
FROM INFLUENCE TO ENGAGEMENT: FACEBOOK INFLUENCERS AND CLOTHING BRAND ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUTH IN WESTERN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The purpose of the study to investigate the effect of Facebook influencer traits on youth engagement with clothing brands in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The study examines four important traits of influencers credibility, fairness, reputation, and interactivity. A quantitative survey design was employed using a convenience sampling technique to collect data from 277 young Facebook users who actively follow Facebook influencers. The response rate was 93.2%. Correlation and multiple linear regression methods are applied in analyzing the data. This finding indicate that fairness, reputation, and interactivity are significantly and positively related to brand engagement, while credibility is not significantly related to brand engagement. Among these three significant traits, interactivity is the most significant factor in determining brand engagement. overall results suggest that youth engagement is mainly influenced by interactive communication, fairness perception, and reputation of the influencer rather than credibility based on expertise. The regression model has a high degree of explained variance in brand engagement ($R^2=0.691$), thus regression model indicating strong model fit. The results highlight the significance of interactive and relational features in social media marketing, because parasocial relationships become an important part of engagement between influencers and consumers. From managerial perspective, clothing brands should prioritize influencers who actively interact with followers and maintain strong reputational capital. Future research might include more analysis of other social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, as well as more attributes of influencers including authenticity and content quality to enhance understanding of youth brand engagement in evolving digital marketing environment.

Key Words: Facebook, Facebook influencers, Influencer Marketing, Influencer Credibility, Influencer Fairness, Influencer Reputation, Influencer Interactivity, Brand Engagement.

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology and the expansion of internet access have greatly changed the global marketing environment. Digital technology has been used by businesses to communicate with consumers and market their products and services. Social media have been important tools for the marketing function, as information, ideas, and trends can reach large groups of people quickly. Social media have been important tools for the marketing function, as they have helped organisations interact with their consumers and enabled better relationships with them (Khan et al., 2023; Syahrivar, 2025). Thus, social media have become an important aspect of the marketing function (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Among the various social media platforms, Facebook has been maintaining its position in Sri Lanka and has been popular among the people belonging to various demographic groups. Its popularity among young people has made Facebook an important platform for business functions (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). According to recent digital usage reports, Sri Lanka has over 10 million Facebook users, representing nearly half of the population, making it the most widely used social media platform in the country (Pulasthi, 2025). In the clothing industry, consumer behavior is strongly influenced by fashion sense, aesthetic appeal, and peer groups, while social media has become important marketing tools that shape consumers' perceptions and purchase decisions (Kim & Ko, 2012).

As a result of the rise of social media marketing, influencer marketing has also been recognized as an effective marketing promotion tool. An influencer is a person who can influence others' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours through information shared on the internet (Freberg et al., 2011). On the other hand, social media influencer marketing is a promotional strategy in which a company partners with individuals with a strong social media presence to promote its products or services to consumers (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Compared to traditional celebrity marketing, social media influencers have a more personal relationship with the consumers, thus creating a sense of trust and credibility towards the product (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Jin & Phua, 2014). This is particularly vital in the marketing promotion of products to the youth, who often depend on the opinions of others in the decision-making process to purchase certain products (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Childers et al., 2019). Therefore, the credibility, reputation, fairness in communication, and interactivity of the influencers are considered vital factors that influence the consumers' responses towards the marketing promotion of the products on social media marketing.

Empirical studies in Sri Lanka also show that influencer marketing is widely adopted in the fashion industry, with more than 60% of branded fashion companies integrating influencer-based promotions into their digital marketing strategies (Jayasinghe & Wanninayake, 2024). For the Sri Lankan context, the Western Province is the most urbanized and economically active region in the country. The region comprises the districts of Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara. The youth of the Western Province are very active on social media and are often exposed to new trends and marketing activities. According to the National Youth Services Council, youth in Sri Lanka are generally considered to be within the age range of 19 to 30 years in this study. Young consumers are more likely to use social media platforms regularly

and are more receptive to digital marketing activities (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). Studies indicate that over 70% of Sri Lankan youth aged 19–30 use social media daily, with a significant proportion actively engaging with influencer content through likes, shares, and comments (Gurusinghe & Attanayake, 2025). Therefore, many clothing brands are partnering with Facebook influencers to attract the attention of young consumers and persuade them to interact with the brands. Engagement with the brand is an essential concept in the current marketing environment. It is the level of a consumer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with a brand (Hollebeek, 2011).

In social media environments, engagement can be observed through actions such as liking, sharing, commenting, and interacting with brand-related content (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). If the consumer engages with the brand, it has the potential to strengthen the relationship with the consumer and increase the probability of the consumer making a purchase (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Influencers have a significant impact in motivating consumer engagement with the brand, as they generate content that attracts the consumer's attention, which in turn creates a connection between the consumer and the brand (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). Although influencer marketing has been extensively studied by international researchers, the majority of the studies have been conducted in relation to Western countries and social media influencers such as Instagram and TikTok (Abidin, 2016; Casaló et al., 2018). A review of influencer marketing literature indicates that more than 70% of empirical studies focus on Instagram-based influencers, while Facebook-based studies account for less than 15% globally, showing a clear platform imbalance.

