

Sustainable Cultural Trends and Digital Influence: The Role of Instagram Influencers in Promoting Ethnic Wear among GEN- Z Women

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Abstract: Today, in the fast and competitive business environment, fashion entrepreneurs must adapt to the ever-evolving fashion trends to withstand the market. Customer satisfaction and the tastes of younger generations, particularly Gen Z, greatly influence the fashion industry. With Gen Z's strong obligation to sustainability, there has been a significant shift toward fashion choices that align with ethical and cultural values. This study explores the connection of sustainable cultural trends and digital influence, examining how social media platforms, particularly Instagram, make it possible to promote and adopt ethnic fashion. The purpose of this research is to provide light on the interconnected nature of fashion, culture, and technology by investigating the impact of online influencers on consumers' fashion decisions. Specifically, the study focuses on how Instagram influencers promote ethnic wear among Gen Z women, highlighting their impact on the popularization of sustainable and culturally strengthening fashion trends. This study describes the demographic profile of the respondents. This research uses a simple random sampling technique alongside a descriptive research design. Factor analysis shows the most influential factors are social media influence, heritage, attitude of the younger generation, purchasing power, Instagram influencers, social responsibility, personal style and individuality, and price and affordability, and peer and friends adopting ethnic wear, while structural equation modeling (SEM) reveals the impact. The results highlight the importance of ethical and inclusive fashion practices and shed light on the influence of Instagram personalities on cultural sustainability as well as the fashion business.

Keywords: Gen Z, Sustainable Culture, Instagram Influencer, Ethnic Wear, Shaping Fashion.

Introduction

The contemporary fashion landscape is undergoing a paradigm shift, driven by Generation Z's (Gen Z) unique intersection of digital nativity, environmental consciousness, and cultural awareness. As the first truly digital-native cohort, Gen Z women (born 1997-2012) are redefining fashion consumption through their engagement with social media platforms, particularly Instagram, where influencer culture has emerged as a dominant force in shaping sartorial choices (Turner, 2023). This phenomenon coincides with growing global concerns about fashion sustainability—the industry accounts for 10% of annual carbon emissions and 20% of wastewater (UNEP, 2019)—prompting a resurgence of interest in ethnic wear as both an environmentally sustainable and culturally significant alternative to fast fashion (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Within this context, Instagram influencers have become pivotal cultural intermediaries, bridging traditional heritage and contemporary style while navigating complex issues of authenticity, appropriation, and commercial viability (Pham, 2021). More recent bibliometric studies have shown that social media has a larger effect on consumer behavior, particularly in influencing brands' perceptions and consumers' decisions to buy (Botla et al., 2024).

For instance, Bhaskaran and Swarupa (2024) demonstrate that social media's influence on consumer behavior is multifaceted, driven by factors such as user-generated content, trustworthiness, and visual appeal, with platforms like Instagram serving as critical arenas for brand engagement (Atashsooz et al 2019). Similarly, Dhal et al. (2024) identify key factors—positive reviews, visuals, attractiveness, and trustworthiness—that enhance the effectiveness of social media advertisements, particularly in e-tailing contexts. These findings align with the strategies employed by influencers promoting ethnic wear, where authenticity and cultural resonance are paramount (Jalili et al., 2021). The

sustainability appeal of ethnic wear lies in its inherent characteristics: artisanal production methods, use of natural fabrics, and cultural durability (Fletcher, 2014). A whopping 73% of millennials and Gen Zers are prepared to shell out more cash for eco-friendly goods (Nielsen, 2021), creating fertile ground for ethnic wear's revival (Saritha & Gunasundari 2024). However, this revival is not merely about environmental benefits; it represents what Joy et al. (2012) term "wearable heritage"—garments that maintain cultural continuity in an increasingly globalized world. For Gen Z women, who are 1.8x more likely than millennials to consider cultural authenticity when making purchases (Deloitte, 2023), ethnic wear serves as both an ecological statement and an identity marker in multicultural societies (Gentina et al., 2022).

