influencers agree to endorse everything merely for sponsorship, they are considered to be less trustworthy and doubt every endorsement. This situation will make things difficult for brands [56].

Trust is important for influencers to interact, both socially and in business. It helps in the cohesiveness of influencers and customers ethically. Being real and genuine makes the customers trust the influencer. Regulators look for clearer disclosures to stop misleading customers and the public. When influencers clearly disclose sponsorship, customers trust them more, do not feel deceived, and assume that the influencer is trustworthy [57].

An influencer's ability to promote a brand effectively depends on their perceived trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise. According to the Source Credibility Theory and the Source Attractiveness Model, customers are more likely to trust and follow the advice of influencers, if they find them credible and appealing [58]. This trust often comes from parasocial relationships, where followers believe the influencers as their friends. Fashion brands can work closely with influencers who are trustworthy, knowledgeable, and have strong connections with their followers to get more customers interested in buying their endorsed products [59, 60].

2.7. Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR and VR)

Augmented Reality combines computer-generated information with the real-world environment. It creates a view of their surroundings with added digital elements. AR uses text, pictures, and 3D models, using technology that combines multimedia, real-time tracking, and smart interactions [61]. AR has moved from just an idea to being used in real-world situations with industries, especially retail to improve its customer experiences. High-street fashion retailers are experimenting with AR to improve brand perception but current designs have failed to captivate customer interest [62]. Millennial and Generation Z youth are accustomed to digital experiences, and demand sophisticated AR-integrated shopping environments, which improve User Experience and hedonic performance [63]. Virtual reality immerses users in a computer 3D environment, categorized into non-immersive and immersive types. The immersive version, often experienced through head-mounted displays (HMDs), provides a 360-degree experience, while non-immersive VR is typically displayed on screens. However, VR's challenges include discomfort, high costs, and a lack of standardization [64].

Fashion retailers like Young [65] have begun incorporating VR to enhance customer engagement. Despite being used for special events, VR's potentiality in retail and e-commerce is growing, where it can provide a more immersive shopping experience. Ferdows, et al. [66] for example, has introduced Ferdows, et al. [66] which enables consumers to interact with clothing virtually and make purchases directly [67]. In the retail sector, AR and VR are expected to redesign the shopping experiences. Both technologies are being adopted by brands like Kupriienko and Flehantova [68] to enhance engagement and boost consumer interaction with fashion products. The future of AR and VR in retail promises to elevate interactivity and improve shoppers' experience while purchasing fashion products [69, 70].

2.8. Consumer Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a high probability that a customer is expected to purchase a product, and is a critical element of the decision-making process. Factors such as familiarity, perceived risk, price, and quality significantly influence purchase intentions. Familiarity shaped by past experiences and marketing efforts reduces uncertainty and enhances confidence in purchasing decisions [71]. Live streaming commerce (LSC), especially on Chinese platforms like Taobao, has transformed e-commerce by offering interactive, live shopping experiences that increase consumer trust and purchase intention. The SOR theory explains how external stimuli and internal states influence consumer behavior [72, 73]. Influencers, especially Rue [74] further impact purchase intentions, with their credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) being particularly effective in fashion and lifestyle [75].

The influencer industry thrives on influencers' ability to form parasocial relationships with followers, creating emotional bonds that enhance endorsements and increase purchase intentions [76]. Theories such as 'Source Credibility' and the 'Presumed Influence model' underlines how trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and perceived reactions drive consumer engagement. Despite the substantial growth of the fashion industry, influencers' self-presentation, content strategies, and their specific roles in shaping purchase intentions remain underexplored, making this research highly relevant [76].
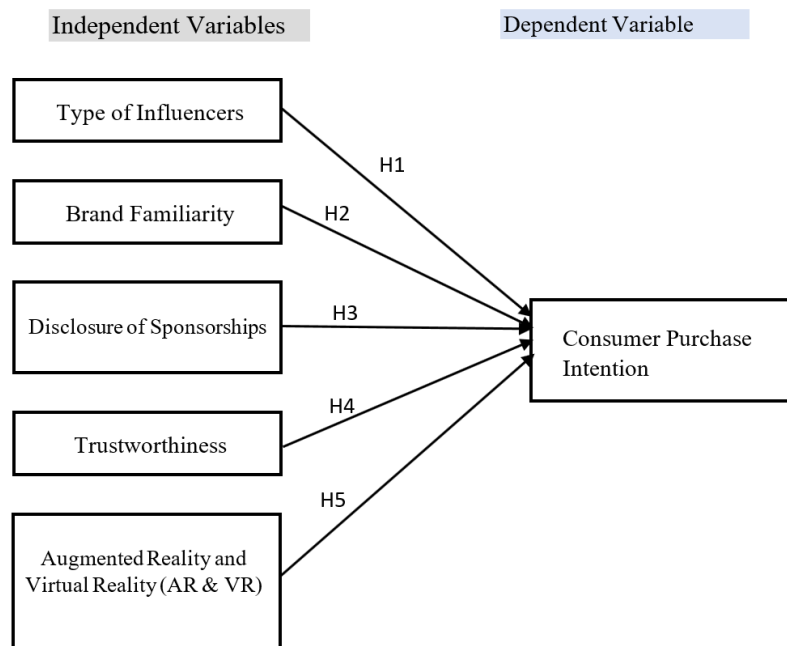

Figure 3.
Conceptual Framework.