However, in Sri Lanka, Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms. Nevertheless, there has been very little research conducted to identify the impact of Facebook influencers on consumer engagement with the brand in Sri Lanka. Additionally, most studies have been conducted to analyze the individual characteristics of the influencer, whereas the present study aims to analyze all the characteristics of the influencer. Consequently, there is a lack of research that examines the impact of credibility, fairness, reputation, and interactivity of influencers simultaneously on brand engagement within the Sri Lankan clothing market. Cultural values, social, and consumer behavior patterns may vary from country to country; hence, it is not advisable to generalize findings from other countries and apply them in the Sri Lankan market (Hofstede, 2001).

1.1 Research Question and Research Objective

To bridge this research gap, the overall aim of this research is to explore the impact of Facebook influencers on clothing brand engagement among youth within the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- What is the impact of Facebook influencer credibility on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka?

- What is the impact of Facebook influencer fairness on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka?
- What is the impact of Facebook influencer reputation on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka?
- What is the impact of Facebook influencer interactivity on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka?

In line with these research questions, the study sets the following objectives:

- To examine the impact of Facebook influencer credibility on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.
- To examine the impact of Facebook influencer fairness on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.
- To examine the impact of Facebook influencer reputation on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.
- To examine the impact of Facebook influencer interactivity on clothing brand engagement among youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.

By examining all these factors within one framework, this research aims to provide a better understanding of the impact of these factors on clothing brand engagement.

Despite its importance, the current research has some limitations. First, the current research is based on the clothing industry alone, and its applicability to other industries is questionable. The second limitation of the current research is its focus on the Western Province alone, which makes its applicability to the entire nation questionable. Third, the research is limited to Facebook alone without any comparative data from other social media sites. Fourth, the research is based on self-reported data from surveys, which could have some level of bias as well. Nevertheless, these are also opportunities for further research to be undertaken from a different perspective and industry. Overall, the purpose of the research is to gain a better insight into the role played by Facebook influencers in clothing brands for the youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The research is relevant for both academic and marketing purposes in the new field of social media marketing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Influencer Credibility

Influencer credibility is the measure of the level of trust, knowledge, and reliability that the followers associate with the information or products communicated by the influencer. Credibility is considered a vital component in the assessment of the effectiveness of marketing communications, as consumers are more likely to accept marketing communications from a credible source (Ohanian, 1990). In the context of social media marketing, the credibility of the influencer is the measure of the level of trust that the followers have in the information

communicated by the influencer regarding the products or services promoted (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The notion of credibility is considered to have a multidimensional construct. Ohanian (1990) argues that there are three dimensions of source credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. The dimension of expertise entails the perceived knowledge and experience of the influencer with regard to the product category, while trustworthiness entails the perceived level of honesty associated with the information communicated by the influencer. Attractiveness entails the physical appearance of the influencer or the product lifestyle. In the context of social media, these dimensions combine to influence the perception of the messages conveyed by the influencers to their followers (Munnukka et al., 2019; Casaló et al., 2018).

There are various antecedents of the formation of credibility for the influencers. These include the consistency of the quality of the content posted by the influencers, the authenticity of the communication style of the influencers, the transparency of the sponsored content posted by the influencers, and the expertise of the influencers in a particular domain, such as fashion or lifestyle (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020). The consequences of the credibility of the influencers have been discussed in various studies related to marketing. The study conducted by Casaló et al. (2020) found that a high level of credibility positively influences the attitude of the consumers towards the brands. The study conducted by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) found that a high level of credibility positively influences the attitude of the consumers towards the brands. The study found that the credibility of the influencers influences the attitude of the consumers towards the brands. From a theoretical perspective, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion provides a useful explanation of the role of credibility in the process of persuasion. This model suggests that credible sources enhance the probability of consumers processing the information through the central route. This results in the formation of strong and stable consumer attitude towards the brand (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Hence, the credibility of the influencer plays an important role in the persuasiveness of the marketing communication, leading to a high level of engagement.

2.2 Influencer Fairness

Influencer fairness refers to the level of communication of the influencers in an honest, transparent, and ethical manner while endorsing a brand or a product. The importance of fairness in the context of social media marketing is increasing. This is because consumers are becoming more aware of the sponsored content of the influencers (Evans et al., 2017). Hence, the influencers who communicate the balance of opinions towards the products are likely to be viewed as fair. It is also possible to consider the concept of influencer fairness from a multidimensional perspective. It includes transparency, honesty, and ethical responsibility. Transparency relates to the level of openness by the influencer in disclosing the sponsored content or the paid endorsement. Honesty, on the other hand, relates to the level of honesty by the influencer in offering genuine opinions rather than exaggerated ones. Ethical responsibility relates to the level of responsibility taken by the influencer to ensure that the promotional messages do not end up misleading or manipulating the consumers (Audrezet et al., 2020). Various factors contribute to the perception of fairness by the consumers towards the

influencer. These factors include transparency, balance in reviewing the products, and ethical behavior. The perception of fairness by the consumers towards the influencer increases when the latter is transparent in the advertising of the products. This means that the consumers will be able to trust the opinions of the influencer if the latter is transparent (Evans et al., 2017). Studies have shown that fairness has implications for consumer responses. Transparent and ethical communication also fosters trust among consumers, which increases brand credibility and leads to increased levels of engagement, such as commenting, sharing, and recommending the brand to others (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Audrezet et al., 2020). On the contrary, unfairness may cause consumers to develop negative attitudes towards the influencer and the brand under consideration. From a theoretical viewpoint, fairness in influencer communication can be described using the theories of persuasion and trust in communication. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, transparent and honest communication increases the persuasiveness of the message, as it increases the levels of trust that consumers have in the source of the information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This implies that fairness in influencer communication increases the persuasiveness of the brand's message and the levels of engagement among the influencer's followers.