Instagram's visual-centric platform has become the primary battleground for this fashion revolution (Alkaim & Khan 2024). The platform's algorithm favors authentic, engaging content, with fashion micro-influencers (10,000-100,000 followers) achieving 22% higher conversion rates for sustainable fashion compared to traditional ads (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This "authenticity premium" is particularly crucial for ethnic wear, as Gen Z consumers demonstrate heightened skepticism toward corporate greenwashing (Duffett, 2020). Influencers who successfully promote ethnic wear employ specific content strategies: showcasing artisan collaborations (Abidin, 2018), demonstrating versatile styling (Djafarova & Bowden, 2021), and providing historical context (Marwick, 2015). These approaches resonate with Gen Z's values-driven consumption patterns, where 68% expect brands to contribute to social causes (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). However, this digital-mediated cultural revival presents significant tensions. The line between cultural appreciation and appropriation remains contentious, particularly when influencers commodify traditional garments without proper attribution or understanding (Khamis et al., 2017). Moreover, the platform's inherent commerciality risks reducing cultural symbols to aesthetic trends, potentially diluting their significance (Pham, 2021). These challenges are compounded by Gen Z's social media dependence—averaging 3 hours daily on visual platforms (Pew Research Center, 2023)—which makes them simultaneously sophisticated critics and vulnerable targets of performative activism (Twenge, 2020).

This study examines how Instagram influencers navigate these complexities to promote ethnic wear among Gen Z women, addressing three research gaps (Kesana et al., 2021). First, while social media's general impact on fashion is well-documented, few studies focus specifically on ethnic wear's digital revival (Comunian & England, 2020). Second, existing research often overlooks Gen Z's unique position as both digital natives and cultural custodians (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Third, most analyses concentrate on Western contexts, neglecting emerging markets where ethnic wear's sustainability potential is most pronounced (Gazzola et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Sustainability in Fashion and the Rise of Ethnic Wear

Contemporary fashion discourse has increasingly emphasized sustainability, with scholars noting a paradigm shift from fast fashion to more environmentally conscious consumption (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The fashion industry's environmental impact, responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions (UNEP, 2019), has prompted Gen-Z consumers to seek alternatives. Ethnic wear has emerged as a sustainable option due to its typically artisanal production methods, use of natural fabrics, and cultural durability (Fletcher, 2014). A whopping 73% of millennials and Gen Zers are prepared to shell out extra cash for eco-friendly goods (Nielsen, 2021; Thanaraj et al., 2024), creating fertile ground for the revival of traditional garments. The sustainability of ethnic wear extends beyond environmental factors to encompass cultural sustainability. As Joy et al. (2012) argue, traditional garments serve as "wearable heritage," maintaining cultural continuity in globalized societies. This dual sustainability environmental and cultural—makes ethnic wear particularly appealing to Gen-Z women who view fashion as an expression of both ecological and identity values (Gazzola et al., 2022).

The Influencer Effect: Driving Sustainable Fashion Adoption Among Gen-Z Women on Instagram

The digital landscape has fundamentally transformed fashion consumption patterns, with Instagram emerging as a dominant platform for style inspiration (Abidin, 2016). Platform algorithms and influencer ecosystems have created new pathways for niche fashion trends to gain mainstream attention (Djafarova & Bowden, 2021). For Gen-Z women, who spend an average of 3 hours daily on visual social media (Pew Research Center, 2023), Instagram serves as both a discovery platform and validation space for fashion choices. Influencer marketing has proven particularly effective for sustainable fashion promotion. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that micro-influencers (those with 10,000–100,000 followers) have 22% higher conversion rates for sustainable fashion compared to traditional advertisements. This "authenticity premium" is crucial for ethnic wear promotion, as Gen-Z consumers are skeptical of corporate greenwashing but trust peer recommendations (Duffett, 2020).

