

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FASHION AMONG THE YOUTH IN
THE FASHION INDUSTRY: CASE STUDY OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

LYDIA OBUNI MOCIRUKU

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I, Mociruku Lydia Obuni, declare that this report is entirely prepared by me. I affirm that all ideas, concepts and analysis presented within this proposal are original and have not been submitted to any other award at any other university. Furthermore, this research has not been plagiarized

Sign.....*Lydia*.....

Date.....*18 May 2026*.....

Mociruku Lydia Obuni

M23B05/063

APPROVAL

I hereby validate that I have scrutinized this research report, based on my assessment, I confirm that the content of the report meets the minimum standards of quality and academic integrity required for submission.

Research supervisor

Mrs. Nnassiwa Winfred


.....

Date


.....

DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to my supporters, encouragers and believers. With God everything is possible. To my parents, who taught me perseverance, integrity and the value of hard work. Thank you for your continuous sacrifice and love. To my supervisor who walked with me throughout the process and gave me academic guidance. May God continue to bless you overflowing.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

BNPL	Buy Now Pay Later
FOMO / FoMO	Fear of Missing Out
SD	Standard Deviation
UCU	Uganda Christian University
SNS	Social Networking Sites
A	Cronbach's Alpha
M	Mean
R	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient
P	Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient
N	Sample Size
Gen Z	Generation Z

ABSTRACT

Social media has disrupted how people consume fashion all over the world. Sites like Tiktok, Instagram, and WhatsApp are platforms where consumers seek fashion inspiration, learn about trends and purchase products endorsed by influencers. This pattern is common across Generation Z worldwide. Social media platforms impact fashion consumption patterns in Uganda through increased mobile internet penetration and the country's youthful demographics. Research on how social media affects fashion consumption among youths in East Africa is scant. Available literature focuses on the West and Asia.

The aim of the study was to explore how social media influences fashion among undergraduate students of Uganda Christian University (UCU). Objectives were to establish what platforms students used and how often they used them to follow fashion. Secondly, the study sought to determine the correlation between social media following and students' style preference. Finally, the research investigated how purchases are influenced by social media influencers compared to fellow students.

Methodology: The study used a cross-sectional descriptive design and was approached with mixed methods. Ninety undergraduate students of Uganda Christian University (UCU) participated in the study. Data was collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire given out physically and through electronic means. Quantitative data were analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27, utilizing descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and dependent t-test. Tiktok (25.6%) and WhatsApp (23.3%) were the two most used platforms. Social media following correlated positively but insignificantly with student's style preference ($r = 0.174$, $p = .101$). Students' fashion purchases were significantly influenced by influencers than fellow students ($M=3.08$ vs $M=2.31$; $t(89) = 8.31$, $p < .001$).

In conclusion, based on the findings, social media conditionally influences UCU students' fashion behavior. Although students use social media platforms to follow fashion trends, there was no significant influence of social media following on their style preference. This can be attributed to conditioned factors unique to UCU inhibiting social media from having full behavioral authority. This includes institutional rules, cultural practices, and students' financial capabilities. Students' social proof weighed less when compared to influencers.

Keywords: *Social media, fashion consumption, influencer marketing, Generation Z*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation looks at how social media affects the way students at Uganda Christian University (UCU) buy clothes and what styles they like. The study looks at how digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube affect university students' fashion choices, how they act as consumers, and how they express their identities. This study makes clear the complicated relationship between using digital media and fashion behaviour in East Africa. It looks specifically at how Ugandan youth deal with and respond to fashion trends that are spread through social networks.

There are six chapters in this thesis. Chapter One gives a summary of the study, including the research question, goals, and importance. Chapter Two goes over all the research that has been done on the theoretical frameworks and real-world evidence that show how social media affects how people buy clothes. Chapter Three talks about how the study was set up, how the sample was chosen, and how the data was collected. In Chapter Four, we talk about what we learned about how UCU students use social media. Chapter Five talks about how influencers and content made by users change what people want to wear. Chapter Six gives conclusions, talks about the effects on policy and practice, and makes suggestions for future research.

1.2 Background of the study

Social media has heavily influenced fashion trends all over the world. Platforms such as Instagram, have been at the forefront, applications like Tiktok and YouTube (Where trends are also made) make it simple for consumers to communicate with brands and propel influencer culture. (Darshan et al., 2025). Influencers, UGC, Peer-to-peer brand relationships affect the youth audience's fashion purchases. Sustainability and Brands

Ethical standards are also concerned through social media and influence buying behaviors. (Halibas et al., 2025).

Gen Z's style could be described as bright and expressive, caring about the environment; recycle-front. They like to mix vintage clothes with modern clothes. They are influenced by their taste in music, social media trends and pop culture. Influencers have been found to have a large impact on youth ages 16–25 years old purchase intentions all over the world. Emotional attachment, Parasocial relationships, influencers "Authentic" persona all affect purchases, specifically when it comes to Fashion, Beauty, and Tech products. (Bhargava, 2025). Social media websites with short form videos have created an even larger impact: Social media platforms such as Instagram Reels and Tik Tok have created faster trends, causing impulsive purchases based on fear of missing out. Not only that but force brands to release high-quality, eye-catching, and relatable content at a rapid pace. Brands can not release new content once every week like they use to. (Sivakami and Marufa, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025).

African fashion sense on social media platforms trends similarly to other social media users but is also based on their cultural practices. Sub-Sahara African youth use Instagram and Tik Tok to search for and express their style; Gen Z in SSA are more likely to continue to use a brand and recommend the brand to others if they have positive experiences in social media interactions. (A et al., 2021). SSA African youth look up to western-style influencers seen in media and celebrities but value wearing traditional clothing for different activities. (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2024). Female subjects in the study also noted they experience more pressure on Instagram and Tik Tok to look certain ways than males did. Asian countries also have young influencers posting traditional wear and remake trends; these influencers have been shown to affect purchase behaviors and brand popularity. (Hassan, Taif and Tajuddin, 2024).

Fashion trends quickly move to youth in Uganda. Youth make up approximately 77% of Ugandans between the ages of 25. Smartphone and social media use have been increasing in Uganda due to the increase in mobile data network and lower-cost smartphones. College students make up a big percentage of Ugandan social media users. The average Ugandan college student spends a lot of time on social media like any other college student. Social media use will continue to rise in Uganda, and as social media use among Ugandans increase college students will likely exhibit similar behavior to other Gen Z consumers. 91% own a smartphone, 83% use social media, and 62% prefer to shop online vs. in-person (Bilovodska and Voronina, 2024). Gen Z in Uganda can be described as technologically learned, adapt quick to changes, and obsessed with new trends. However, when on social media, Ugandans like to multitask. Media multitasking has been proven to reduce cognitive control. Ugandans tend to look at social media when shopping for products both online and in-store, are price sensitive, and prefer the purchase of convenient goods. (Rahate and Gadve, 2026).

The University of California, Uganda has over 30,000 students who come from various walks of life. Students at UCU are most likely to have a higher than average knowledge and use of social media. UCU is known to be a private Christian University that many students who come from middle-class and upper-class backgrounds. Social media allows people to express who they are and what they identify with. This is important to college students who are still developing their identities and can be influenced by their friends and surrounding peers. (Peng, 2025).

There have been many studies done on what Generation Z consumers around the world behave like when shopping. However, studies conducted on

social media usage and behavioral effects on East African consumers, specifically Ugandan youths, are limited. Research on social media usage and behavioral impact has been done outside of Africa. Only a couple of studies have looked into social media usage and behavioral impact and the mediator variables of identity expression, purchase decision, and preference of fashion. (Dewi and Indra, 2024). Another issue is that studies are specific to one social media platform, not consumers who use multiple media platforms. (Taber, Dominguez and Whittaker, 2023). Studies need to be done to better understand the minds of African youths and how their culture and pay grades affect them towards western trends. (Wei and Zain, 2025). The world knows how fear of missing out causes impulse shopping when it comes to trends but not specifically in Uganda. (Mudjiyanto et al., 2025). Even though youths today know about sustainable fashion the research question still applies because social media promotes fast and unhealthy purchasing decisions.

The researcher will be adding to previous research by studying how social media influences fashion trends and what affects Ugandan university students' purchase behaviors.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Social media platforms impact how consumers buy fashion products all over the world. However, no research has been done to see how social media impacts the behavioral attitudes of university students towards fashion products in Uganda. This consumer behavior relationship has not been studied in Uganda even though youths make up 77% of Uganda's population and are one of the fastest-growing consumer markets in Africa.

With 14.5 million social media users in Uganda, university students and youths who live in urban regions make up most of these users. As internet accessibility and mobile phone affordability continue to spread across the

country, social media consumption will increase. University students become more vulnerable to these social media influences as they are building their identities and just starting to make purchases by themselves. Ages 18–25.