2.3 Influencer Reputation

Influencer reputation entails the overall perception that the public and the influencer's followers have concerned the influencer's reliability and reputation in a specific social circle. Reputation is often a product of the influencer's past behavior and their ability to consistently create engaging content in a specific niche, such as fashion and lifestyle (Fombrun, 1996). A strong reputation is associated with reliability and professionalism, which can enhance the persuasiveness of the recommendations. Reputation is also seen as a multidimensional construct. This means that reputation is associated with several factors. These factors include reliability, consistency, and public recognition. Reliability is seen as the ability of the influencer to be consistent in their behavior. Consistency is seen as the ability of the influencer to deliver consistent and high-quality content. Public recognition is seen as the popularity of the influencer in the social media environment (De Veirman et al., 2017). Antecedents of reputation: Several antecedents are associated with the reputation of influencers. These include consistency in providing content over time, positive interactions with the audience, high engagement of followers, and associations with reputable brands. An influencer who is consistent in providing high-quality and useful information is likely to develop a positive reputation (Casaló et al., 2020). Consequences of reputation: The consequences of reputation are significant in marketing communication. Literature suggests that influencers who have a strong reputation are more likely to influence brand perception, consumer trust, and engagement behavior (Munnukka et al., 2019). The audience perceives influencers who have a strong reputation as opinion leaders who can influence consumer behavior in terms of fashion trends.

2.4 Influencer Interactivity

Influencer interactivity is the level of communication and interaction that occurs between the influencer and the audience on social media. Social media provides influencers the opportunity to interact directly with the audience through various interactive tools. This is different from the traditional advertising approach, where there is no direct communication. Social media provides influencers with the opportunity to interact directly with the audience through various interactive tools (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). This direct communication helps create a strong bond between the influencers and the audience. Interactivity is often considered a multidimensional concept. Interactivity involves responsiveness, participation, and communication frequency. Responsiveness involves the ability of the influencers to respond to the audience's communication. Participation involves the ability of the influencers to encourage the audience to participate in interactive communication. Communication frequency involves the ability of the influencers to interact with the audience. There are a number of antecedents that affect the level of interactivity between influencers and their followers. Some of these antecedents include the features of the social media platforms used, the influencer's communication style, and the level of audience interactivity. Influencers who tend to be more responsive and encourage interactivity are likely to develop stronger relationships with their followers. The consequences of influencer interactivity are also linked to the level of consumer engagement. Studies have shown that the more the influencers engage in interactivity, the stronger the emotional connection and the higher the levels of trust and engagement in brand-related content (Dessart et al., 2019; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Interactive communication also makes the followers feel encouraged to share the information and support the promoted brands. The concept of interactivity can be understood using the theory of parasocial interaction. Horton and Wohl (1956) developed the concept of parasocial relationships to explain the emotional connection between the audience and the media personalities. The frequent interactions between influencers and their followers in the social media environment tend to strengthen the parasocial relationships between the two parties.

2.5 Brand Engagement

Brand engagement is the measure of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement that consumers build up towards a brand. Consumer brand engagement involves more than mere consumption and entails activities such as interacting with the brand, sharing information, and engaging in brand-related conversations (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Brand engagement is accepted as a multidimensional construct that comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioral brand engagement dimensions. The cognitive dimension entails the level of attention and interest that consumers display towards the brand. The emotional dimension entails the feelings that consumers develop towards the brand, whereas the behavioral dimension entails the actions that consumers display towards the brand, such as commenting, sharing, and recommending the brand (Dessart et al., 2015). The consequences of brand engagement are critical in terms of long-term marketing success. A high level of brand engagement may result in brand loyalty and purchase intentions (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012).

Likewise, transparent and fair communication will improve the perception of honesty and authenticity among the followers, which will enhance the level of engagement (Evans et al., 2017; Audrezet et al., 2020). Reputed influencers are often viewed as opinion leaders, who have the power to influence the attitude of the followers towards the brand (De Veirman et al., 2017; Casaló et al., 2020). Moreover, interactive communication between the influencers and the followers will improve the relationship, leading to the engagement of the consumers in liking, sharing, and commenting on the content (Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Kim & Kim, 2022). Hence, the above arguments from the literature indicate that the characteristics of the influencers are likely to have a positive influence on the engagement of the consumers, especially the youth who actively engage in the social media platforms for information-seeking purposes.

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a quantitative research approach to examine the effects of Facebook influencers on the engagement of youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka with clothing brands. This methodological approach is chosen because it can yield quantified data that is statistically analyzable. This study is based on the positivistic research philosophy, which believes that reality is objective and can be observed, measured, and analyzed scientifically. This philosophy supports objective measurement of variables and statistical testing of relationships between influencer characteristics and brand engagement. A deductive research approach is applied, where hypotheses are developed from existing theories and tested using empirical data.

A cross-sectional survey design is used to examine relationships between variables at a single point in time. This design is suitable for identifying patterns of association between influencer characteristics and brand engagement. The researcher has chosen the survey method using a structured questionnaire. This method will be the major source of data collection. This method is chosen for its consistency, reliability, and objectivity. The independent variables Facebook influencer credibility, fairness, reputation, and interactivity will be measured using several indicators such as trustworthiness, honesty, expertise, transparency, social contribution, responsiveness, and accessibility. The dependent variable, brand engagement, will be measured using several indicators such as attention, interaction, recommendation, feedback, and influence. The variables will be measured using a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This will help the researcher standardize the responses. The secondary data will be collected from books, research reports, and the internet.