Cultural Mediation and the Influencer's Role

Instagram influencers function as cultural intermediaries, translating traditional aesthetics for contemporary audiences (Pham, 2021). Their content creation strategies—including "outfit of the day" posts, styling tutorials, and cultural storytelling—make ethnic wear accessible to young consumers (Abidin, 2018). This mediation is particularly significant for Gen-Z women navigating dual identities in multicultural societies (Gentina et al., 2022). However, this cultural mediation raises important questions about authenticity and appropriation. Khamis et al. (2017) identify three potential pitfalls: superficial engagement with cultural significance, commodification without proper attribution, and homogenization of diverse traditions. The most effective ethnic wear influencers, according to Marwick (2015), are those who collaborate directly with artisans, provide historical context, and demonstrate genuine, sustained engagement with the cultures they showcase (Shirke & Udayakumar 2019),

Gen-Z's Unique Position in this Ecosystem

Generation Z's fashion consumption differs markedly from previous cohorts in three key aspects: digital nativity, values-driven consumption, and community-oriented decision making (Turner, 2023). Their approach to ethnic wear combines these characteristics: First, their digital fluency enables rapid trend adoption but also sophisticated verification of sustainability claims (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Second, their consumption reflects deeply held values—68% expect brands to contribute to social causes (Deloitte, 2023). Third, their decisions are highly communal, with 81% consulting social media before purchases (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). This unique positioning makes Gen-Z women particularly receptive to influencer-promoted ethnic wear that aligns with their sustainability ethos and cultural curiosity. However, as Twenge (2020) cautions, this generation's social media dependence also makes them vulnerable to performative activism and aesthetic-driven rather than substantive engagement with cultural fashion.

Generation Z: Characteristics and Trends

People born between 1997 and 2012 make up Generation Z, the first to grow up entirely immersed in technology, exhibiting distinct characteristics that differentiate them from previous cohorts. People of Generation Z were born into the digital age, so they are experts at using the internet and its many social media sites to plan their day-to-day activities, from sharing content to making purchases (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Duffett, 2020). This generation stands out for its strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion, being the most racially and ethnically diverse generation to date, with firm expectations for equitable representation in all spheres of society (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Their support for LGBTQ+ rights, racial equity, gender equality, and other social justice causes demonstrates their progressive ideals (Twenge et al., 2021). Environmental consciousness significantly shapes Gen Z's consumer behavior, with a marked preference for sustainable brands and ethical consumption practices, as seen in their rejection of fast fashion and support for eco-friendly alternatives (Gazzola et al., 2022; Nielsen, 2021). Mental health awareness is another defining trait, with Gen Z being more open about psychological struggles and actively promoting workplace flexibility and self-care initiatives (APA, 2023; Twenge, 2020). Financially cautious yet entrepreneurial, this generation has adopted innovative approaches to career development, embracing side hustles, freelancing, and digital entrepreneurship while showing early interest in alternative investment options like cryptocurrency (McCrindle, 2022; Deloitte, 2023). As Gen Z continues to gain influence in the workforce and marketplace, organizations across sectors must adapt to their preferences for digital engagement, corporate social responsibility, and inclusive policies to remain relevant (Schawbel, 2023; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Their unique combination of technological fluency, social consciousness, and pragmatic outlook positions them as transformative agents in shaping future economic, cultural, and societal trends.

Research Gap

Despite the significant influence that social media influencers have on fashion trends, very little is known about how Instagram influencers have helped promote ethnic clothing among women of Gen Z. Prior research has mostly ignored the specific confluence of ethnic design with Gen Z tastes in favor of a more general examination of social media's impact on consumers' fashion decisions. Furthermore, previous studies have primarily focused on national or state levels, with little attention to specific districts. This study addresses this gap by examining the distinct experiences of Gen Z women. Additionally, research on the attitudes and preferences of Gen Z women toward ethnic wear remains underexplored, providing localized insights into their fashion choices and digital influences.

To bridge these gaps, this study aims to explore the following key questions:

1. How do Instagram influencers promote ethnic wear among Gen Z women?
2. What factors influence Gen Z women's adoption of ethnic wear?
3. What strategies may fashion companies and marketers employ to promote ethnic wear using Instagram influencers?