Students worldwide are impacted by social media influencers, social media algorithms, short-form videos, Fear of Missing Out, parasocial relationships, and validation when it comes to buying apparel or accessories (Bhargava, 2025; Sivakami and Marufa, 2025). Ugandan youths are also influenced by these same psychological factors when it comes to consumer behavior. However, due to low disposable income, high cost of living, and lack of social media accessibility. These factors may cause Ugandan youths to have different cognitive responses when it comes to making purchasing decisions. (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2024).

It has been proven that high social media usage can lead to an increase in impulse buying, social appearance comparisons, and fast-fashion consumption (Suresh and Sadanandan, 2025; Talaat, 2020). International social media companies like Shein and Localground use influencer marketing to help generate sales with young consumers. There has been research done about influencers but only through a western perspective and audience. What about the students in Uganda? What do they value when it comes to buying fashion products? Where do they make purchases? Do cultural identities, low income, and local influencers play a factor? (Dewi and Indra, 2024; Wei and Zain, 2025). If research like this is not done in Uganda, then how will local businesses, universities, and governments create social media marketing tactics and change their curriculum.

The research will help us gather social media consumption rates among students in Uganda. By collecting data from Uganda Christian University students, we will be able to understand how social media impacts the way students in Uganda purchase fashion products. By using an existing

consumer behavior model and manipulating it to fit our study, we can create research that will help fashion companies and the government of Uganda.

1.4 Research objectives

1.4.1 General objective

To examine the influence of social media on fashion among the youth in the fashion industry; case study of undergraduate students of Uganda Christian University (UCU), Mukono.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

The study intended to:

- (i)** To assess the patterns of Instagram for fashion content among UCU students.
- (ii)** To examine the relationship between fashion on social media platforms and fashion style among UCU students.
- (iii)** To compare the influence of social media influencers versus peer-generated content on fashion purchasing intentions among UCU students.

1.5 Research Questions

The study aimed to address the following questions;

- (i) What are the patterns and frequency of Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube usage for fashion content among undergraduate students at Uganda Christian University?
- (ii) What is the relationship between exposure to fashion content on social media platforms and fashion style preferences among undergraduate students at Uganda Christian University?
- (iii) To what extent do social media influencers versus peer-generated content differ in their influence on fashion purchasing intentions among undergraduate students at Uganda Christian University?

1.6 Research hypotheses

The following were the research hypotheses for the study;

H1_i: There is significant variation in the patterns and frequency of social media platform usage for fashion content among UCU undergraduate students, with certain platforms used more frequently than others.

H2_i: There is a significant positive relationship between exposure to fashion content on social media platforms and fashion style preferences among UCU undergraduate students.

H3_i: Social media influencers exert a significantly greater influence on fashion purchasing intentions than peer-generated content among UCU undergraduate students.

1.7 Scope of study

1.7.1 Conceptual Scope

The study investigated whether there is a correlation between use of social media and fashion preferences/buying habits of university students. Participants would be asked about the type of content they follow on social media and how often they use social media. Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook and YouTube were chosen to represent social media as they are the platforms where fashion is mostly sold/introduced not only worldwide but also increasingly in Uganda. Preference was determined by both what participants said they preferred (survey) and what they were wearing (observation). Buying fashion was determined by what participants say they buy (survey) Confounding variables: age, gender, year of study, socioeconomic status, following influencer content vs peers content. The study did not look at why they had certain preferences.

1.7.2 Geographical Scope

This study was geographically confined to Uganda Christian University Mukono campus located in Uganda. Uganda Christian University-Main campus is located in Mukono district located about 30km East of Kampala. It was chosen as the study venue because UCU hosts close to 30,000 students which cut across Uganda's urban and peri-urban youth population. It also draws students from all walks of life (regarding socio-economic status) and from every corner of the country. There are also high levels of social media penetration as Ugandan university students are largely on social media. Students are situated in one location which allows for convenience sampling and data to be collected within the stipulated study period.

1.7.3 Temporal Scope

Cross-sectional Data Collection Study was undertaken during the semester timeframe of the 2025/2026 school year. Data range allowed enough time to observe seasonal trends and spending habits while allowing for reasonable deadlines with school and study requirements. Reflection included past 4 (months).

1.8 Significance of the study

1.8.1 Theoretical Significance

The research builds off extant social media influence theory as well as fashion decision making and consumer behavior theories to provide theoretical contributions specific to East Africa. More researchers are beginning to address African cultural, economic, and technological particularities when studying the behaviors of African youth. Furthermore, the study contributes to scant literature on the role of multiple social media platforms in the fashion decision-making process. Current literature focuses on one platform at a time rather than the ecosystem of platforms used by consumers. Finally, while youth consumption has been studied extensively,

there is limited research focused on consumption patterns of youth in East Africa.

1.8.2 Practical Significance

The research results can guide actions of several groups. Fashion businesses and online shops can modify their online marketing efforts according to evidence of which platforms, styles of influencer and kinds of content appeal best to Ugandan young people, with respect to their buying decisions. Companies interested in marketing fashion within Africa in countries like Uganda should be aware that this study sheds light on effective social media marketing practices in that region and help them create suitable approaches to promote their brands. Small local clothing businesses and independent design creators can use this data on recommendations from friends and user-generated material to come up with budget-friendly and honest ways of attracting customers. Social media websites would be well-informed to adapt their rules on advertising and user content management concerning young users.

1.8.3 Policy and Educational Significance

The study findings have policy relevance on digital literacy, consumer protection online environments, as well as aggressive marketing targeting children in emerging economies. The results from the study will be essential in enlightening learning institutions on digital literacy trends by highlighting the precise tactics social media platforms employ in shaping youths' decision-making. Further, the study will provide benchmark data for policymakers looking to intervene in sectors that influence economic growth and development through youth consumption behaviors and online business transactions in Uganda. The results from this study will enlighten learning institutions on digital literacy levels by highlighting how social media companies affect youths' decision-making.

1.8.4 Relevance to Sustainable Development

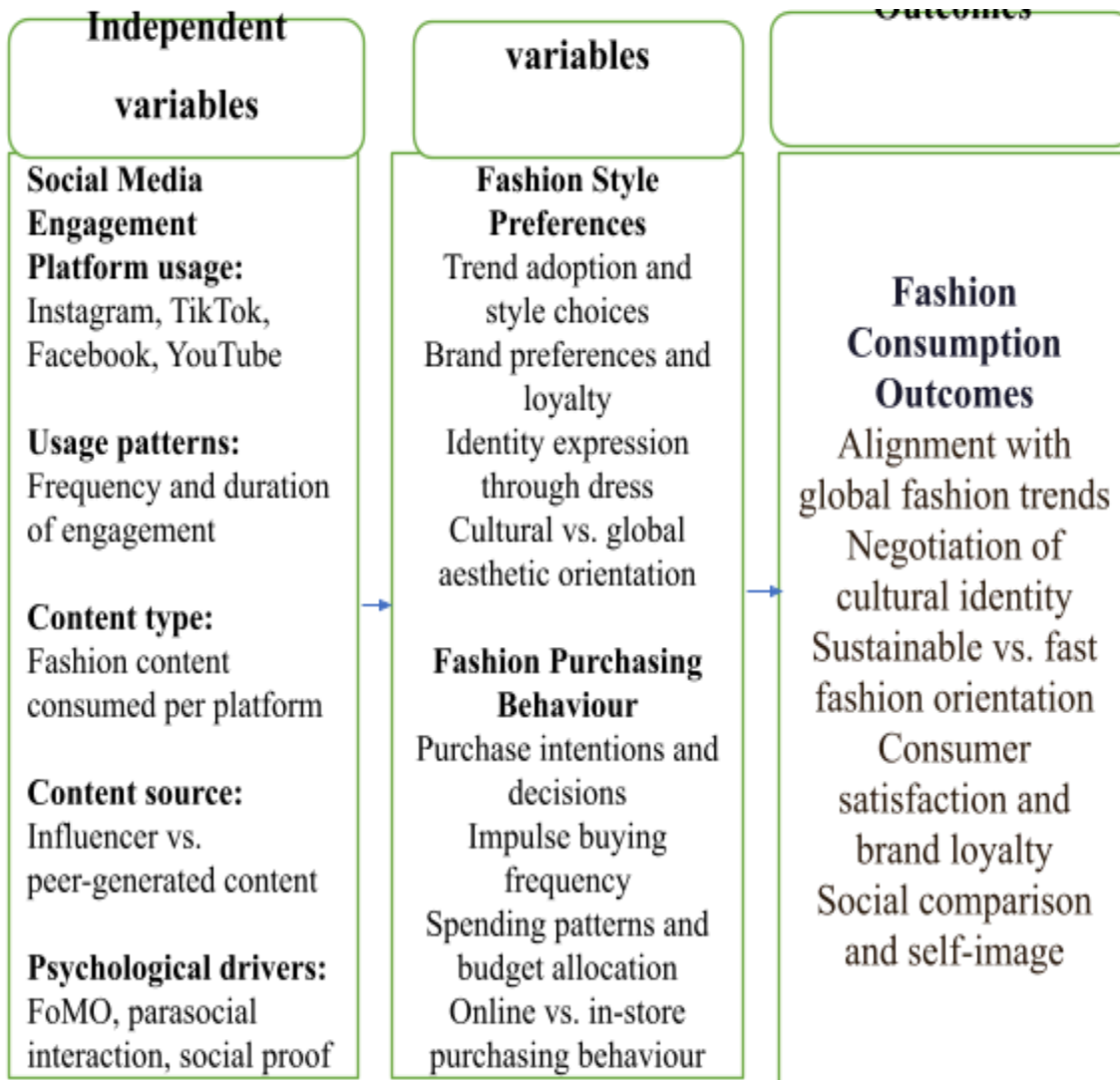
Social media playsets a role in responsible consumption and production Goal 12 and decent work and economic growth Goal 8. By studying how social media affects youths' consumption of fashion products and services in Uganda, this research will highlight how social media can promote youth advocacy for circular economy systems or lead to overconsumption. This study will also highlight how social media may or may not promote ethical fashion with fair labor practices in supply chains.