Figure 3 indicates the conceptual framework to examine the factors influencing consumers' purchase intentions in Malaysia's apparel and footwear fashion industry. The framework identifies five independent variables (IVs)—Type of influencer, Brand familiarity, Sponsorship disclosure, Trustworthiness, and Augmented reality & Virtual reality (AR & VR)—that may impact Purchase Intentions (dependent variable, DV). The study proposes hypotheses to explore the relationships between these five independent variables and purchase intentions. By analyzing the interactions of these factors, the research tries to offer valuable insights into the key factors influencing consumer purchase decisions in social media influencer marketing, offering strategic guidance for businesses in the influencer-driven marketplace.

3. Hypothesis Development

3.1. Influencer Type and Consumer Purchase Intention

Unlike traditional celebrities, digital influencers are 'common people' who have become 'online celebrities' by creating and sharing content on social media platforms. Their ability to create and distribute content allows them to be seen as credible sources of information and trends, influencing their followers' behavior. For example, Instagram influencers are users with large followings who are highly regarded in areas like fashion and lifestyle, allowing them to monetize their posts.

As noted by Ren, et al. [77] the growing presence of popular influencers has motivated many businesses to incorporate them into their promotional strategies. Due to the increase in online activity during COVID-19, influencers' role is exponentially raised, particularly among younger consumers. Approximately 54% of young consumers stated that they have purchased products recommended by SMIs. As they continue to have a significant impact, companies are increasingly leveraging them to promote their brands. Compared to traditional advertising mediums such as radio, television, or newspapers, influencer posts on social media are seamlessly woven into daily stories shared with their followers. This fosters a sense of familiarity with influencers that surpasses that of conventional celebrities. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Social media influencers will significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions more than traditional celebrities in the fashion industry.

3.2. Brand Familiarity and Consumer Purchase Intention

Brand familiarity denotes the extent to which consumers identify and embrace a company's brand. It plays a significant role in shaping a consumer's purchasing decisions. A higher level of familiarity strengthens the emotional bond, increasing the likelihood of consumers opting for the brand if it aligns with their expectations [45]. Prior research highlights a strong correlation between brand recognition and brand familiarity. Studies have investigated the impact of brand assets on brand familiarity, brand image, and purchase intention. Findings indicate that brand recognition positively influences brand familiarity, which subsequently strengthens purchase intention. Additional research has examined the relationships between brand safety, advertising attitude, brand attitude, brand familiarity, and purchase intention. These studies concluded that elements such as brand safety, brand knowledge, and brand awareness have a positive effect on brand familiarity, ultimately boosting consumer purchase intention [78]. In the fashion industry, brands with high familiarity typically attract more buyers due to their established reputation for quality [79]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Brand familiarity has a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry.

3.3. Sponsorship Disclosure and Consumer Purchase Intention

Recent studies emphasize that alignment between influencers and their promoting brands will improve the efficiency of sponsored content. A strong match enhances product attributes, purchase intentions, and engagement. Sponsorship disclosures are more effective when influencers have loyal followers with strong parasocial connections, which influence decisions and brand perceptions. Thus, disclosing sponsorships boosts engagement, improves brand evaluations, and drives purchase intentions.

Clearly disclosing sponsorships enhances the transparency and availability of information about paid partnerships, which, according to research, positively influences user responses and consumers' purchase intentions for several reasons [77]. However, in certain cases, brands intentionally conceal their associations with fashion influencers to distort market perceptions of their products. The absence of adequate sponsorship disclosure often leads to ambiguity regarding transparency standards, ultimately undermining consumer trust and negatively affecting purchase intentions for the brand. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: The disclosure of sponsorships greatly affects consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry

3.4. Trustworthiness and Consumer Purchase Intentions

Trustworthiness is described as a "*combination of credibility, respect, and honesty exhibited by the communicator by message recipients*". When the audience views the communicator as trustworthy, they are more inclined to believe the message. A communicator is seen as persuasive primarily due to their trustworthiness, even if their expertise is not emphasized. Many influencers are now opting for YouTube as their major social media choice due to the rise in the popularity of video content. On the other hand, if the influencers are found untrustworthy, the brand credibility will be lowered, consumers' purchase intentions will decrease, and eventually, product sales will decline [80]. It has been established that trust is a driving factor of customer purchasing behavior, in turn, the greater the trust, the better the attitude, and the greater the purchase intention. Social media influencers have gained popularity these days because the consumer views them as being more trustworthy compared to brands [81].

E-word-of-mouth (E-WOM) publicity from trusted influencers can work effectively on the purchase intentions of online buyers. Various studies reveal that influencer marketing enhances the purchase intention of fashion buyers, where trends conveyed by influencers are dominant. Research shows that the trustworthiness of SMIs plays a significant role in predicting the purchase intentions of fashion buyers. For example, trustworthiness was observed to influence the fashion product purchase intentions of Instagram users; further, trustworthiness has an indirect effect with regard to content quality being a mediator [82]. Thus from the above discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4: The trustworthiness of influencers will have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry.