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the demographic profile of Gen Z women who prefer ethnic wear.
- To investigate what drives Gen Z women to follow Instagram influencers that promote ethnic clothing.
- The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of Instagram influencers in influencing Gen Z women to buy ethnic clothing.
- To offer recommendations for fashion designers, manufacturers and future researchers on effectively promoting ethnic wear among Gen Z women.

Research Methodology

This study uses a structured research approach to investigate the role of Instagram influencers in encouraging Gen Z women to wear ethnic clothing. A descriptive research design is adopted to analyze factors such as social media influence, cultural heritage, purchasing power, personal style, and affordability in shaping their fashion choices. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point rating scale to ensure comprehensive insights. A total of 236 respondents from diverse backgrounds, including college students, working women, and homemakers, were selected for the study. Standard statistical tools and analytical methods were used to interpret the data accurately, ensuring a meaningful understanding of the preferences and perceptions of Gen Z women regarding ethnic fashion.

Data Analysis

Table 1.1 Gen Z Women Stream Wise Respondents

Stream	No. of Respondents
Gen Z women in colleges	79
Gen Z women in working women	79
Gen Z women in(homemakers)	78
Total	236

Source: Primary Data

Descriptive Statistics

Table No 1.2 - Classifications of The Respondents on The basis of their Family Income and Marital Status

Personal Factor	Frequency	Percent
Income		
below Rs:15,000	17	7.2
Rs:15,001 to Rs:30,000	46	19.5
Rs:30001 to Rs:45,000	48	20.3
Rs:45,001 to Rs:60,000	65	27.5
Above Rs:60,000	60	25.4
Total	236	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	108	45.8
Unmarried	128	54.2
Total	236	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The analysis of respondents' family income distribution reveals that 7.2% have a family income of less than ₹15,000 per month, while 19.5% fall within the ₹15,001 to ₹30,000 range. Additionally, 20.3% of respondents have a family income between ₹30,001 and ₹45,000, followed by 27.5% in the ₹45,001 to ₹60,000 category. Finally, 25.4% of respondents have a family income exceeding ₹60,000 per month. Regarding marital status, 45.8% of respondents are married, whereas 54.2% are unmarried.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a crucial statistical tool in research, helping to simplify a large set of variables by identifying underlying factors or dimensions. It enables the reduction of complex data into meaningful patterns, improving the clarity and interpretability of research findings. The table presents the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value, which is 0.733. The value indicates that the data is suitable for factor analysis, allowing the researcher to proceed with further analysis.

Table No 1.3 - Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.917	12.780	12.780	1.733	11.553	11.553
2	1.742	11.616	24.396	1.648	10.986	22.540
3	1.454	9.693	34.090	1.570	10.470	33.009
4	1.376	9.174	43.264	1.538	10.255	43.264
5	1.271	8.471	51.735			
6	1.066	7.107	58.842			
7	.925	6.163	65.006			
8	.870	5.800	70.806			
9	.810	5.402	76.208			
10	.744	4.959	81.166			
11	.716	4.772	85.938			
12	.605	4.035	89.973			
13	.572	3.812	93.785			
14	.489	3.262	97.047			
15	.443	2.953	100.000			

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Table No 1.4 - Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
E15: Interest	0.727			
E3: Purchase Power of GenZ women	0.545			
E2: Heritage	0.446			
E12: Digital influence	0.433			
E11: Instagram Influencer insist to buy	0.398			
E16: New Updates		0.680		
E10: Society insist the Gen Z Women to Buy		0.543		
E7: Purchase intension		0.535		
E8: Friends insist the Gen Z Women to Buy		0.475		
E14: Indian Culture		0.207		
E5: Individuality of Gen Z Women			0.708	
E6: Social Responsibility			0.692	
E4: Personal Style			0.558	
E9: Peer insist the Gen Z Women to Buy				0.818
E1: Instagram Influencer				0.760