The research strategy combines structured surveys with cross-sectional research to obtain data at a single time point. This design allows the study to capture respondents' current perceptions and behaviours efficiently without longitudinal tracking. The structured questionnaire is used as a data collection instrument, while SPSS and Microsoft Excel are used for data analysis and presentation. The research method also relies on descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression to examine the association between the independent and dependent variables. Data analysis includes descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to examine both relationships and predictive effects. The study population consists of youth aged

19 to 30 residing in the Western Province of Sri Lanka who actively follow Facebook influencers and demonstrate interest in clothing brands. This demographic is targeted due to its high engagement with social media and significant influence on digital consumer trends. A sample size of 384 was initially considered as the minimum recommended sample size using Krejcie and Morgan (1970). However, due to practical limitations, 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 277 valid responses were obtained, resulting in a final sample size of 277 respondents (92.3% response rate). A convenience sampling technique ~~technique~~ (non-probability sampling) was used to select respondents based on accessibility and willingness to participate.

The operationalization of the research variables is based on previous research to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. The credibility of the influencer is measured based on factors such as trustworthiness, honesty, expertise, experience, and reliability. The fairness of the influencer is measured based on factors such as distributive fairness, procedural fairness, interpersonal fairness, informational fairness, and transparency. The reputation of the influencer is measured based on factors such as the number of followers, authenticity, genuineness, contribution to society, and positive influence. The interactivity of the influencer is measured based on factors such as responsiveness, accessibility, clarity of communication, and reachability. The brand engagement is measured based on factors such as attention, interaction, recommendations, feedback, and influence. The constructs are measured based on a five-point Likert scale. his methodology provides a systematic framework for examining the impact of Facebook influencer characteristics on youth brand engagement.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework emphasizes the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables. The independent variables of the study are Facebook influencer characteristics, namely credibility, fairness, reputation, and interactivity. The dependent variable is brand engagement. In this study, no moderating variable is included, and the focus is on the direct relationship between influencer characteristics and brand engagement.

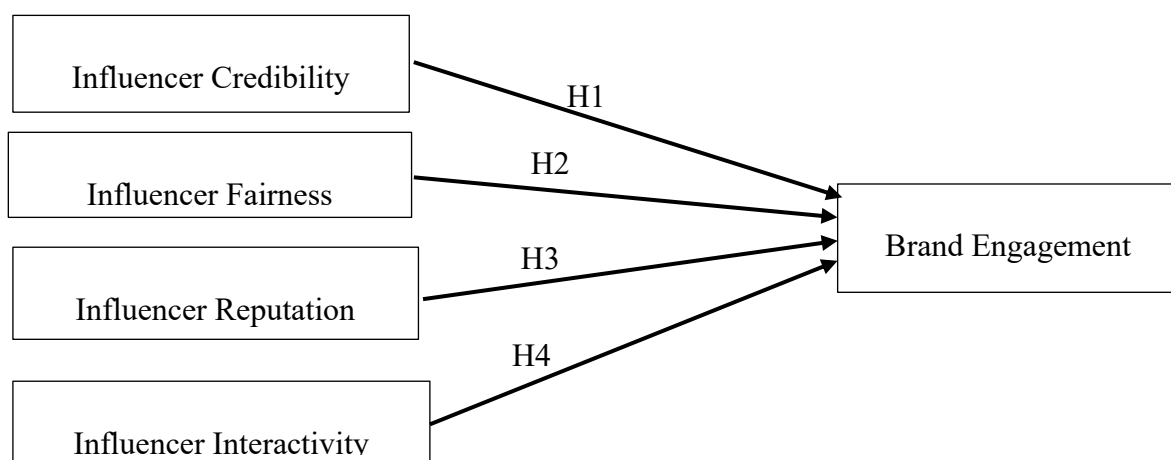


Figure 01: Conceptual Framework

A hypothesis is often developed to investigate the relationship between two variables. For the purpose of this research study, the hypotheses are developed to establish a fruitful relationship between the variables and brand engagement. Each independent factor in this study is expected to influence different behaviors and outcomes. The researcher in this study has attempted to establish a definite relationship between the four independent variables and the dependent variable at the time of conceptualization. It is postulated that changes in these four variables are expected to produce a substantial impact on the main dependent variable, which is brand engagement.

For comprehending and explaining these relationships, the researcher has developed four hypotheses based on previous literature on Facebook influencer marketing. These four hypotheses are based on the literature about Facebook influencers. The study aims to explore these relationships by analyzing previous literature and each of these attributes individually by previous research. Indicators of Facebook influencers are developed to measure each of these attributes. Based on the problem definition, research objectives, and literature review, the following hypotheses are developed for this study.

H1: There is a Significant impact of Facebook influencer credibility on brand engagement.

H2: There is a Significant impact of Facebook influencer fairness on brand engagement.

H3: There is a Significant impact of Facebook influencer reputation on brand engagement.

H4: There is a Significant impact of Facebook influencer interactivity on brand engagement.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This study focused on the youth population aged between 19-30 years in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, which consists of approximately 1,794,108 individuals. The sample was selected from active Facebook users in the districts of Colombo, Gampaha, and Kaluthara. Although the intended sample size was 384, only 300 questionnaires were distributed using Google Forms through convenience sampling due to accessibility limitations. Out of these, 277 respondents completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 92.3%, which is considered satisfactory for analysis.