1.9 Conceptual framework

This conceptual diagram displays how social media use affects undergraduate students' fashion consumption at Uganda Christian University. The independent variable was social media use. Factors that make up social media use include using Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, YouTube; frequency and duration of social media use; types of fashion content they view online; whether they receive fashion content from influencers or peers; and psychological motivators including FoMO, parasocial interaction and social proof. The dependent variables which social media use affects are broken down into two categories: Fashion style preferences and Fashion purchasing behaviour. Fashion style preferences include being trendy, brands students wear, if students can describe their style. Fashion purchasing behaviour include; purchase intention, impulse buying, and expenditure.

Factors that moderated the relationship between social media use and how it affects students' fashion style preferences and purchasing behaviour include; gender, age, level in university, income, internet availability, smartphone ownership, culture, peer pressure, local vs. global mindset. These factors were chosen because they constitute variables that are unique to the context of Ugandan university students. The outcome will be a student's fashion

consumption; including being globally trendy, addressing cultural identity, sustainable vs. fast fashion, and satisfaction. The theories that were used to support this study include the Uses and Gratification Theory to show why students use social media to view fashion content; Social Comparison Theory to show how students are influenced by peers regarding appearance; and Influencer Marketing Models to show how influencers and peers affect students' purchase intentions..



Moderate the relationship between social media engagement (IV) and fashion style preferences and purchasing behaviour (DVs)

Figure . Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to the research problem in order to identify what's already known about the subject of social media and fashion consumption among Christian university students in Uganda. The reviewed literature addresses the research problem within the context of Ugandan Christian university students. The literature is organized into three main themes that correspond with the three research objectives: Social media use patterns among the youth in Uganda, The relationship between social media exposure and fashion style preferences among youth in Uganda, The influence of influencer versus peer-generated content on fashion purchasing intentions among youth in Uganda, other influencing factors and research gap are discussed in the following sections.

2.2 Social Media Platform Usage Patterns among Youth

Gen Z lead all generations in social media usage. Among Gen Z, Instagram, Tiktok, and YouTube are the top three most popular social media platforms. Users spend time on social media platforms for fun, socialization, news, and purchasing items. The average person uses 4-5 social media platforms and differentiates the time spent on each platform by subject and who they're communicating with (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025). Many gen Z-ers use Instagram as a tool to find new clothing. Over 90% of fashion brands are on Instagram and 72% of Generation Z consumers use Instagram to gain fashion inspiration (Sivakami and Marufa, 2025). The scroll-friendly interface and aspirational nature of Instagram allows users to be exposed to more clothing they may not have been searching for. The like and comment features allow others to see what's trending on an individual's account which further creates a loop of what followers are buying and normalizing certain trends. Recently, Instagram has been pushing creators to

use their reels feature over photo posts. When comparing both post formats, videos on Instagram receive 40% more engagement.

Tik Tok is quickly becoming the leading trendsetting platform. Tik Tok's unique algorithm allows videos to go viral and be seen by those who don't follow the poster. This allows anyone on the platform to become an instant trendsetter as opposed to Instagram where you must have a followership to gain traction (Pratiwi et al., 2025). While Instagram trends are most popularly seen and used, Tik Tok trends become more popular because of the authenticity of the content. 62% of Generation Z say Tik Tok has an effect on the clothes they buy. Facebook is used less frequently by Gen Z, however, Facebook offers many different platforms such as groups and marketplaces. Facebook groups allow friends to discuss certain topics and recommend products to each other. This peer-to-peer word of mouth can come in handy when making higher judgment purchases. Facebook marketplace allows people to sell items to one another. Facebook marketplace is popular in countries where online shopping may not be as robust or inexpensive (Yang, 2022). YouTube is a platform where creators can share long-form content. Many creators make videos on outfits that they like. YouTube can be used as a research tool to find out more information about products.

Social media platforms are used together to discover new clothing trends. Tik Tok is great for discovery, Instagram is great for seeing what people you follow are wearing, YouTube is great for research, and Facebook can be great for purchasing from others. Many Africans and Ugandans access the internet through their phones. Data can be expensive and slower in speed. Streaming videos on platforms like Tik Tok and Instagram can use away at data amounts. Photo-based platforms such as Instagram are more popular than video-heavy platforms like YouTube in Africa (Bilovodska and Voronina, 2024). Posting new clothing may be a way of showing off to

friends. Some may not have constant access to new clothing like others in the world. Global trends are also popular, but they are viewed through a Ugandan lens.

2.3 Social Media Exposure and Fashion Style Preferences

In terms of propagating trends, social media outlets are another large contributor. Because trends are repeated often over social media's visual platforms, they become normalised and can be validated through likes/views which decrease the risk we feel when adopting trendy styles. Social media allows for modelling behaviour from those we follow to serve as examples we can implement into our behaviour (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025). Trends used to take months to proliferate through generations, now they can arise and spread in a matter of 2 days.

As a result, the rate at which fashion is consumed has accelerated to what the fashion industry is no longer capable of meeting (Cayaban et al., 2023). UGC currently makes up how people talk about and discuss fashion. 75% of young women on TikTok (Gen Z age group) said they learn about fashion from other consumers, 14% from brands, and 11% from influencers (Matthews, 2025).

UGC works because it comes off as more authentic, trustworthy, attainable, and relatable to viewers when posting about fashion as opposed to posting aspirational content as influencers do. Fashion TikTok communities can develop their own aesthetic values and standards for consuming fashion, as well as influence the individual members' styles and shopping habits. (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025). Short-form video can even adjust our taste levels. Our brains perceive these fast-paced videos as snippets of dopamine hitting our brain as we swipe through videos. There's no actual description or detail as to what we're looking at, we just feel things. We begin to feel like certain things are beautiful or trendy. When we see clothing

moving on individuals and placed within realistic settings and lifestyles, it allows the styles to feel like something we can one day wear as opposed to styles we could never obtain (Sivakami and Marufa, 2025).

Social media has allowed youths to continue furthering the past time of expressing themselves through their style. By dressing for the gram, you are given an audience to see your appearances. The likes and reposts you receive from your chosen social circles can influence you and allow you to feel validated in your choices. You're more likely to continue to dress that way or shop for certain types of clothing that receive you positive feedback. Gen Z's will change how they dress on different social media platforms because their audience is different (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025).

When it comes to who influences our sense of style more, women say trends online play a more significant role than they do for men. As for TikTok, the data is more gender neutral. There are many communities on TikTok that act as influences for different fashion trends. We also see that Gen Z's tend to express their gender diverse fashion identities on social media platforms. (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025).

Unlike the Western youth previously described, Ugandan youth tend to balance between these two worlds. They will have an identity to feel connected to their peers and social media and another style for when they attend family events or gatherings in the community. Thus, they will pull from global inspiration when building their style but are not necessarily copying it. They want to feel like they can fit in with the trends they see but also want to highlight their culture. Social media plays a role in this because, as previously stated, we like to feel validated in our decisions. If you can afford to feed into trends you see on Instagram, you are at a higher social status than others. If someone can't keep up with fast trends because of their economic state, they may feel comparatively deprived. They want to

consume at the same rate as their friends but simply cannot. Gen Z as a whole does care about sustainability; 73% of those asked agreed that fast fashion was harmful to the environment (Halibas et al., 2025). But there is a green knowledge gap when it comes to action.

2.4 Influencer Content, Peer-Generated Content, and Fashion Purchasing Intentions

Gen Z considers fashion influencers the top fashion influencers worldwide. An influential account that had 10,000, 100,000 followers had a 60% higher engagement rate than celebrities and a 40% higher conversion rate (Chiu and Ho, 2023). Influencers with smaller followings are considered more real and that a micro-influencer "cares more about their favorite brand that they're promoting just for money," or that they "love their favorite brands so much they can and will tell all their followers about it," whereas with influencers with huge followings, it "is assumed their posts are only bought.