3.5. Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality and Consumer Purchase Intention

Communication and information technology have really improved the development of VR and AR. These technologies have been able to provide an option for displaying products as 3D animations so that consumers can see themselves from all angles. Research has revealed that customers' purchase intentions increase when there are 3D displays. The 3D presentation increases perceived information and elevates the mood of the consumer because it presents an in-store shopping experience. Both technologies enhance consumer purchasing intention by providing detailed 3D representations of the products, enhancing the shopping experience, and making it similar to in-store interaction experiences [83]. AR technology is gaining attention since it has a potential influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Studies show that the improved virtual presence of online sales environments can result in beneficial trends, such as favorable attitudes toward consumers, positive attitudes toward purchasing, and quality shopping experiences [84]. One of the most known applications of AR is the virtual dressing room (VFR), a means of interactive simulation for providing customers with the possibility of trying clothes virtually through textured images on avatars or virtual models [85].

Virtual reality is coming out as a transformational tool for making the shopping experience better, particularly for fashion merchandise. Studies have shown that consumers who experience a VR demonstration have a more pleasant shopping

experience, greater purchase intentions, and a higher likelihood of visiting the store compared to those who only viewed traditional photos or 360° images [86]. These positive outcomes in pleasure, attitudes toward virtual stores, and purchase intention suggest that VR can significantly boost customer engagement and satisfaction). Hence, the following hypothesis is advanced:

Hypothesis 5: Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR and VR) significantly influence consumers' intention to purchase in the fashion industry.

4. Methodology

Research design sets a framework to achieve research objectives systematically and cost-effectively, translating problems into analyzable data, specifying data requirements, and outlining collection and analysis methods to ensure credible conclusions [87, 88]. This study adopts a positivist approach to examine the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase intentions with reference to apparel and footwear products in Malaysia's fashion industry [89, 90]. Deductive reasoning tests general principles against specific cases, while inductive reasoning uses observations to form general principles [91]. This study employs a deductive approach and a quantitative method, using a questionnaire to analyze relationships between five independent variables and a dependent variable, consumer purchase intentions in the apparel and footwear industry.

A research strategy outlines the study plan, including design, measurement, and sampling [92]. Quantitative strategies include experimental, correlational, causal-comparative, and descriptive designs. Correlational research examines existing relationships between variables Mahajan [93] which this study employs. Regarding time horizon, the cross-sectional studies collect the data at a single point in time and offer a 'snapshot' of relationships among the variables without follow-up relationships Wang and Cheng [94] thus, this study adopts a cross-sectional design. In quantitative research, accessing a large population can be challenging, hence researchers reduce it to an appropriate sample size for analysis, using statistical methods to infer conclusions about the population parameters [95]. This study applies the Krejcie and Morgan [96] sampling size calculation method which determines sample size based on the known population by referencing Krejcie and Morgan [96]. For a population of 1,00,000, the table suggests a sample size of 384. However, 10% of the target sample size of 384 was selected for the pilot study, resulting in 38 participants.

The sampling population for this study comprises Malaysian customer influenced by social media influencers marketing to purchase apparel and footwear merchandise, focusing on its impact on their purchase intentions [97]. Obtaining a complete list of consumers is impractical for this research. Therefore, the study adopts a convenience sampling technique, a non-probability sampling method in which the participants are selected based on availability and accessibility [98]. Although convenience samplings have limitations in generalizability and error assessment, it is cost-effective and time-saving and provide valuable insights into the problem [99].

4.1. Data Collection

In this study, data is primarily collected through a structured questionnaire to assess consumer purchase intentions in the apparel and footwear fashion industry. The questionnaire consists of 39 questions, divided into three sections. Section A gathers demographic data (age, ethnicity, gender, education, and monthly income) and includes four screening questions to ensure the selection of appropriate respondents. Sections B and C contain 30 questions focused on evaluating dependent and independent variables related to purchase intentions. Respondents rate their opinions on a Likert 5-point scale indicating "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree" and like.

The collected data is analyzed with SPSS and interpreted subsequently. Before proceeding to complete data collection, a pilot study was conducted to examine the Cronbach's Alpha or Coefficient reliability of the instrument [100]. Normally, an internal consistency of more than 0.70 is established as a threshold value for proceeding with a wider study [101]. In this study, demographic and descriptive analysis was performed to describe sample characteristics and behavior of the variables [102, 103].

From Section B of the questionnaire, Pearson's correlation was applied to data to measure the correlation between the dependent variable and five independent variables [104]. The research applies Multiple Linear Regression to examine the effects of influencer type, brand familiarity, sponsorship disclosure, trustworthiness, and augmented/virtual reality on customer purchase intention. SMARTPLS was used in this study for its ability to analyze complex relationships and latent constructs through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). It is ideal for exploratory research, handling small or non-normal datasets, and maximizing explained variance. The study examines how five independent variables predict the dependent variable. Its bootstrapping technique enhances reliability, making it suitable for examining factors like influencer type, brand familiarity, and AR/VR on consumer purchase intentions. The SMARTPLS generates coefficients for the independent variables, highlighting the magnitude and direction of their influence on consumers' purchase intentions.