Before conducting statistical analysis, the collected data were screened and cleaned to ensure accuracy and consistency. The dataset contained no missing values, meaning that all 277 responses were complete and valid for analysis. Additionally, the data were examined for outliers using SPSS, and no significant outliers were identified. Therefore, the dataset was considered suitable for further statistical analysis.

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to measure the internal consistency of the scales used in the study. A Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 is generally considered acceptable.

Table 01: Reliability Analysis

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Credibility (IC)	5	0.836
Influencer Fairness (IF)	5	0.771
Influencer Reputation (IR)	5	0.811
Influencer Interactivity (II)	5	0.799
Brand Engagement (BE)	6	0.753

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The results indicate that all constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, as all Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. This confirms that the measurement scales used in the questionnaire were reliable.

4.2 Validity Analysis

Construct validity was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Table 02: Validity Test Results

Variable	KMO Value	Approx. Chi-Square	Sig.
IC	0.842	504.757	0.000
IF	0.821	312.691	0.000
IR	0.820	415.165	0.000
II	0.819	377.897	0.000
BE	0.812	639.143	0.000

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The KMO values ranged from 0.812 to 0.842, exceeding the recommended minimum level of 0.60. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p = 0.000$) for all variables. These results confirm that the measurement scales possess satisfactory construct validity and that the items effectively measure the intended constructs.

Overall, the reliability and validity results confirm that the measurement instruments used in the study are appropriate for further statistical analysis.

4.3 Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity is the situation in which two or more independent variables in a regression model are highly correlated with each other. High multicollinearity may be problematic since it can inflate the variance of the regression coefficients and render them unstable and difficult to interpret (Hair et al., 2019). This assumption was checked in terms of Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistics. The generally agreed-upon thresholds are a Tolerance value between 0.1 and 10 for VIF.

Table 03: Multicollinearity

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	IC	.989	1.011
	IF	.434	2.307
	IR	.412	2.427
	II	.385	2.598

a. Dependent Variable: BE

Source: Survey data, (2025)

The results of the multicollinearity diagnostics have been presented in Table 4, and this assumption was satisfied. All Tolerance values were significantly higher than the 0.1 threshold, and all VIF values were well below the maximum limit of 10. This confirms the absence of the presence of any significant multicollinearity issues among the independent variables, i.e., the individual influence of each of the influencer characteristics over brand engagement can be reliably estimated in the regression model.

4.4 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis entails converting the raw data into data that is easy to understand and interpret. It is utilized to describe the basic features of the data in a study by offering simple summaries about the sample and the measures (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The descriptive analysis has been done for the demographic variables of the study as well as for the variables presented in sections respectively.

4.5 Descriptive analysis of demographic variables

The descriptive analysis of demographic variables is presented in this section in which include, Gender, Age, Usage of Facebook, and Following Facebook influencers.

Table 04: Descriptive analysis of demographic variables

Demographic Variable	Category / Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	128	46.2
	Female	149	53.8
Age	15–20 years	16	5.8
	21–25 years	115	41.5
	26–30 years	128	46.2
	31–35 years	18	6.5
Facebook Usage	<1 hour/day	14	5.1
	1–3 hours/day	64	23.1
	3–5 hours/day	124	44.8
	>5 hours/day	75	27.1
Following Facebook Influencers	Yes	271	97.8
	No	6	2.2

Source: Survey data, (2025)

The study sample consisted of 277 respondents, with females forming the majority (149 respondents, 53.8%) and males comprising 128 respondents (46.2%). This indicates a slightly higher representation of female participants in the study.

The respondents were primarily young adults, with the majority aged between 26 and 30 years (128 respondents, 46.2%), followed by those aged 21 to 25 years (115 respondents, 41.5%). Smaller proportions were observed for ages 31–35 years (18 respondents, 6.5%) and 15–20 years (16 respondents, 5.8%), showing that the sample is largely concentrated in the 21–30 years age range. Most respondents reported moderate to high usage of Facebook, with 124 respondents (44.8%) using the platform for 3–5 hours per day. Those using Facebook for more than 5 hours per day accounted for 75 respondents (27.1%), while 64 respondents (23.1%) used it for 1–3 hours per day. A small proportion of respondents (14 respondents, 5.1%) used Facebook for less than 1 hour per day. An overwhelming majority of respondents (271 respondents, 97.8%) indicated that they follow Facebook influencers, whereas only 6 respondents (2.2%) reported that they do not. This highlights the high prevalence of influencer engagement among the study participants.

4.6 Descriptive analysis of variables of the study

This section presents the descriptive statistics with the following characteristics: mean, median, standard deviation and variance for the main study variables, which were: Influencer Credibility (IC), Influencer Fairness (IF), Influencer Reputation (IR), Influencer Interactivity (II) and Brand Engagement (BE). These statistics, summarized in Table 5, provide information about the general perceptions and behavior of the respondents.

Table 05: Descriptive analysis

	IC	IF	IR	II	BE
Mean	4.1870	4.6332	4.6823	4.6549	4.6504
Median	4.0000	4.8000	4.8000	4.8000	4.8333
Std. Deviation	.37043	.39275	.37127	.39511	.34700
Variance	.137	.154	.138	.156	.120
Minimum	3.40	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.67
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Source: Survey data, (2025)

An examination of the mean values reveals several key trends. All variables recorded high mean scores, well above the midpoint of a 5-point Likert scale.