This influencer that a lot of people look up to is so relatable," which is why this authenticity is currently the most accurate prediction of how much influence purchasing power an influencer has. People are more likely to wear what influencers advise them to wear if they know that influencers genuinely feel this way about the items they recommend. Authenticity has often been signalled by the influencers displaying consistent personal style, being upfront about sponsorship and discussing products honestly. When a follower feels like they know the influencers personally (i.e. having a parasocial relationship), influencers are more influential. Since fans see purchases as a way to support an influencer friend, social obligations play a role in purchases from influencers (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025).

UGC is even more compelling for purchasing than influencer content. This is mainly due to the social proof a UGC post yields: when someone sees multiple friends wearing a piece of clothing they like, they'll assume it is also

suitable for them (Al-Abdallah and Bataineh, 2018). As opposed to recommendations from influencers, when a friend repeatedly shows off an outfit over a period of time, people undergo permanent changes to behavior through modeling, meanwhile, direct recommendations have a higher immediate effect on someone's attitude about a product, although the person is less likely to have long-term behavioural changes (F and M, 2025).

In several African countries, the most popular influencers in that area have a greater chance of being more influential than foreign influencers. When research was conducted regarding several of these influencers, not only had they had much smaller follower counts, but they were also more relatable, culturally more similar and explained the context around posting about their products (William et al., 2025).

In addition to purchase intentions predicting behavior, when a user has a greater emotional connection with an influencer, they're more likely to maintain loyalty to the influencer and their future purchases. Furthermore, emotional connection with creators can increase customer retention and future purchasing frequency. This is why consumers, who feel a higher degree of emotional connection with creators, are less critical of the products they post about. This allows influencers to deceive customers more easily. Influencers don't seem to care as much if their followers become scammed.

Fear of missing out, also known as FoMO, is what triggers people to impulse purchase things online. Factors of FoMO that make people impulse purchase include fear of not having the trending pieces of clothing that are constantly coming out, the forced scarcity marketers have introduced and the fast turnover of trends. Influencers also play a role by perpetuating FoMO through their social media posts. Instagram and other social media, have built their platforms to capitalize on FoMO. Users encounter constant content feeds, see who viewed and liked their recent posts and are able to one-click

purchase items, which allows for easier impulsive purchases, these features benefit Instagram by improving the company's bottom line (F and M, 2025).

2.5 Moderating Factors in Social Media's Influence on Fashion Consumption

The effects of demographics, socioeconomic status, culture and location of the respondent moderate the influence of fashion in social media. With females scoring significantly higher in terms of fashion engagement and social media influence (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025), gender is the strongest moderating variable. There's some evidence that younger Gen Z males are beginning to be interested in fashion due to a change in beauty standards (Sharma and Agarwal, 2025). Students in the earlier years of university use social media influence for fashion more than students in later years (1st years more than others), but socioeconomic class matters in how you use fashion influence. The quality of the internet is what moderates which platforms you've access to, or the tiered system which comes with having different levels of quality in terms of broadband.

The quality of a smartphone you've access to regulates your ability to see videos and heavy image-rich content that is displayed on social media (Bilovodska and Voronina, 2024). Lower-income students who are able to afford smartphones and the internet have equal exposure to the fashion trends that are available on social media. Due to a lack of purchasing power, these students feel frustrated and deprived as they can't buy the things they like compared to their higher-income peers (William et al., 2025).

Moreover, one cultural orientation regarding Western and global trends and culture versus local culture moderates your adoption of trends in that the more a student is attracted to global culture versus local culture, the more likely they're to adopt Western and foreign trends, vice versa is that the more a student feels that the local culture is superior, the more likely they

are to reject Western trends. In addition, how much peer groups focus on appearance in social trends dictates how social media fashion trends affect students (Taber, Dominguez and Whittaker, 2023).

Peer groups' attitudes on social trends affect how strongly social media fashion influences students in that students who claim that their friends are more obsessed with appearance are influenced by social media fashion more than students that claim that their friends don't care about appearances at all (Taber, Dominguez and Whittaker, 2023). Uganda is a Christian-majority country, so students who tend to be more religious are likely to take these religious standards into consideration when dressing up. Additionally, specific to UCU (a Christian university), in a residential area, with students who typically are middle-class and follow a certain dress code, also serves to moderate these trends among them.

2.6 Research Gaps

There is a wide gap in literature about the role of social media in fashion consumption, even globally. Most of the existing studies focus on regions like North America, Western Europe, or Eastern Asia, neglecting the specificities of local African infrastructure, the economic context and cultural specifics in East Africa or Uganda. Additionally, few studies focus on the usage of multiple platforms by young adults for fashion purposes. Research predominantly examines individual platforms, while few delve into the process of integrating different platforms to achieve desired fashion outcomes. Fourth, the specific influencer characteristics; whether local or international, level of following, type of content produced; that most effectively influence the buying intent of African youth is largely undocumented. Additionally, the explanations behind Gen Z's gap between their stated environmental concerns and their purchase of fast fashion remains blurry in the context of Africa. Finally, the majority of existing

research is cross-sectional, preventing the establishment of whether the influence of social media on youth fashion preferences is lasting or temporary. This research addresses the first three research gaps as it focuses on Ugandan Christian University students' fashion choices, assesses the influence of different platforms and of both influencers' and peers' fashion choices in informing their buying decisions.

2.7 Summary

Drawing from theory and previous research, this chapter has laid the foundation for the following stages of this research project. Collective use of social media platforms and individual use have been shown to greatly influence the power of social media on teens' adoption of fashion trends, dressing styles, self-expression and consumer spending habits. Social media platform use is also affected by gender, socioeconomic levels, cultural background and political governance. As this concept has not been tested among the African population, more specifically Ugandans, as it has been in westernized societies, this study will aim to uncover some of those missing gaps. The following chapter will consist of a research study that empirically tests the relationships among UCU undergraduate students.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter gives an account of the methods used in this study, it provides details on the research design, study area, target population, determined sample size, sampling strategy, data-collection approach, instruments, validation and reliability, data coding and analysis and ethical issues related to this research. The selection of a particular methodology for this study was motivated by the objectives, feasibility and acceptable academic research standards that this study adheres to.

3.1 Research design

Cross-sectional descriptive research design using a mixed-methods approach allowed data collection at a particular point in time and to study the patterns of social media use, fashion influence, patterns of spending and financial behavior of students. Quantitative research design allowed frequencies and proportions related to these patterns, as well as the association between the variables. Qualitative research design allowed deeper and contextualized knowledge of the students' actual experiences, struggles and strategies of managing financial resources. The design chosen was suitable as the research was meant to describe and explore relationships, rather than causality.

3.2 Study site

The study was conducted at Uganda Christian University (UCU), a private university in Mukono District, Uganda. UCU enrolls a wide variety of students from several faculties and schools with different fields of study, making it an appropriate study area to explore the influence of social media in teenagers' fashion and spending habits. It was chosen because of the ease of access,

the academic structured environment and relevance to the study's target population (undergraduate students).

3.3 Study population

The study target population was undergraduate students pursuing various degree programs at Uganda Christian University at the time of data collection. Undergraduate students were chosen for the study because they represented the key youth population that's actively involved in using social media and influencing youth fashion trends but simultaneously faces limitations in their spending power.

3.4 Sampling and sampling techniques

3.4.1 Sample size determination

For the quantitative strand, it recommended the use of Cochran's formula for large populations: $n_0 = Z^2 p(1-p)/e^2$. Using 95% confidence level ($Z=1.95$), $P=0.5$ (maximum variability) and margin of error $e=0.05$ hence $n_0 \sim 384.16$, approximately 385 respondents as a starting point before any finite-population corrections. (Mark N.K. Saunders, Philip Lewis & Adrian Thornhill, 2020).

The actual size of the study sample was 90 undergraduate students. Although it's common for survey-based studies to aim for a larger sample, the sample size was narrowed down because of time and financial constraints, plus other limitations imposed by the academic year within the period of data collection. This was a term paper given a specific duration within the academic year. This meant that data had to be collected online, limiting the possibility to reach a much larger number of respondents.

3.4.2 Sampling strategy

Non-probability convenience sampling techniques were used in the study. Participants were selected because they were available, accessible and

willing to participate during the time of data collection. Undergraduate students present on campus or accessible via the online study tools were approached to fill in the questionnaire. The use of convenience sampling was chosen for this study due to its exploratory and descriptive design.

The population was assumed to be homogeneous in characteristics and it was preferred because of time and monetary constraints. Although this sampling technique has limitations as it restricts generalisability beyond the study population, it's widely utilized and acceptable in social science research for exploratory studies and those aiming to investigate relationships between variables, patterns, or perceptions, rather than drawing generalisable conclusions to the entire population. Nevertheless, efforts were made to include students from various faculties, years of study and genders.