The *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)* test of sphericity is a measure to assess whether the data is adequate for factor analysis. The KMO value ranges from 0 to 1. A KMO value between 0.8 and above indicates a very good sample size, values between 0.7 and 0.79 are regarded as good, but values between 0.6 and 0.69 are considered average, but still can be improved,. KMO values below 0.6 suggest that the sampling is insufficient, and needs corrective action. If the KMO value is less than 0.5, the factor analysis results may not be suitable for analysis [105].

In factor analysis, factor loading measures the relationship between an observable variable and a latent component variable. With values ranging from -1 to 1, factor loading indicates how much a variable contributes to or is explained by a particular component. Higher absolute values of factor loadings indicate stronger correlations, signifying a closer relationship

between the variable and the factor. Variables with high loadings, typically greater than 0.40, are considered representative of the factor [105]. The Eigenvalue represents the ratio of the specific variance explained by a particular extracted element to the common variance. It indicates the percentage of the total variance accounted for by an individual factor. In factor analysis, factors with an Eigenvalue >1 are considered significant [105].

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Reliability Test for Pilot Study & Complete Study

A survey on influencer marketing in the apparel and footwear fashion industry was conducted over two weeks, reaching 436 participants via WhatsApp and email. A reliability test was performed for both the pilot study, which involved 40 participants, and the full dataset of 360 responses.

Table 1.
Reliability coefficient for pilot study and complete data set.

Variables	Number of Items	Pilot Study (N=40)		Complete study (N=360)	
		Coefficient	Reliability Test Results	Co-efficient	Reliability Test Results
Type of Influencers	5	0.871	Good	0.926	Excellent
Brand Familiarity	5	0.937	Excellent	0.965	Excellent
Sponsorship Disclosure	5	0.786	Acceptable	0.924	Excellent
Trustworthiness	5	0.939	Excellent	0.978	Excellent
Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality	5	0.856	Good	0.954	Excellent
Consumers' Purchase Intention	5	0.711	Acceptable	0.709	Acceptable

Source: Hoo, et al. [106] and Madhavedi, et al. [107].

Table 1 compares the results of the Pilot Study and the Complete Study across six variables: Type of Influencers, Brand Familiarity, Sponsorship Disclosure, Trustworthiness, Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality (AR/VR), and Consumers' Purchase Intention. In terms of coefficients, most variables showed improvements from the pilot to the complete study. Type of Influencers increased from 0.871 in the pilot study to 0.926 in the complete study, with its reliability improving from Good to Excellent. Brand Familiarity also saw an increase, from 0.937 to 0.965, maintaining excellent reliability in both studies. Sponsorship Disclosure improved significantly, with its coefficient rising from 0.786 to 0.924, and its reliability moving from Acceptable to Excellent. Trustworthiness showed a marked increase in both coefficient and reliability, from 0.939 and Excellent in the pilot study to 0.978 and Excellent in the complete study. Similarly, Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality showed an increase in coefficient from 0.856 to 0.954, with its reliability improving from Good to Excellent. However, Consumers' Purchase Intention remained relatively stable, with a coefficient of 0.711 in the pilot study and 0.709 in the complete study, both rated as Acceptable in terms of reliability. Overall, the results suggest that, from the pilot to the complete study, variables like Brand Familiarity and Trustworthiness became more influential and reliable, while others like Consumers' Purchase Intention remained stable.

5.2. Descriptive Analysis

5.2.1. Demographics Profile of Respondent

The data collected from the respondents on several demographic factors to examine whether the data is representative of population characteristics. Before collecting demographic data, respondents were first asked a screening question to determine if they had ever purchased fashion products promoted by social media influencers. Among the 436 total respondents, 360 confirmed having made such a purchase. Consequently, the survey insights will be derived from the 360 respondents.

Table 2.
Demographic profiles of respondents.

Variable	Category	Total Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	90	25
	Female	270	75
Total		360	100
Race	Malay	232	64
	Chinese	90	25
	Indian	31	9
	Others	7	2
Total		360	100
Age	Below 20	12	3
	21 – 25	51	14
	26 – 30	164	46
	31 – 35	55	15

Variable	Category	Total Number	Percentage
	36 – 40	21	6
	>40	57	16
Total		360	100
Exposure	Daily	110	30
	Several Times a Week	150	42
	Once a Week	47	13
	Several Times a Month	29	8
	Once a Month	9	3
	Rarely	15	4
Total		360	100
Marital Status	Single (Never Married)	231	64
	Married	119	32
	Divorced	6	2
	Widowed	3	1
	Others	1	1
Total		360	100
Education Level	No Formal Education	2	1
	Primary Education	1	1
	Secondary Education	5	1
	Vocational Education	3	1
	Diploma/Certificate	25	7
	Bachelor's Degree	249	69
	Master's Degree	66	18
	PhD Degree	9	2
Total		360	100
Monthly Income	Less than RM 1,000	10	3
	RM 1,000 to 3,000	19	5
	RM 3,000 to 5,000	62	17
	RM 5,000 to 7,000	131	37
	RM 7,000 to 9,000	72	20
	>RM 9,000	66	18
Total		360	100