4.7 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the independent variables (IC, IF, IR, II) and the dependent variable (BE). The correlation coefficient (r) ranges from -1 to +1, where values closer to ± 1 indicate a stronger relationship, and the sign indicates the direction (positive or negative). The significance (p -value) indicates the probability that the observed relationship occurred by chance. A p -value of less than 0.05 is typically considered statistically significant.

Table 06: Correlation

		IC	IF	IR	II	BE
IC	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	277				
IF	Pearson Correlation	.093	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.124				
	N	277	277			
IR	Pearson Correlation	.055	.685**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.360	.000			
	N	277	277	277		
II	Pearson Correlation	.035	.709**	.729**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.566	.000	.000		
	N	277	277	277	277	
BE	Pearson Correlation	.041	.727**	.726**	.778**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.501	.000	.000	.000	
	N	277	277	277	277	277

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey data, (2025)

The correlation matrix in Table 6 reveals the following key relationships:

Influencer Credibility (IC) and Brand Engagement (BE)

The correlation was found to be very weak and positive ($r = .041$), and it was not statistically significant ($p = .501$). This suggests there is no meaningful linear relationship between how credible youth perceive an influencer to be and their level of engagement with the clothing brands they promote.

Influencer Fairness (IF) and Brand Engagement (BE)

A strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation was observed ($r = .727$, $p = .000$). This indicates that as the perceived fairness of an influencer increases, the level of brand engagement among youth also tends to increase significantly.

Influencer Reputation (IR) and Brand Engagement (BE)

Similar to fairness, there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between influencer reputation and brand engagement ($r = .726$, $p = .000$). A better reputation is strongly associated with higher brand engagement.

Influencer Interactivity (II) and Brand Engagement (BE)

This relationship was the strongest among all variables. The correlation was powerful, positive, and highly significant ($r = .778$, $p = .000$), suggesting that influencer interactivity is a key factor associated with driving brand engagement in youth.

4.8 Regression Analysis

To test the research hypotheses and determine the extent to which the four influencer characteristics predict brand engagement, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. This technique allows for the assessment of the collective and individual impact of the independent variables (IC, IF, IR, II) on the dependent variable (BE). The results are presented in three parts: the Model Summary, the ANOVA table, and the Coefficients table.

4.9 Model Summary

The model summary provides an overview of the overall fit of the regression model. The R, R Square, and Adjusted R Square values are key indicators of the model's explanatory power.

Table 07: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.832 ^a	.691	.687	.19417

a. Predictors: (Constant), II, IC, IF, IR

Source: Survey data, (2025)

The R value of .832 indicates a robust multiple correlation between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable. The R Square value is .691, which is a crucial finding. It signifies that 69.1% of the total variance in Brand Engagement (BE) can be explained by the four influencer characteristics combined. The Adjusted R Square, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, is .687, confirming the model's substantial explanatory power.

4.10 ANOVA

The ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test determines whether the overall regression model is statistically significant. It tests the null hypothesis that there is no linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Table 08: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.978	4	5.744	152.370	.000 ^b
	Residual	10.255	272	.038		
	Total	33.232	276			

a. Dependent Variable: BE

b. Predictors: (Constant), II, IC, IF, IR

Source: Survey data, (2025)

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is highly statistically significant. The F-statistic is 152.370 with a significance value of .000 ($p < 0.001$). This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirms that the combination of influencer credibility, fairness, reputation, and interactivity is a significant predictor of brand engagement among the youth sample.

4.11 Coefficient Table

The coefficients table provides detailed information about the individual contribution of each predictor variable to the model. The unstandardized coefficient (B) represents the change in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in the predictor, while the significance value (Sig.) indicates whether this effect is statistically significant.

Table 09: Coefficient Table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.852	.200		4.266	.000
IC	-.011	.032	-.012	-.358	.721
IF	.241	.045	.273	5.329	.000
IR	.225	.049	.241	4.597	.000
II	.360	.048	.409	7.542	.000

a. Dependent Variable: BE

Source: Survey data, (2025)

The analysis of individual predictors reveals:

Influencer Credibility (IC): The coefficient ($B = -.011$) is not statistically significant ($p = .721$). This indicates that when controlling for other factors, influencer credibility does not have a significant impact on brand engagement. Influencer Fairness (IF): The coefficient ($B = .241$) is positive and highly significant ($p = .000$). This means that influencer fairness is a significant positive predictor of brand engagement. Influencer Reputation (IR): The coefficient ($B = .225$) is also positive and highly significant ($p = .000$), confirming that influencer reputation is another significant positive predictor of brand engagement. Influencer Interactivity (II): This variable has the largest unstandardized coefficient ($B = .360$) and is highly significant ($p = .000$). This identifies influencer interactivity as the strongest and most influential predictor of brand engagement among the four characteristics studied.

4.12 Hypothesis Testing

This section summarizes the results of the hypothesis tests based on the outcomes of the multiple regression analysis. The decision to support or not support each hypothesis was based on the p-value (Sig. value) from the coefficients table (Table 4.14), using a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Each hypothesis is formulated to explore how specific characteristics of influencers such as credibility, fairness, reputation and interactivity impact the youth's clothing brand engagement.