3.5 Data collection methods and instruments

3.5.1 Data collection methods

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire distributed both physically and online. The physical questionnaires were given to students who were available at the university, whereas the online questionnaires were shared via various online platforms to accommodate those students not physically at the university. This facilitated better participation and minimized non-response resulting from accessibility issues. The Questionnaire required an estimated 10, 15 minutes to complete with participant guidance.

3.5.2 Data collection instruments

The study made use of a questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were responded to on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Open-ended

questions assessed students' lived experiences as well as challenges faced and coping mechanisms adopted towards spending on fashion.

3.5.3 Data collection procedure

Upon approval of ethical clearance and informing and consenting all study participants, researchers first sought approval and access from the university administration to contact undergraduate students to participate in the study. Participants were contacted physically on campus as well as through social media sites and were given a brief description about the study. Respondents were told they could choose to either participate in the study or not and that their responses would be anonymous.

The consent statement was written at the top of the questionnaire and respondents who did not agree to the terms stated were dismissed from the study. Questionnaires were self-administered. Participants were allowed to complete the questionnaire at their own convenience. Completed physical questionnaires were given to students physically present on campus while an online copy of the survey questionnaire was sent to students off-campus through social media pages, websites and e-mail.

Physical questionnaires were retrieved immediately after students handed in their completed questionnaires while google forms automatically recorded responses uploaded online. Researchers went through questionnaires that had been filled on a daily basis to ensure questionnaires were well filled as missing and responses that were ill-filled (to be excluded from data pool) and any errors would be handled as described above. Data were collected within a specific period during the school term to reduce inconvenience and to have the study done in a timely manner.

3.6 Data analysis

Data were coded, entered and analyzed using SPSS version 27. Frequencies, percentages, Means and Standard deviation were used to describe

participants' demographics, social media usage, factors influencing participants' fashion style and spending habits as well as participants' level of financial discipline. Furthermore, Composite indices, Fashion Influence Index, Spending Habits Index and Financial Discipline Index were created by taking the mean scores of the various Likert scale questions under each index.

Pearson's correlation was used to determine the relationship between Social Media influence and participants' spending habits. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between participants' trust in influencers and peer pressure with their spending habits. Spearman's correlation was chosen because the data is an ordinal variable (Likert scale).

Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis. This involved reading through the responses several times to gain general understanding of information collected. Responses were coded and coded responses were grouped into various themes which were interpreted according to quantitative findings.

3.7 Validity and reliability

Measures were taken to try and ensure that data collected was reliable and valid. A pilot study was done on a few students (who were not part of the study's sample size) to test the questionnaire for grammar, relevance and word choices. Changes were made to the questionnaire where the pilot study respondents reacted on ambiguous questions.

Content validity and face validity was ensured by consulting fellow peers and supervisors who specialise in research methods. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the Likert-scale questions. The questionnaire was subjected to internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha. All indices had a Cronbach's alpha that was greater than or equal to 0.70 which

is considered acceptable. Finally, all questionnaires were screened for completeness after data cleaning regimen had been applied.

3.8 Limitations and delimitations

3.8.1 Limitations of the Study

The sample size and generalizability of this study was limited by using a non-probability convenience sampling method. Due to sampling limitations, the results may not be generalized beyond the study sample. Findings from the study are only generalizable to the undergraduate students studied and maybe not all youth.

Small sample size affects the power of study but due to limited time and financial resources we could only get 90 respondents. So the sample size may limit statistical power of some analyses but it is large enough for the descriptive and correlation analysis that our research aimed to perform. The study also has self-reported measures which can introduce response bias, like social desirability bias and recall bias. Data collected was through a cross-sectional survey which can limit causality inferences. Thus relationships between excessive social media use and spending behaviour cannot be inferred as causal but only associative.

3.8.2 Delimitations of the Study

The study only focused on undergraduate students in Uganda Christian University not focusing on graduate students. It was also delimited to youth who attend University leaving out the youth who are not under University education. Fashion spending rather than general spending was focused on. The study also looked at students who use social media but did not delimit it to which social media platform was used. Additionally social media use and spending behavior in students was studied rather than the entire population. Geographically the study was delimited to one university only. Data was collected at one time during a students semester.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Approval was sought from the necessary authorities before the administration of data was commenced. Respondents were consented before they were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and respondents were told they could withdraw at any point without any consequences.

The researcher did not collect any personal identifiers. Confidentiality was ensured and data gathered will be used for academic purposes only. All information from the respondents will be reported in aggregate therefore no respondents will be identifiable. The study ensured that ethical principles such as respect for persons, beneficence, confidentiality and autonomy were maintained.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Background Characteristics of Respondents

The sample comprised almost equal numbers of male (n = 128, 51.1%) and female (n = 122, 48.9%) (see Table 1). The largest number of respondents were aged between 21 and 23 years old (n = 143, 55.6%) and between 24 and 25 years old (n = 105, 35.6%). More than half of the respondents were currently in Year 3 (n = 155, 52.2%). Respondents came from a range of disciplines including the School of Science and Technology (n = 95, 26.7%), the School of Business (n = 91, 25.6%), and other faculties (n = 128, 34.4%).

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Respondents (N = 90)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency Percent	
		(n)	(%)
Gender	Male	46	51.1
	Female	44	48.9
Age group (years)	18–20	7	7.8
	21–23	50	55.6
	24–25	32	35.6
Year of study	Year 1	8	8.9
	Year 2	14	15.6
	Year 3	47	52.2
	Year 4	16	17.8
Faculty / School	School of Business	23	25.6

Characteristic	Category	Frequency Percent	
		(n)	(%)
	School of Science and Technology	24	26.7
	School of Law	10	11.1
	School of Education	1	1.1
	School of Theology	1	1.1
	Others	31	34.4

Primary data source: Author's field survey, 2026.

4.2 Patterns and frequency of social media for fashion content

Respondents indicated that they spent a lot of time on social media as shown on Table 2. 44.4% spent more than 6 hrs while 32.2% spent between 4-6 hrs per day on social media. Frequency on exposure to fashion posts was also high as most of the respondents answered that they see fashion posts often or very often. In terms of how long respondents have been using social media. Most of the respondents have used social media for more than six years (70.0%) which is considered a long time.

Table 2. Extent of Social Media Usage Among Respondents (N = 90)

Variable	Category	Frequency Percent	
		(n)	(%)
Social media platforms used†	Facebook	1	1.1
	Instagram	13	14.4
	Snapchat	18	20.0
	TikTok	23	25.6

Variable	Category	Frequency Percent	
		(n)	(%)
	WhatsApp	21	23.3
	X (Twitter)	14	15.6
Time spent on social media (per day)	< 1 hour	3	3.3
	1–3 hours	18	20.0
	4–6 hours	29	32.2
	> 6 hours	40	44.4
Frequency of viewing fashion content	Never	1	1.1
	Rarely	6	6.7
	Sometimes	26	28.9
	Often	23	25.6
	Very often	34	37.8
Years of social media use	< 1 year	1	1.1
	1–3 years	6	6.7
	4–6 years	20	22.2
	> 6 years	63	70.0

Primary data source: Author's field survey, 2026.

TikTok (25.6%) and WhatsApp (23.3%) were the most frequently used platforms. Cross-tabulations further showed that users of visually oriented platforms, particularly TikTok, were more likely to report higher daily time spent on social media.