Table 2 represents the demographic characteristics of the sample data collected which includes their gender, race, age, education level, marital status, monthly income, and exposure to influencer marketing. According to the Table 2:

i. The majority of respondents were female, with 270 females (75%) compared to 90 males (25%).

ii. The respondents were predominantly composed of Malay ethnicity, with 232 participants (64%), followed by 90 Chinese participants (25%), 31 Indian participants (9%), and 7 participants (2%) from other racial groups, indicating a varied racial composition despite the higher percentage of Malay participants.

iii. Regarding age distribution, the largest group of participants, 164 individuals (46%), were between the ages of 26 and 30. Other age groups included 14% of participants aged 21 to 25, 15% aged 31 to 35, and 16% aged above 40. The smallest groups were those under 20 years old (3%) and those between 36 and 40 years old (6%), suggesting that the sample primarily consists of young adults.

iv. As for exposure to social media, a significant portion of participants reported frequent exposure, with 110 participants (30%) exposed daily and 150 participants (42%) exposed several times per week. Lower levels of exposure, such as once per week (13%), multiple times per month (8%), or infrequently (4%), were reported by fewer participants.

v. In terms of marital status, 119 participants (32%) were married, while 231 participants (64%) were single. A small percentage reported being widowed (1%), divorced (2%), or in other marital statuses (1%).

vi. Education levels were predominantly high, with 249 participants (69%) holding a bachelor's degree and 66 participants (18%) holding a master's degree, and 25 participants (7%) holding a certificate. Only 2% of the sample had a PhD, while 1% had only a secondary or primary education, and 1% had no formal education.

vii. Finally, the monthly income distribution showed that the majority of participants earned between RM 5,000 and RM 7,000 (37%), followed by those earning between RM 7,000 and RM 9,000 (20%) and those earning more than RM 9,000 (18%). Smaller proportions of participants earned lower amounts, with 5% earning between RM 1,000 and RM 3,000, 17% earning between RM 3,000 and RM 5,000, and 3% earning less than RM 1,000. This suggests that the sample consists primarily of individuals from mid-to-high income brackets.

On the whole, the sample is composed mainly of young, well-educated, and affluent individuals, with high levels of social media engagement and a diverse racial background.

5.2.2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all independent and dependent variables were calculated. The mean and standard deviations will determine whether these variables were generally favorable and to assess the degree of variation in responses Hoo, et al. [108].

Table 3.
Results for Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Type of Influencer	360	4.34	0.84
Brand Familiarity	360	4.29	0.87
Sponsorship Disclosure	360	4.34	0.76
Trustworthiness	360	4.10	1.01
AR and VR	360	4.21	0.86
Consumer Purchase Intention	360	4.02	0.70

As represented in Table 3 the type of influencer and sponsorship disclosure had the highest means (4.34), reflecting positive perceptions with moderate variability. Brand familiarity also received a high mean (4.29) but showed wider variability in responses. Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR & VR) had a mean of 4.21, indicating positive views with moderate spread. Trustworthiness (mean: 4.10) and consumer purchase intention (mean: 4.02) had slightly lower averages, with trustworthiness showing the highest variability, reflecting diverse opinions. To conclude, the participants rated most variables positively, with varying degrees of agreement.

5.3. Pearson's Correlation

Pearson's correlation coefficient quantifies the direction and strength of the relationship between two continuous variables. It ranges from -1 to +1, with -1 indicating a perfect negative linear relationship, and +1 signifying a perfect positive linear relationship [108, 109]. In this study, Pearson's correlation coefficient values for the five independent variables and their relationship with the dependent variable consumer purchase intention were analyzed [110]. According to Table 4, for all the variables, the p-value is less than 0.01 signifies that the independent variables are statistically associated with the purchase intentions of consumers. For the influencer type, the correlation coefficient of 0.692 signifies a strong positive relationship, conveying that the type of influencer, and consumers' purchase intention move in a similar direction.

Table 4.
Results of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient.

		Type of Influencer	Brand Familiarity	Sponsorship Disclosure	Trustworthiness	AR and VR	Consumer Purchase Intention
Type of Influencer	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2 tailed)						
	N	360					
Brand Familiarity	Pearson Correlation	0.762**	1				
	Sig. (2 tailed)	<0.001					
	N	360	360				
Sponsorship Disclosure	Pearson Correlation	0.728**	0.761**	1			
	Sig. (2 tailed)	<0.001	<0.001				
	N	360	360	360			
Trustworthiness	Pearson Correlation	0.801**	0.789**	0.739**	1		
	Sig. (2 tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001			
	N	360	360	360	360		
AR and VR	Pearson Correlation	0.718**	0.751**	0.753**	0.755**	1	
	Sig. (2 tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001		
	N	360	360	360	360	360	
Consumer Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	0.692**	0.729**	0.665**	0.732**	0.736**	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
	N	360	360	360	360	360	360

Note: **Significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed).