Table 10: Hypothesis

Hypotheses	Coefficient value	P value (Sig value)	Decision
H1: there is a significant impact of Facebook influencer credibility on brand engagement.	-0.011	0.721	Not Supported
H2: there is a significant impact of Facebook influencer fairness on brand engagement.	0.241	0.000	Supported
H3: there is a significant impact of Facebook influencer reputation on brand engagement.	0.225	0.000	Supported
H4: there is a significant impact of Facebook influencer interactivity on brand engagement.	0.360	0.000	Supported

Source: Survey data, (2025)

Based on the statistical evidence:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) is not supported. As per Table 07, the regression analysis results were summarised, showing that influencer credibility has a negative coefficient and a significance value that is also not less than the threshold level of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis related to influencer credibility is accepted. “There is no significant effect of Facebook influencer credibility on brand engagement,” and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. The p-value of 0.721 is greater than 0.05, indicating that influencer credibility does not have a statistically significant effect on brand engagement in this context.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) is supported. Based on Table 07, the results of the regression analysis were summarised, indicating that influencer Fairness has a positive coefficient and a significance value that is less than the threshold level of 0.05. Thus, the alternative hypothesis concerning influencer Fairness is accepted. “There is a significant effect of Facebook influencer fairness on brand engagement,” and the null hypothesis is rejected. The p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, demonstrating a significant positive effect of influencer fairness on brand engagement.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) is supported. Based on Table 07, the results of the regression analysis were summarised, indicating that influencer reputation has a positive coefficient and a significance value that is less than the threshold level of 0.05. Thus, the alternative hypothesis concerning influencer reputation is accepted. “There is a significant effect of Facebook influencer reputation on brand engagement,” and the null hypothesis is rejected. The p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, confirming a significant positive effect of influencer reputation on brand engagement.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) is supported. Based on Table 07, the results of the regression analysis were summarised, indicating that influencer Interactivity has a positive coefficient and a significance value that is less than the threshold level of 0.05. Thus, the alternative hypothesis concerning

influencer Interactivity is accepted. “There is a significant effect of Facebook influencer Interactivity on brand engagement,” and the null hypothesis is rejected. The p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, indicating a substantial positive effect of influencer interactivity on brand engagement.

4.14 Key Findings

This research sought to examine the effect of Facebook influencers' characteristics on clothing brand engagement among the youth in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The research revealed that out of the four characteristics of Facebook influencers examined, namely credibility, fairness, reputation, and interactivity, three factors positively affected youth brand engagement. These factors are fairness, reputation, and interactivity, while the effect of credibility was not statistically significant. Among the factors that positively affected brand engagement, the research revealed that interactivity was the most dominant, followed by fairness and reputation.

The research revealed that the youth respondents' use of Facebook as a social media platform was very high. A high percentage of the youth respondents used Facebook regularly to follow social media influencers. This indicates that Facebook remains an important platform in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of the youth towards brands. Previous research also has shown that social media platforms are important in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of consumers towards brands (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The results therefore support the argument that social media environments have become critical marketing spaces for fashion and clothing brands targeting younger audiences.

The results of the regression analysis revealed that the four-influencer explained 69.1% ($R^2 = 0.691$) of the variance in clothing brand engagement. This indicates strong explanatory power, suggesting that influencer characteristics play an important role in determining consumer engagement in social media environments. Similar results have been reported in previous studies that examined the influence of influencer characteristics on consumer engagement, which is consistent with the results of this study (Labrecque, 2014; De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The strong influence of interactivity also suggests that youth consumers place more emphasis on communication with influencers than on their expertise or credibility. This finding supports Parasocial Interaction Theory, which argues that continuous interaction between influencers and followers strengthens emotional bonds and encourages greater brand engagement. Interestingly, the results also revealed that influencer credibility was not found to be a significant predictor of brand engagement in this study, although it has long been considered an important factor in determining persuasion outcomes in communication (Ohanian, 1990). This outcome may be explained by the fact that youth consumers today are more influenced by social interaction, relatability, and authenticity than by traditional indicators of expertise or authority.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the present study, emphasize the growing importance of relationship-oriented characteristics in influencer marketing. The findings suggest that youth brand engagement on Facebook is primarily influenced by influencer characteristics such as fairness, reputation, and interactivity rather than traditional measures of credibility. These findings in the contemporary digital marketing environment, consumers respond differently to influencer marketing than to traditional advertising, where factors such as credibility and expertise were traditionally considered the most important determinants of consumer behavior. The traditional source credibility theory suggests that the expertise and trustworthiness of the information source have a significant impact on the acceptance of the message (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). However, the findings of the present study suggest that the youth engagement with the brands on Facebook is not significantly influenced by the credibility of the influencer. Instead, variables that facilitate social connection and interaction are important for influencing the youth's behavior. This supports the parasocial interaction theory, which explains the emotional and relational connections audiences build with media personalities (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The interactive communication platforms associated with social media motivate the development of perceived closeness between influencers and their audiences through the combined efforts of replying to comments, discussing topics or being involved with followers. This perceived relationship leads to increased levels of interaction between individuals and brand-related content.

Similarly, influencer fairness was found to have a significant positive effect on brand engagement. This finding suggests that youth consumers value transparency, honesty, and ethical behaviour in influencer marketing. Open disclosure of sponsored content and genuine product recommendations strengthen consumers' trust and encourage greater engagement with clothing brands. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which argue that transparent and ethical communication enhances consumer trust and the effectiveness of influencer marketing (Evans et al., 2017; Audrezet et al., 2020).