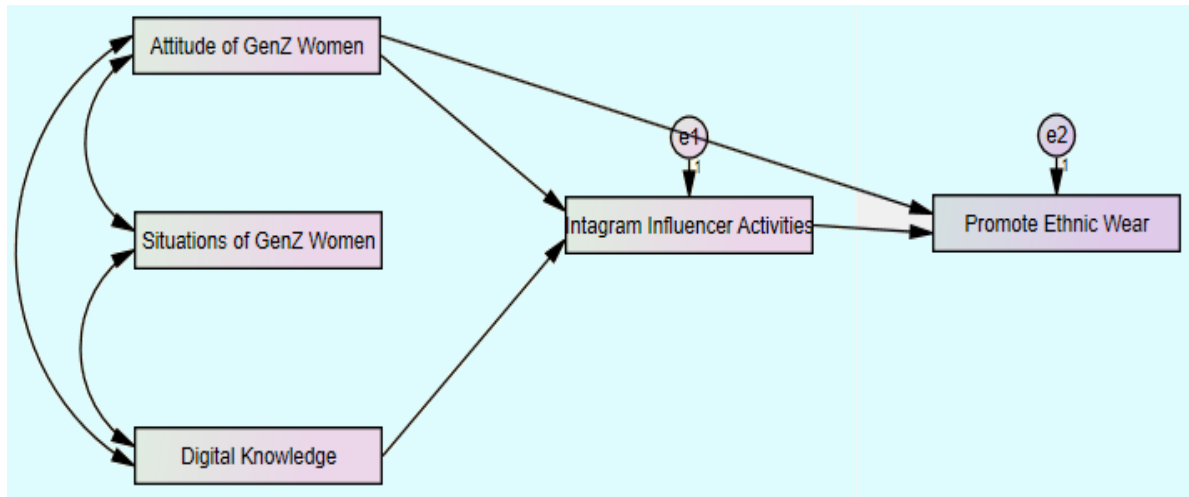
The cumulative percentage analysis reveals that the four extracted factors collectively explain 43.264% of the total variance from the original sixteen variables. The factor analysis results indicate that four factors were extracted from the original variables. Based on the rotated factor matrix, Factor 1 comprises variables E15, E3, E2, E12, and E11, with factor loadings of 0.727, 0.545, 0.446, 0.433, and 0.398, respectively. These five variables share a common underlying characteristic, which has been labeled "Current Change Update." Similarly, Factor 2 includes variables E16, E10, E7, E8, and E14, with factor loadings of 0.680, 0.543, 0.535, 0.475, and 0.207, showing that these variables are part of a shared category now called "Compulsion Factors." Furthermore, Factor 3 includes variables E5, E6, and E4, with factor loadings of 0.708, 0.692, and 0.558, respectively, and is renamed as "Unique Factors." Factor 4 consists of variables E9 and E1, with factor loadings of 0.818 and 0.760, respectively, and is labeled "Guidance Factors." We then rename the extracted factors as follows: Factor 1 – "Current Trends," Factor 2 – "Compulsion Factors," Factor 3 – "Unique Factors," and Factor 4 – "Guidance Factors." Among these, when considering how Instagram influencers promote ethnic dress among Gen Z women, the first factor stands out as the most important element.

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Based on the proposed relationships in this research, we integrate the confirmed measurement model into the structural model. We use structural equation modeling (SEM) to check how well the model works, the proposed cause-and-effect links, and how independent factors affect the dependent variable. This approach ensures a comprehensive assessment of the relationships within the research framework.

H₀: There is no significant impact of Instagram influencers in promoting ethnic wear among Gen Z women.