For brand familiarity, the correlation coefficient is 0.729, which represents a strong positive correlation, indicating that brand familiarity has a positive impact on consumer purchase intention. For sponsorship disclosure, the correlation coefficient is 0.665, signifying a strong positive relationship, indicating that clear sponsorship disclosure enhances consumers' purchase

intention. For trustworthiness, the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.732 indicates a strong positive relationship, showing that higher trustworthiness leads to greater consumer purchase intention. Finally, for augmented reality and virtual reality (AR & VR), the coefficient of correlation value of 0.736 suggests a strong positive relationship, indicating that a higher use of AR and VR technologies positively affects consumer purchase intention. Therefore, sponsorship disclosure, type of influencer, brand familiarity, trustworthiness, and AR & VR exhibit strong positive relationships with consumers' purchase intention, with correlation coefficient values ranging from 0.665 to 0.736, and all are significant at less than the 0.01 level.

5.4. SMARTPLS Regression

The Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) technique predicts the value of a dependent variable based on multiple independent variables by modeling their linear relationships. This study employed MLR to examine the association between consumers' purchase intention (dependent variable) and independent variables such as Type of influencer, Brand familiarity, Sponsorship disclosure, Trustworthiness, and Augmented reality & Virtual reality. For this analysis, SMART PLS software is used to perform Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is a robust method for analyzing complex relationships, particularly when latent variables are involved. It is highly effective for exploratory research, as it maximizes explained variance and performs well with small sample sizes or non-normally distributed data. Bootstrapping, a resampling technique, was applied within PLS-SEM to assess the significance of model parameters by generating multiple resample datasets. This method estimates standard errors, constructs confidence intervals, and enhances the reliability of the analysis, providing a precise evaluation of the relationships between variables.
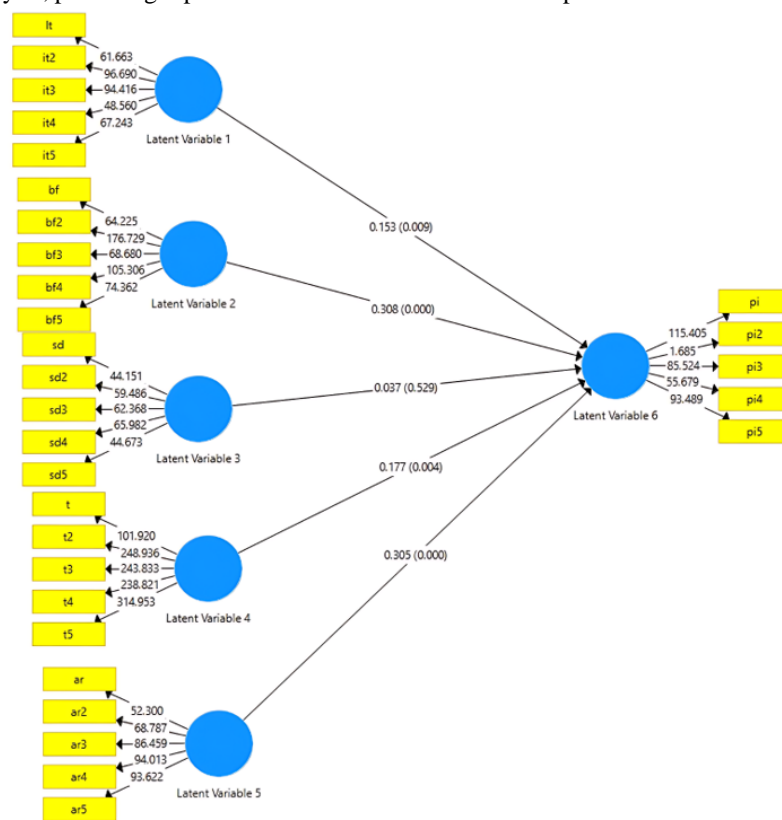

Figure 4.
IVs and DV in SMARTPLS Form.

Latent Variable 1 (Influencer Type): According to Figure 4, consumers' purchase intention and the type of influencer are positively correlated, with a path coefficient of 0.153. This indicates that assuming all other variables are constant, a one-unit increase in influencer type leads to a 0.153 unit rise in consumers' purchase intention. Although it is minute, this demonstrates a meaningful positive impact. The p-value for the type of influencer is 0.009, confirming a statistically significant correlation between the type of influencer and consumers' purchase intention at the 5% level of significance.

Latent Variable 2 (Brand Familiarity): Consumers' purchase intention and brand familiarity indicate a positive coefficient value of 0.308, denoting that as brand familiarity increases by one unit, consumers' purchase intention rises by 0.308 units. The probability value of brand familiarity is 0.000, signifying much within the acceptance level, indicating a strong association between brand familiarity and consumers' purchase intention.

Latent Variable 3 (Sponsorship Disclosure): A positive relationship exists between sponsorship disclosure and consumers' purchase intention, as shown by a coefficient value of 0.037. This indicates that for every one-unit increase in sponsorship disclosure, consumers' purchase intention is expected to increase by 0.037 units. However, the p-value for this variable is 0.529, which is above the acceptance level of 0.05. This indicates that there is no association between sponsorship disclosure and consumers' purchase intention variables.

Latent Variable 4 (Trustworthiness): Consumers' purchase intention and trustworthiness are positively correlated, as indicated by the coefficient of 0.117. This implies that higher trustworthiness is associated with increased purchase intention. Keeping all other variables constant, for every unit rise in trustworthiness, consumers' purchase intention is likely to rise by 0.117 units. A p-value of 0.04, which is within the 0.05 acceptance level, signifies that there is sufficient evidence to substantiate that a relationship exists between the two variables.