The reputation of the influencer has also been shown to play a very significant part in brand engagement. Influencers that have strong reputations are often considered to be leaders in their field and thus dramatically alter how consumers perceive products and create social trends. Previous studies have demonstrated that an influencer's reputation acts as a signal to consumers of reliability and social approval, and subsequently informs consumer attitudes towards brands and brand-related behaviors (De Veirman et al, 2017; Casaló et al, 2020). Similarly, influencer fairness was found to have a significant positive effect on brand engagement. This finding suggests that youth consumers value transparency, honesty, and ethical behaviour in influencer marketing. Open disclosure of sponsored content and genuine product recommendations strengthen consumers' trust and encourage greater engagement with clothing brands. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which argue that transparent and ethical communication enhances consumer trust and the effectiveness of influencer marketing (Evans et al., 2017; Audrezet et al., 2020).

6. Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study. The first limitation is that this study only focused on youth from the Western Province of Sri Lanka; therefore, it is likely that the findings will not be generalizable to other regions of Sri Lanka with different social and cultural contexts. The second limitation is that the study focused solely on youth from the clothing industry; therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study cannot necessarily be applied to other industries in which youth consumers' behaviours may differ (Kim & Ko, 2012; Casaló et al., 2020). The third limitation is that the study examined only Facebook as a platform through which young consumers engage with others; there are also other platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube that young consumers use that may impact how young consumers engage with clothing brands in different ways (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Finally, one of the limitations of this study is that it relied on self-reported survey data and is therefore considered to be subject to response bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Overall, this study provides valuable insights regarding how influencer characteristics affect clothing brand engagement among youth.

7. Theoretical Implications

This research had multiple important implications for current research on influencer marketing and consumer engagement. It was discovered that these results challenge many of the typical uses of source credibility theory, which has long been viewed as a crucial factor in the influence of persuasion through the medium of social media. While source credibility has often been thought of as the most important determinant of brand engagement (Ohanian, 1990) among youth within a social media context, it appears that source credibility alone does not impact brand engagement for youth in the social media context significantly. The implications of this study indicate that the import of source credibility may vary depending on the social media platform used, as well as on the characteristics of the audience and the type of marketing communication employed by businesses. Results of this study support the extension of parasocial interaction theory to the social media influencer context as influencer and follower interactivity has a significant positive effect on brand engagement. Previous research (Horton & Wohl, 1956) has established that audiences develop psychological connections to media personalities through repeated exposure and perceived interactions. Previous research (Labrecque, 2014; Tafesse & Wood, 2021) has also shown that interactive communication improves emotional attachment to brands and drives greater brand engagement. Additionally, the findings of this study corroborate aspects of McGuire's (1985) Source Attractiveness Model, showing that (1) the likeability, familiarity, and attractiveness of a source affect the persuasive outcomes associated with a message; and (2) the reputation of an influencer significantly affects engagement by followers with brands, indicating that approvals from others and the overriding perception of the influencer's reputation by the public will influence how much engagement followers engage with brands via that influencer. Thus, the role of social influence and social status is validated as an important aspect of the digital marketing environment. Also, this study expands the small body of literature regarding influencer marketing in developing countries. The majority of existing literature relating to influencer

marketing was conducted in Western/ developed market countries. This study not only provides additional empirical data regarding the influencer marketing in the form of the example of Sri Lanka, but also adds diversity to existing theoretical literature and provides empirical evidence that young people in developing markets may pay more attention to relational/ethical characteristics and attributes when engaging with influencer-based content.

8. Practical Implications

The findings of the present study offer several important implications for marketing practitioners, particularly for clothing brands that adopt social media-based marketing strategies. Firstly, clothing brands should consider the relational and interactive characteristics of influencers for promotional campaigns. Influencers who are more likely to engage and interact with their followers are more likely to produce high brand engagement outcomes for clothing brands. The clothing brands should consider transparency and fairness in influencer communication as an important factor for effective marketing campaigns. Influencer brands should be honest and transparent about brand partnerships and provide honest reviews for the clothing brand. Fair and ethical communication between influencers and consumers can help create positive perceptions about promotional messages and prevent negative perceptions about promotional messages (Evans et al., 2017). The clothing brands should consider the reputation of influencers for effective marketing campaigns. Influencers who have high reputation and image can help clothing brands create positive social endorsement for the brand. Studies suggest that consumers tend to seek opinion from influencers for clothing brands and other lifestyle trends (Casaló et al., 2020). Additionally, clothing brands should design social media campaigns that encourage interaction and participation. Interactive marketing activities such as live streams, polls, Q&A sessions, and collaborative challenges can help increase consumer engagement and strengthen brand communities. Such strategies not only increase visibility but also create meaningful relationships between brands and consumers.

9. Future Directions

This study has given rise to a number of opportunities for future research. Firstly, the study could be conducted among a wider geography of consumers from other provinces of Sri Lanka. This will help to identify the consistency of the results obtained in this study. Secondly, the study could be conducted to identify the effectiveness of the influencer marketing concept on different social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This is because each of the social media platforms has different characteristics, which might influence the effectiveness of the characteristics of the influencer. Lastly, the study could be conducted over a long period of time to identify the changes in the effectiveness of the influencer over a period of time. This is because the digital marketing environment is constantly changing. Further, the study could be conducted using a mixed method approach. This will help to gain a deeper understanding of the factors behind the motivation of consumers to engage in the activity. Lastly, the study could be conducted to identify the effect of other characteristics of the influencer such as authenticity, quality of content, specialization of the influencer, and engagement of the followers.

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