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Source: Primary Data

Fig 1.1 Path Diagram

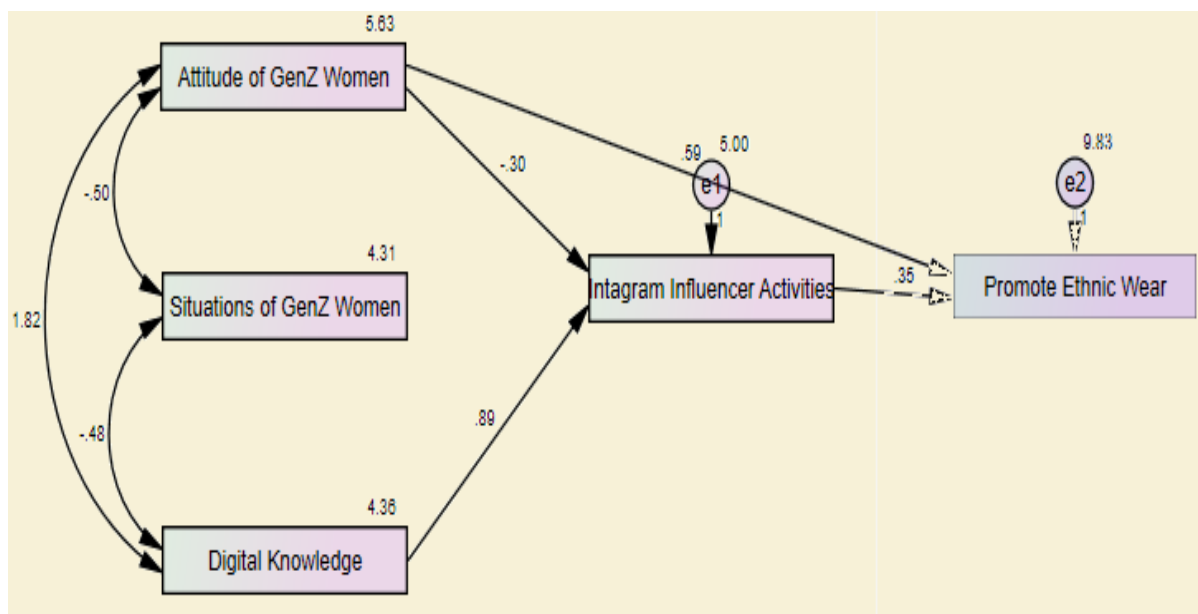


Fig: 1.2 Sem Model

The table presents a degree of freedom (DF) of 3, which is below the recommended threshold of 5, indicating that the model demonstrates a good fit. The RMSEA value, ranging between 0.05 and 0.08, suggests a moderate model fit. Additionally, the root mean square (RMS) value of 0.033 further supports the model's adequacy, as it falls below the acceptable threshold of 0.08, confirming a well-fitting model.

Regression Analysis

Table No: 1.5 - Regression Weights: Unstandardized

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Instagram Influencer Activities	<---	Attitude of GenZ Women	-.303	0.066	-1.578	***	
Instagram Influencer Activities	<---	Digital Knowledge	0.891	0.0075	1.856	***	
Promote Ethnic Wear	<---	Instagram Influencer Activities	0.354	0.072	1.902	***	
Promote Ethnic Wear	<---	Attitude of GenZ Women	0.593	0.086	1.882	***	

The table reveals that the P-value is less than 0.05, indicating high statistical significance. The significance is determined based on the P-value, while the Critical Ratio (CR) falls within the acceptable range of -1.96 to 1.96. The results of the regression analysis confirm a significant impact of Instagram influencers on the promotion of ethnic wear among Gen Z women.

Correlation Between Variables

Table No: 1.6 - Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
CR1: Attitude of Gen Z Women	<-->	CR2: Digital Knowledge	0.368
CR2: Digital Knowledge	<-->	CR3: Situation of Gen Z Women	-.111
CR1: Attitude of Gen Z women	<-->	CR3: Situation of Gen Z Women	-.101

The table indicates a strong positive correlation between digital knowledge and the attitude of Gen Z women. Specifically, the correlation between CR3 and CR2 is -0.111, indicating a negative relationship, while the correlation between CR3 and CR1 is -0.101, also reflecting a negative correlation.

Factor Analysis

Based on factor analysis, the extracted factors were renamed as follows:

Factor 1: "Current Change Updated"

Factor 2: "Compulsion Factors"

Factor 3: "Unique Factors"

Factor 4: "Guidance Factors"

Among these, Factor 1 emerged as the most influential factor in determining the role of Instagram influencers in promoting ethnic wear among Gen Z women.