Latent Variable 5 (Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR and VR)): There is a positive correlation between AR and VR in comparison with consumers' purchase intention, and the coefficient value confirms at 0.305. Assuming all other factors remain constant, for every unit rise in AR and VR, the consumers' purchase intention is likely to increase by 0.305 units. The p-value of 0.000, below the significance level of 0.05, proves a statistically significant association between AR and VR vis-à-vis purchase intention. Thus, AR and VR play a key role in forming consumers' purchase intentions.

Therefore, it can be concluded that consumers' purchase intentions are significantly influenced by the type of influencer, brand familiarity, trustworthiness, and augmented reality, as these factors enhance the likelihood of a purchase. On the other hand, sponsorship disclosure does not reflect a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

5.5. Factor Analysis

Table 5 provides information about a factor analysis from the study on the predictors of consumer behavior, purchase intentions, type of influencer, brand familiarity, advertisement disclosure, trustworthiness, and AR & VR. More critical metrics include the KMO test, factor loadings, and eigenvalues extracted from the data presented here. With a high KMO value of 0.851 for 'Consumers' Purchase Intention' and an even higher value of 0.955 for the independent variables, the data shows excellent sample adequacy for analysis, ensuring reliable results.

Table 5.
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Factor Loading and Eigenvalue.

Factor Analysis			
Variables	**KMO Test**	**Factor Loading**	**Eigenvalue**
Consumers' Purchase Intention	0.851	0.042 – 0.926	3.990
Type of Influencers Brand Familiarity Sponsorship Disclosure Trustworthiness Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality	0.955	0.699 – 0.898	16.992

The factor loadings are the correlations between latent factors and observed variables and vary from 0.042 to 0.926 for 'Consumers' Purchase Intention' and from 0.699 to 0.898 for independent variables, signifying that different factors have varied strengths of correlation. The Eigenvalues indicate the amount of variance explained by each factor. 'Consumers' Purchase Intention' has an Eigenvalue of 3.990, which implies that it has a moderate contribution to the variance, whereas all five independent variables have an exorbitant Eigenvalue of 16.992, which emphasizes their significant contribution to explaining consumer behavior. These metrics validate the strength and relevance of the variables in understanding consumer purchasing decisions.

6. Discussions and Conclusion

6.1. Discussion of Key Discoveries

This study reveals that factors such as the type of influencer, brand familiarity, sponsorship disclosure, trustworthiness, and augmented reality and virtual reality have a strong effect on customer purchase intentions in the apparel and footwear industry. These results support existing research, emphasizing the importance of these factors in shaping consumer buying behavior. The findings suggest that consumers are more likely to make a purchase when they trust the influencer, are familiar with the brand, and can engage with advanced technologies like augmented reality. Nevertheless, the limitations of the study include relying on a single technique of data collection and the limited time to conduct the surveys and do the research. Future studies could consider a more detailed view of characteristics that impact various businesses and demographics.

6.2. Hypothesis Testing

Table 6.
Results of Hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
1	Social media influencers will significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions more than traditional celebrities in the fashion industry.	Accept
2	Brand familiarity has a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry.	Accept
3	The disclosure of sponsorships greatly affects consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry.	Accept

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
4	The trustworthiness of influencers will have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry.	Accept
5	Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR and VR) significantly influence consumers' intention to purchase in the fashion industry.	Accept

6.2.1 Hypothesis 1

Influencing consumers' purchase intentions through social media is higher than that of traditional celebrities in the fashion industry. Influencers have been found to create positive attitudes and increased purchase intentions due to the fact that they are relatable, authentic, and credible [42]. Consumers identify with their lifestyles and desire to emulate them, which improves engagement and trust [39]. Brands collaborations with influencers, including fashion bloggers and vloggers, can enhance this impact in promotion. Therefore, SMIs are more potential than traditional celebrities because of their strong follower connections and authenticity [39].

6.2.2. Hypothesis 2

Brand familiarity has a significant effect on the purchase intentions of consumers within the fashion industry since it increases confidence and trust at the time of purchase. Familiarity builds up emotional attachment; hence the possibility of purchase is increased [45]. According to research, brand awareness positively affects brand equity and consumer decision-making among younger consumers [49]. Brand familiarity is enhanced by content marketing as it builds relationships and recognition. Hence, brand familiarity plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior [49].

6.2.3. Hypothesis 3

Sponsorship disclosure positively affects purchase intentions, especially in the case of congruence between influencers and brands. It helps to build trust, credibility, and engagement, thus diminishing skepticism [50]. If an influencer discloses sponsorships to their loyal follower base correctly, it can result in the enrichment of consumer and brand relationships and purchase intentions [111]. Authenticity is ensured with proper disclosure, and regulatory risks are to be avoided, as was evident in Lord & Taylor's case [112]. Thereby, sponsorship disclosure develops consumer trust and increases purchase intention.

6.2.4. Hypothesis 4

The trustworthiness of influencers is important in the purchase decision-making process. It will have a positive effect on brand reputation and consumer perception. Influencers who are perceived as credible and fashionable are trusted, and more consumers engage with these influencers, and they are likely to produce Electronic- Word of Mouth publicity [36, 81]. Consumers seek authentic endorsements to have trust in influencers. Hence the trustworthiness of influencers will significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry [80].