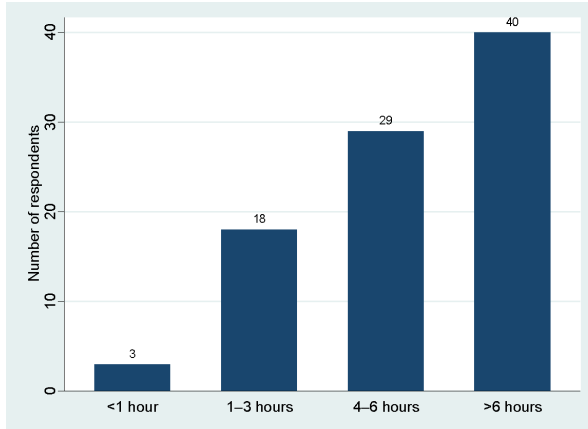


Figure 2. Time spent on social media per day

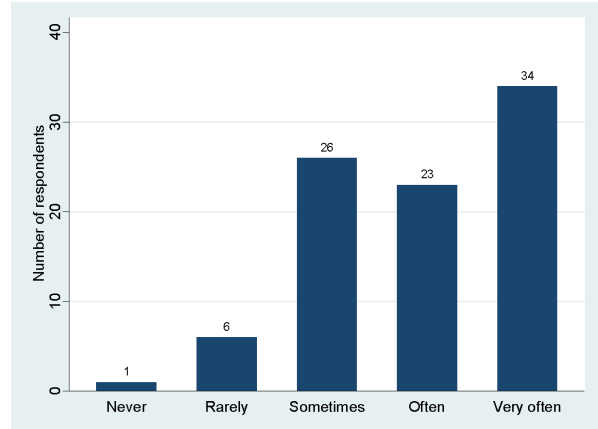


Figure 3. Frequency of viewing fashion content

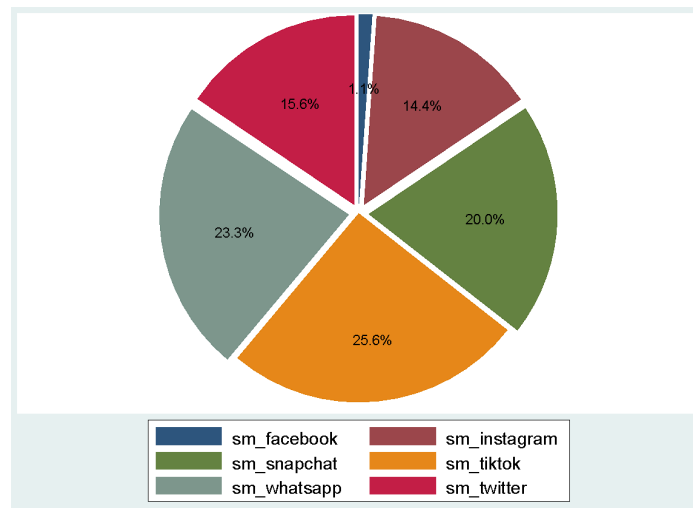


Figure 4. Social media types used

4.3 Relationship between exposure to fashion content on social media platforms and fashion style preferences

Respondents indicated an overall moderate influence of social media on their clothing choices (Fashion Influence Index; $M = 2.72$, $SD = .84$; see Table 3). The item with the highest agreement was related to learning about new fashion trends through social media ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.19$), which implies that respondents agreed that social media was where they learned about fashion trends. They disagreed that they felt direct social pressure to recreate others' outfits ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.08$) or that what their friends

posted on social media strongly influenced what they wore ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.11$). The scale demonstrated acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Table 3. Social Media Influence on Fashion Preferences: Mean Scores, Interpretation, and Reliability (N = 90)

Item	Mean±SD	Interpretation
Social media influences my clothing choice	3.11±1.06	Neutral
I discover new fashion trends mainly through social media	3.47±1.19	Agree
I feel pressure to dress like people I follow online	2.16±1.08	Disagree
I change my dressing style to match trends seen on social media	2.42±1.07	Disagree
My fashion choices are influenced by friends' posts online	2.47±1.11	Disagree
Fashion Influence Index	2.72±0.84	Neutral

Primary data source: Author's field survey, 2026.

Note. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Interpretation of mean scores followed these cut-offs: 1.00–1.80 = strongly disagree; 1.81–2.60 = disagree; 2.61–3.40 = neutral; 3.41–4.20 = agree; 4.21–5.00 = strongly agree. The Fashion Influence Index was computed as the mean of the five unstandardized items. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Exposure to fashion content was relatively high, with respondents indicating that they often to very often view fashion-related content ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.02$) and follow fashion influencers ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.02$). The composite exposure index ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.64$) further suggests moderate overall exposure levels across the sample (See Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Exposure Variables (N = 90)

Variable	Mean ± SD	Interpretation (Likert-Based)
Daily Social Media Use	3.18 ± 0.87	On average, students reported using social media between “1–3 hours” and “4–6 hours” per day, indicating moderate daily engagement.
Viewing Fashion Content	3.92 ± 1.02	Students reported “Often” to “Very Often” viewing fashion-related content on social media.
Following Fashion Influencers	3.92 ± 1.02	Students indicated they “Often” to “Very Often” follow fashion influencers or fashion pages.
Years of Social Media Use	3.34 ± 1.04	Most students have been actively using social media for approximately “4–6 years”, reflecting substantial platform experience.
Exposure Index (Standardized Composite)	0.00 ± 0.64	The standardized exposure score indicates moderate overall exposure to fashion-related social media content, with noticeable variation among students.

Primary data source: Author’s field survey, 2026.

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between exposure to fashion-related social media content and fashion style preference (Table 5). The results revealed a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.174$, $p = 0.101$). However, the relationship was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that exposure to fashion content alone does not significantly predict students’ fashion style preferences among undergraduate students at UCU.

Table 5. Correlation Between Exposure to Fashion Content and Fashion Influence (N = 90)

Variable	1	2
1. Exposure Index	—	
2. Fashion Influence Index	0.17	—

Primary data source: Author’s field survey, 2026.

Note. Values represent Pearson correlation coefficients. $p < .05$.

The correlation between exposure and fashion influence was not statistically significant ($r = .17$, $p = .101$).

4.4 Influence of social media influencers versus peer-generated content on fashion purchasing intentions

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the influence of social media influencers and peer-generated content on fashion purchasing intentions. Results indicated that influencer influence (M = 3.08, SD = 0.76) was significantly higher than peer influence (M = 2.31, SD = 0.85), $t(89) = 8.31$, $p < .001$. The mean difference of 0.77 (95% CI [0.59, 0.95]) suggests that students perceive influencers as having a stronger impact on their fashion decisions compared to peers.

Table 6 Paired-Samples t-Test Comparing Influencer and Peer Influence on Fashion Spending (N = 90)

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p	Mean Difference	95% CI of Difference
Influencer Influence	3.08	0.76					
			8.31	89	< .001	0.77	[0.59, 0.95]
Peer Influence	2.31	0.85					

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Patterns and frequency of social media for fashion content

Results indicated high consumption of social media among participants from UCU. The majority of participants use social media for more than four hours a day (>6 Hrs= 44.4%, =4-6 Hrs = 32.2%) and have been using social media for more than six years (>6 years=70.0%). The platform participants most frequently used was TikTok (25.6%) and WhatsApp (23.3%), followed by Snapchat (20%), X/The Twitter (15.6%) and Instagram (14.4%). This provides support for H1₁, that predicted some platforms would be used more frequently than others for consumption of fashion content.

For the most part, results follow global trends presented in past literature. Sharma and Agarwal (2025) explain how Gen Z commonly keeps four-to-five accounts across social media platforms at any given time and splits their consumption between networks based on how the media is presented and what social need it can satisfy. The popularity of TikTok aligns with Pratiwi et al.'s (2025) interviews with college students who describe TikTok as "considered by the majority of young users as the platform where trends start," which may be because once a trend starts on TikTok, the algorithm shows videos to very large audiences even if the creator of the original post only has a small following. A unique difference in platform popularity compared to studies of Western samples is the importance of WhatsApp; Instagram tends to be more popular among college students in Western countries.

When participants were asked about their global fashion-specific behaviors on social media, we see that Instagram is no longer the dominating social media platform for Gen Z when living in Uganda. Researchers from previous literature like Sivakami and Marufa (2025) have conducted studies where they interviewed Gen Z about their use of social media for fashion

inspiration. 72% of their participants reported using Instagram when looking for fashion inspiration. However, data collected from UCU students shows that Instagram is not the most popular platform. This could be due to a number of reasons but, as mentioned before, could likely be attributed to internet consumption in Uganda being done primarily through cellphones. Bilovodska and Voronina (2024) discuss how in countries where data center is expensive and internet providers often limit bandwidth to those who pay for data monthly, image-based platforms like Instagram require too much data to use and video-based platforms like TikTok are often slowed by providers to a buffering point where watching videos is not feasible.

Due to these limitations, participants' prioritization of WhatsApp, a platform not image/video-centric like Instagram and rarely mentioned in Western-centric discussions of fashion-related social media use, comes directly as a result of internet limitations faced in Uganda. As previously discussed, WhatsApp allows users to receive recommendations from multiple friends through the use of community groups. This allows users to facilitate microtransactions through the platform. This finding is similar to Al-Abdallah and Bataineh's (2018) study which found that participants who had access to community groups through messenger applications were more likely to make purchases of higher involvement items.

TikTok's relatively new feature of 'shops,' allows users to post pictures of the outfits they're wearing and ask others to comment things like "LIKE FOR SHOP" or "COMMENT FOR SHOP" if they're interested in buying what the poster is wearing. The shop feature is another example of community moderation affecting use of social media for fashion consumption. Another interesting finding is the high consumption of fashion related content on participants' favored social media platforms. On average, participants selected that they very often or often look at fashion content posted on social media platforms ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.02$). When diving deeper into the

data through cross-tabulations, we see that participants who used photo and video based social media platforms (specifically TikTok) were more likely to say they spend greater than 6 hours on social media per day. This is similar to studies that have measured intentions to watch short form videos on social media. Sivakami and Marufa (2025) measured participants' enjoyment when watching different media formats on social media and found significantly higher ratings for short form videos. Participants use a variety of platforms for different parts of the fashion inspiration process. Sharma and Agarwal's (2025) study showed participants used TikTok to browse through currently trending outfits and then showed their friends the videos on WhatsApp to receive recommendations on where to buy pieces.