Structural Equation Modeling (Sem) Results

The results of the SEM model show that there is a positive degree of freedom (DF = 3), with 15 different sample moments and 12 estimated parameters, which means the model is clearly defined.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation results highlight a strong positive correlation between digital knowledge and the attitude of Gen Z women towards ethnic wear. However, the following relationships were observed:

CR3 and CR2 have a negative correlation (-0.111).

CR3 and CR1 are also negatively correlated (-0.101).

Suggestion

Develop collaborative partnerships with Instagram influencers who demonstrate authentic engagement with ethnic wear, prioritizing those who highlight artisanal craftsmanship and cultural narratives. Integrate sustainability certifications (e.g., organic textiles, fair-trade practices) into marketing campaigns to align with Gen Z's eco-conscious values. Offer affordable pricing tiers or rental options for ethnic wear to address Gen Z's financial constraints while maintaining quality. Enhance content authenticity by featuring behind-the-scenes collaborations with traditional artisans and educational storytelling about cultural heritage. Utilize Instagram Reels and Stories to demonstrate versatile styling of ethnic wear for contemporary settings, appealing to Gen Z's preference for multifunctional fashion. Disclose sustainability claims transparently to avoid accusations of greenwashing. Fund digital literacy programs that educate young consumers on distinguishing cultural appreciation from appropriation in influencer content. Support local artisans through grants for digital upskilling, enabling them to partner directly with influencers. Investigate longitudinal impacts of influencer-promoted ethnic wear on cultural preservation metrics (e.g., artisan livelihoods, language retention). Explore cross-cultural comparisons of Gen Z's ethnic fashion consumption in Global South vs. North contexts.

Implications

Important implications for marketers emerge from this study's findings, fashion firms, and other industry participants who want to use Instagram influencers to promote ethnic clothing among Gen Z women. Influencers on Instagram have a significant impact on engagement, fashion preferences, and purchase decisions. Brands can use AI-driven personalization to provide well-chosen fashion suggestions and use cost-effective pricing techniques like student discounts and seasonal sales to optimize this effect. Deeper emotional ties with customers can also be developed through effective brand storytelling and consumer education regarding the sustainability and cultural value of ethnic wear. While sustainability measures, such as supporting local craftspeople and using eco-friendly sourcing, can improve a company's reputation, ethical and transparent influencer marketing techniques are crucial to preserving consumer trust. Improving social commerce through influencer partnerships and Instagram's shopping capabilities can increase market reach and expedite the buying process. Brands can increase sales, foster cultural sustainability in the fashion industry, and improve customer engagement by implementing these tactics, guaranteeing that Instagram-driven marketing will continue to be effective, moral, and timely.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the significant impact of Instagram influencers in changing the fashion industry by encouraging Gen Z women to adopt ethnic clothing, while also addressing the challenges and opportunities within this evolving market. As sustainability and cultural authenticity become increasingly important to younger consumers, ethnic clothing has gained significant traction, supported by influencers who bridge traditional heritage with contemporary style. However, this digital promotion is not without its complexities—issues such as cultural appropriation, greenwashing, and the commercialization of cultural symbols require careful navigation to maintain authenticity. For fashion designers, entrepreneurs, and marketers, the findings underscore the importance of strategic influencer partnerships that emphasize genuine storytelling, craftsmanship, and sustainability. Micro-influencers, in particular, prove highly effective due to their perceived authenticity and strong engagement with niche audiences. Additionally, brands must prioritize transparency in their sustainability claims to align with Gen Z's values-driven consumption habits. Manufacturers, meanwhile, can leverage digital platforms to showcase ethical production processes, artisan collaborations, and the cultural significance of their designs, thereby appealing to socially conscious consumers. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that while Instagram influencers serve as powerful catalysts for the revival and modernization of ethnic wear, their success hinges on a balanced approach that respects cultural integrity while meeting the demands of a competitive, digitally driven market. By adopting responsible marketing practices and fostering meaningful connections between tradition and innovation, stakeholders can ensure the sustainable growth of ethnic fashion in the Gen Z-dominated digital era.

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