6.2.5. Hypothesis 5

AR and VR enhance the purchase intentions of buyers due to the immersive nature of shopping. Interactive 3D displays and virtual fitting rooms create in-store experiences, thereby increasing confidence and engagement [83]. The major brands are using AR and VR technologies for enhanced online shopping [85]. Hence, the hypothesis test reveals that AR and VR significantly influence the purchase intention of customers by elevating customer mood and product visibility.

6.3. Conclusion
6.3.1. Managerial Implications

The study's results are useful for SMI and marketing professionals. The PLS-SEM Path Model indicates that consumer purchase intentions are highly influenced by influencer type, brand familiarity, trustworthiness, and augmented reality/virtual reality (AR/VR). Although sponsorship disclosure is not a direct predictor, it still has an impact on consumer perceptions. SMIs are exceptional because their personal connections with their followers help establish trust. Customers consider the endorsements of the influencer to be real and genuine. The familiarity of the brand is an important driver of purchase intention. Recognizable and trusted brands foster consumer confidence and create emotional bonds, which in turn lead to increased loyalty and repeat purchases. Similarly, trustworthiness boosts purchasing behavior because consumers are more likely to adhere to the influencer or brand recommendation that they feel is trustworthy, authentic, and honest. The AR and VR technologies take it further by providing an immersive and interactive experience, which replicates the actual in-store shopping experience. These technologies contribute to customer satisfaction but also drive sales through a better shopping experience. Although sponsorship disclosure was not a major determinant of purchase intention in this study, its importance lies in encouraging transparency and trust. The open disclosure of collaborations between brands and influencers reduces skepticism, increases credibility, and thus supports the positive attitude of consumers toward purchase intentions.

6.3.2. Theoretical Implications

This research provides valuable theoretical insights by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Technology Acceptance Model to understand the factors that influence consumer purchase intentions. TPB explains how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control shape the purchase intentions of consumers, while TAM underscores the role of perceived usefulness and ease of use in adopting technologies like AR and VR.

The results thus establish that the type of influencer, familiarity, and trustworthiness strongly predict consumer purchase intentions. SMIs, who perceived to be relatable and trustworthy, shape consumer attitudes and social norms positively, thus promote trust and confidence that leads to purchase. Brand familiarity enhances consumer confidence in making a purchase by giving way to positive attitudes that decrease uncertainty and strengthen subjective norms through social validation. Similarly, trustworthiness is an important factor in the TPB model, improving attitudes and social pressure and increasing confidence in the decision-making process. The research also focuses on the integration of TAM, showing how AR and VR technologies enhance the shopping experience by improving product visualization and decision-making. These technologies enhance purchase intentions when consumers perceive them as useful and easy to use, according to the principles of TAM.

Although sponsorship disclosure is positively related to purchase intentions and enhances credibility, it has relatively weaker predictive power compared with other variables like trustworthiness and brand familiarity in the fashion industry. Though transparency leads to greater trust and diminishes skepticism, other variables such as social norms and attitudes toward brands have stronger effects on consumer behavior. The research combines the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to better understand purchase behavior. Influencer credibility and trust, brand awareness, and AR/VR technologies are the primary drivers of purchase intentions.

6.4. Limitations

The study presents several limitations that should be considered while interpreting its findings. This study was constrained by a time limitation, which is reflected in the depth and scope of the research. Considering these restrictions, the study adopted a cross-sectional design, thereby capturing data at a particular point in time. This approach limits the ability to assess how variables influencing purchase intentions—such as influencer type, brand familiarity, trustworthiness, and AR/VR technology—may change over time, especially in the fast-moving fashion environment. The cross-sectional nature of the design itself imposes a second limitation.

Since the fashion industry is fast-moving, consumer attitudes and preferences, as well as purchase behavior, are often affected by factors such as trends, seasons, and marketing strategies. As a consequence, it is only possible to reveal here a snapshot of consumer sentiments at a particular moment in time and not how these aspects could change over weeks, months, or years. Another limitation is the use of a sole method of data collection—that is, through a self-reported questionnaire. A more robust methodology using diverse data sources—perhaps in-depth interviews, behavioral observations, or social media analytics—can provide a more holistic perspective on consumer behavior. These limitations of the current research—time constraints, cross-sectional design, and the use of self-reported data—affect the generalizability of the findings and also suggest that further investigation in this area is warranted.

6.5. Recommendations for Future Research

In conclusion, the study points to areas that should be explored in future research to move influencer marketing forward. The longitudinal studies that track changes in consumer behavior, purchase intentions, and the effects of AR and VR on consumers over time will add more depth to the topic. Additionally, a more holistic approach can be used by integrating qualitative methods, such as focus groups and interviews, with quantitative techniques, including surveys and experiments. By exploring sustainable sponsorship disclosures and transparency, researchers can provide valuable information that may guide marketers to improve consumer trust and intentions toward purchase. The future directions of research can make the application of SMI marketing more potent for firms to better contend in an ever-increasing dynamic digital environment.

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