As mentioned in the methods section, limitations and suggestions for future research can be concluded with the dataset's small sample size. Because this study was only able to survey students who attend and study at UCU, we can not conclude that these results apply to university students in Uganda. I would argue that social media usage among UCU students is a unique cultural display of youth fashion consumption behavior that is affected by moderating factors not present at universities worldwide. These factors that I discuss throughout the paper include UCU's mission as a Christian university, its residence hall system in Mukono, its school dress code and student body which is made up predominantly of middle-class Ugandans. Each of these factors listed in the literature review section change the way social media may affect student consumption. University students at other institutions in Uganda may not be moderated by these factors and could show different results.

5.2 Exposure to fashion content on social media platforms and fashion style preferences

Objective two determined whether there was a relationship between Exposure to fashion posts/accounts/articles on social media and respondents' Fashion style preference. Pearson Correlation was weakly positive ($r = 0.174$, $p = 0.101$) but did not reach statistical significance at $p < 0.05$. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis related to objective two. There is not enough statistical evidence to support that exposure to fashion posts/articles/accounts on social media platforms will significantly predict fashion style preference of students at UCU. This finding is contrary to our proposed Hypothesis 2, specifically H2₁. Hypothesis 2₁ states there is a positive relationship between exposure and fashion style preference of students at UCU.

Nonetheless, despite the overall exposure mean scores not having statistical significance as it relates to the change in respondents' fashion style preferences, it will be worth noting that participants agreed they discover new fashion trends through social media ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.19$). However, they somewhat disagreed that students at UCU dress how others want them to on social media ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.08$) and that they are strongly influenced to dress like the photos their friends post on social media platforms ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.11$). The overall Fashion Influence Index was neutral ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.84$).

These findings add support but expand upon past research by Sharma and Agarwal (2025). They note social media trends are catching on rapidly due to consumers continuously being exposed to new trends on these platforms. With repeated exposure and exposure to social proof of others wearing new styles, consumers are more likely to be influenced by social media trend adoption. This can occur by seeing influencer fashion content or peers

wearing certain garments. While some level of exposure still appears to apply to students at UCU due to trend discovery receiving the highest mean among other items in the Exposure section, respondents seem to acknowledge the trends without feeling as if they have to conform to them.

Sharma and Agarwal's (2025) theorization may not be entirely invalid but may have a moderating factor at UCU. As discussed in the literature review, Christianity and UCU's Dress Standards may inhibit students' abilities to act on social media exposure. This research conceptually looks at this relationship but does not test this directly. William et al. (2025) explore how Ugandan youth have two different identities when it comes to fashion/style. Youths tend to keep up with social media influenced fashion when they are around their friends but when around family or elders they revert to wearing the traditional attire based on their tribes. With UCU having a residential campus students no longer have the separation between family and peer settings. On campus, students surround themselves with friends while also upholding UCU's Dress standards that are based on Christian culture. This can help rationalize students' awareness of new trends without the feeling of pressure to actually conform to them as they would not be appropriate on campus. Similar findings were found by Cayaban et al. (2023) who found that trends are spreading faster than people can keep up.

The results of this study support previous research by Halibas et al. (2025). 73% of Gen Z globally believes that fast fashion is not sustainable. However, just because students may be aware of the negative implications of fast fashion and trends does not mean they will alter their consumption behaviors. Students at UCU may surround themselves with these "fits" and trends on social media but they do not necessarily have to change how they feel about these garments. Social media allows users to be aware of the trends without feeling social pressure to conform. Consumers are aware but choosing not to act on these goods. One could argue this is a step in the

right direction to shift consumers' habits. To reduce trends and consumers' snap decisions to purchase when something catches their eye. However, fast fashion trends move faster each year making it difficult for the average person to keep up even if they wanted to. Building back to sustainability, while it is important to consumers know that their fast fashion habits are not sustainable, we must reduce the social pressures of trend adoption if we want to shift consumers' behavior. Of course, this study is only cross-sectional so it would be interesting to conduct this study after participants graduate to see if their current media exposure translates into future style choices.

5.3 Influence of social media influencers versus peer-generated content on fashion purchasing intentions

The third hypothesis asked whether respondents were more influenced by social media influencers or content created by peers concerning fashion purchases. UCU students were significantly more influenced by social media influencers ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.76$) than content created by peers ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(89) = 8.31$, $p < .001$. The mean difference was 0.77 (95% CI [0.59, 0.95]). Therefore, H3₁ was supported, which proposed that social media influencers would be significantly more influential on students' fashion purchasing intentions than content created by peers at UCU.

The greater purchasing influence of influencer content relative to peer content at UCU is both supported and contradicted by literature. Micro-influencers have 60% greater engagement and 40% greater purchase conversion than celebrity influencers on average across the world, indicating that influencer marketing campaigns with smaller faces create the largest purchasing response globally (Chiu & Ho, 2023). On the other hand, peer-generated content has shown similar if not greater purchasing influence as influencer content in some studies because approximately 75% of

consumers in Gen Z report hearing about new fashion from content made by peers (Al-Abdallah & Bataineh, 2018; Matthews, 2025).

There can be a number of explanations for students at UCU being more influenced by influencers than their peers. For example, this could say something about the students at peer culture at UCU. Students at UP may not feel as much pressure to keep up with their peers when it comes to fashion as university students outside of Pakistan. Students may not feel this pressure due to UCU having more middle-class students and hosting a residential campus far from major urban centers. Peer influence literature appears to focus on students who attend college in highly urbanised, secular settings.

The literature on how influencer content impacts its audiences can help contextualise students at UCU's receptiveness to influencers. One of the strongest predictors of purchasing intent when watching influencers is how authentic the influencer looks. Audiences are significantly less willing to wear influencer recommended styles and associate with influencers' self-presentations if they believe the creator is just receiving free products to boot (George et al., 2025). Influencers can also often create parasocial relationships with their followers. Viewers come to develop feelings of friendship with influencers they watch despite the relationship being one-sided. Parasocial relationships have been found to mediate influencer marketing effectiveness as users feel they have an obligation to support influencers they perceive as friends (Sharma & Agarwal, 2025). UCU students' mean on the influencer metric was in the neutral-to-agree range ($M = 3.08$). If UCU students experience parasocial relationships with influencers, this may not be as strong of a force as it is on average at UCU due to institutional and cultural filters discussed above.

Lastly, we should consider why peer influence at UCU was in the disagree-to-neutral range ($M = 2.31$). FoMO mediates social media influence on impulse fashion purchases. Social media users experience anxiety over not having trending products that they see on platforms or other social media and contribute to impulse buying and subsequent financial distress (F and M., 2025). UCU students may experience less FoMO regarding their peers than social media users on average. Maybe UCU's student environment is not as concerned with keeping up with fashion as urban secular universities. Another possibility is students see influencers' content as information from fashion experts. However, students may not assign this same value to peer's content. If that is true, that has interesting implications for brands who want to market to UCU students: UCU students may respond better to influencer marketing than peer-to-peer marketing.

William et al. (2025) found that in African fashion markets, local influencers were shown to have better performance on influencer marketing campaigns than international influencers despite often having smaller followings. Audience members found local influencers more relatable to themselves, culturally similar, and appropriate to use in their context than international influencers. The increased reach international influencers had did not make up for how unrelatable they were to the African audience. The influencer mean at UCU was only slightly above neutral on average, which could mean that UCU students are more influenced by locally popular influencers than international ones. However, as discussed above, the survey did not ask students whether they follow local influencers or if they follow international influencers. Future researchers that want to analyse this question should account for this.

As Kawales (2026) beautifully put earlier this year in their research brief, another takeaway from this metric is fear over the vulnerability of influencer audiences. When audiences have emotional connections with the influencers

they watch, they cognitively process the content at more superficial levels. When this happens, viewers are less likely to be skeptical of brands pushing products that they do not use dishonestly. The moderate score UCU students gave influencers could mean students at UCU are not as susceptible to this dangerous side effect of influencer marketing. However, it could also mean that since most students at UCU have been watching social media for over six years, they have learned over time how to consume social media content mindfully. A fun longitudinal study could explore this idea.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The study aimed to analyze the impact of social media usage on undergraduate students' fashion trends at Uganda Christian University, Mukono. Three hypotheses were explored: Firstly, students show patterned tendencies in their choice of social media platforms for accessing fashion content. Secondly, students' exposure to fashion clothing content on social media is positively correlated with their clothing style preferences. Thirdly, social media influencers have a more substantial impact on students' willingness to purchase fashion items compared to content shared by peers.

In reference to our first hypothesis, it was supported that Social media use for purposes related to fashion consumption amongst students at UCU is high. Platform preferences differ and TikTok/WhatsApp have been established as the most used applications on social media. Students accessed these platforms the most with most students using them daily and have been on these platforms since before joining university. This research question was important in establishing students' fashion-related media diet. The hypothesis that students utilize certain platforms more than others was supported. Social media use at UCU differed from patterns in western media literature. Students in Uganda access social media through mobile devices as opposed to computers. Data provisions and affordability are also factors that influenced which platforms students use. The use of WhatsApp and TikTok over Instagram which has been shown in western patterns could be correlated to these differences.

In reference to our second hypothesis, the correlation was positive but weakly supported ($r = .174$, $p = .101$). Students utilize social media to keep up with fashion trends. Fashion trend exposure did not have a significant effect on students' preferences. Students at UCU live in an institutional

environment with a Christian institute dress code and a residential campus. Students' could be conforming to the social environment at UCU. Additionally, students experience a dual identity when it comes to fashion trends. They experience pressure to fit in with the social norms but also want to stand out as global fashion trends are being streamed through social media. These factors can affect students' preferences despite exposure.

In reference to our third hypothesis, there was a significant difference in the influence social media influencers had on participants versus peer content ($M_{diff} = 3.08$ versus 2.31 ; $t(89) = 8.31$, $p < .001$). Social media influencers had more influence on students' purchase intentions than friends. This relationship can be attributed to the authority influencers have over students. Through trust in authenticity and parasocial relationships students value influencers' opinions over their peers'. Conclusively, social media plays a large role in influencing students' fashion choices. However, there are external factors such as data access, affordability, and the institutional environment at UCU that aid in why these findings differ from western centric media research.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for Uganda Christian University, students, policymakers, and future researchers.

6.2.1 Recommendations for Uganda Christian University (UCU)

UCU can consider digital literacy and/or educating students on how to consume fashion media critically as part of student orientation or as co-curricular activity. Students interact with influencers very frequently and spend a lot of time on social media. Teaching them how to be savvy of fast fashion marketing ploys, how to differentiate between real versus sponsored content by influencers and how to be smart consumers can only help them in

their university journey. As a Christian university, UCU can also teach students how to mindfully consume and not give in to FOMO buying as described above.

It may also benefit the university to assess if the way they have conveyed their dress code can better appreciate the two forms of fashion sense students possess because of social media influences. Instead of restricting students, having a conversation with them about this duality that Ugandan youth face can help them abide by UCU's dress code and feel better about themselves..

6.2.2 Recommendations for UCU Students

UCU students should adopt mindful approaches to consuming social media as it relates to fashion. Because exposure was not significantly associated with stylistic change, we believe this indicates students already have a lot of agency in how they approach fashion on social media which they should continue to be mindful of. Understanding how certain aspects of influencer content can affect you such as parasocial relationships and FoMO can help you make informed decisions with your fashion purchases and spend less money on items you buy on impulse. Make sure to set a budget when buying clothes that are influenced by social media. Utilize the locally influenced content we have in Uganda rather than taking on trends started by individuals who may not understand the culture or may be unattainable for you.

6.2.3 Policy Recommendations

At the country-level policy-making stage, Uganda's communications policy body and ministry of education could look to collaborate in bridging digital literacy curriculum into tertiary education policies. This would look at social media's impact on youth consumer behaviour, as policies that make internet/data more affordable would address the gap found in use of social

media between youths of different income levels. As such, exposure to fashion-based social media content will not drive higher relative deprivation among students that cannot afford to keep up with fashion trends. In addition, consumer policies can look to highlight the re-defined line between authentic and paid content by influencers through sponsorships and ad placements, as both authenticity and transparencies were found in the literature review as predictors of responsible influencers.

6.2.4 Recommendations for Future Research

There were many directions that this research could take in future studies. First, as this study was cross-sectional, future research could examine whether exposure to social media fashion content has longer-term effects on style preferences over time. Second, this study could more specifically operationalise exposure to social media influences by examining how exposure to Ugandan vs foreign fashion influencers affected participants' intent to purchase clothing from those influencers. Previous literature indicates that Africans enjoy following fashion influencers who are more local to them than they are to others who may have a higher follower count (Minjian et al., 2022). Third, qualitative or mixed-methods research could assess how students at UCU navigate global and institutional pressures regarding fashion and style. Qualitative methods would allow for more theoretical development around this topic than what is possible through survey research. Fourth, this study could be replicated at other Ugandan universities, especially public secular universities and universities based in urban areas, to assess whether findings from UCU generalise to other settings. Fifth, future research could examine students' sustainability knowledge and behaviours specifically. While participants in this study may claim to value sustainability, they may not actually make sustainable choices when buying clothing. Future research that examines when participants may be more likely to buy sustainable fashion products would be useful.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Title of the Study:

The Influence of Social Media on Fashion and Spending Habits among the Youth

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted for **academic purposes**. Before you decide whether to participate, please read the information below carefully. If you have any questions, feel free to ask before proceeding.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how **social media influences fashion choices and spending habits among university students**. The findings will help inform discussions on **financial discipline, social media influence, and youth consumption behavior**.

Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a **self-administered questionnaire**.

The questionnaire will take approximately **10–15 minutes** to complete.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is **entirely voluntary**.

You are free to **decline participation** or **withdraw at any time** without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Risks and Discomforts

There are **no known physical or psychological risks** associated with participating in this study. Some questions may ask about personal spending

habits; however, you may skip any question you are uncomfortable answering.

Benefits

There are **no direct personal benefits** for participating in this study. However, your responses will contribute to academic knowledge and may help inform **financial literacy initiatives and responsible social media use among youth**.

Confidentiality

All information provided will be treated with **strict confidentiality**.

- No names or identifying information will be collected.
- Responses will be used **only for academic research purposes**.
- Data will be analyzed and reported in **aggregate form**.

Compensation

There is **no monetary compensation** for participating in this study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact:

Principal Researcher:

Lydia Moceruku

Email: _____

Institution: Uganda Christian University (UCU)

Consent Statement

By proceeding with this questionnaire, you confirm that:

- You have read and understood the information above
- You are **18 years or older**
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this study

I agree to participate in this study

Signature..... Date.....

Appendix B: Study Questionnaire

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FASHION AND SPENDING HABITS AMONG THE YOUTH

This questionnaire is for **academic purposes only**. All responses are **confidential and anonymous**. Participation is **voluntary**, and you may withdraw at any time.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

(Tick the most appropriate option)

1. Gender *(Mark only one)*

- Male
- Female

2. Age Group *(Mark only one)*

- 18–20 years
- 21–23 years
- 24–25 years

3. Faculty / School *(Mark only one)*

- School of Business
- School of Law
- School of Science and Technology
- School of Theology
- School of Education
- Others (Specify): _____

4. Year of Study *(Mark only one)*

- Year 1
- Year 2

- Year 3
- Year 4

SECTION B: SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

(Tick one unless stated otherwise)

5. Which social media platforms do you use regularly?

(Tick all that apply)

- Instagram
- TikTok
- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- Snapchat
- X (Twitter)

6. How often do you use social media in a day? (Mark only one)

- Less than 1 hour
- 1–3 hours
- 4–6 hours
- More than 6 hours

7. How often do you view fashion-related content on social media?

(Mark only one)

- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

8. How often do you follow fashion influencers or fashion pages?

(Mark only one)

- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. What type of fashion content do you mostly engage with?

(Tick all that apply)

- Outfit inspiration
- Brand advertisements
- Influencer reviews
- Sales/promotions
- Friends' outfit posts

10. How many years have you been actively using social media?

(Mark only one)

- Less than 1 year
- 1–3 years
- 4–6 years
- More than 6 years

SECTION C: SOCIAL MEDIA & FASHION CHOICES

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

(Mark only one option per statement)

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Social media influences the type of clothes I wear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I discover new fashion trends mainly through social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel pressure to dress like people I follow online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I change my dressing style to match trends seen on social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My fashion choices are influenced by friends' posts online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION D: SOCIAL MEDIA & SPENDING HABITS

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

(Mark only one option per statement)

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Social media encourages me to spend more money on clothes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I buy fashion items impulsively after seeing them online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have purchased fashion items through social media links or ads	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sometimes regret buying clothes influenced by social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media makes it difficult for me to stick to my budget	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I spend more on fashion now than before using social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discounts and flash sales on social media influence my spending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION E: INFLUENCERS, PEERS & SOCIAL PRESSURE

13. Who influences your fashion spending the most? (Mark only one)

- Friends / Peers
- Social media influencers
- Celebrities
- Advertisements
- Family

14. How often do you buy fashion items recommended by influencers? (Mark only one)

- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

15. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

(Mark only one option per statement) 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I trust fashion recommendations from influencers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel left out if I cannot afford trending fashion items	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure on social media affects my spending decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I compare my dressing style with others on social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION F: FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE & COPING STRATEGIES

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

(Mark only one option per statement)

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I set a budget before buying fashion items	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I priorities basic needs over fashion spending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial literacy helps me manage spending influenced by social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I limit my exposure to fashion content to control spending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I save money specifically to buy fashionable items	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Universities should educate students on responsible spending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>