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A Review of the Literature on the Effects of Social Media on Buying Fashion Apparel Intention and Decision

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A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BUYING FASHION APPAREL INTENTION AND DECISION

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ABSTRACT

The fashion apparel industry has radically changed over the period with the impact of technology and the complex integration of business procedures in the contemporary business environment. The initiation of the internet and digital disruption have resulted in extreme changes in fashion clothing that have impacted consumer buying decisions. The review paper aims to evaluate the effect of social media on the buying decisions of Thai consumers in the fashion apparel industry with an assessment of all social media factors impacting the buying decision. The information was gathered from fifty secondary sources, like articles and journals, written about the research topic in the last 5 years. The paper evaluates how the digital environment has a long-term impact on the growth and capability development of the concerned sector.

KEYWORDS: Buying Decision, Consumers' Buying Intention, Social Media, Apparel Industry.

INTRODUCTION

The apparel industry has radically changed in the contemporary business environment. To cater to the enormous 3,000 billion garment and textile industry, the industry is welcoming new companies regularly. However, not all of these companies become well-known to consumers or stand out as individual brands in the same way that global fashion companies do (FashionUnited, 2017). After the two years of interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the apparel industry returned to growth in 2022, during which changes in the category landscapes, advancements in sustainability, and new digital frontiers such as social media presented new opportunities. This is because users are becoming more comfortable with social media, which makes shopping easier from discovery to checkout (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019). There has been a decline in the revenue of the fashion clothing industry by 20% during 2019 and 2020.

About 69% of companies were considered destroyers in the year 2020 according to the McKinsey Global Fashion Index (MGFI), while 7% of companies left the Global Fashion Market because of financial distress (Mckinsey, 2020). It is evident that the apparel industry in Thailand has faced several losses in 2020 due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 and it is evident through graphical representation of sales revenue along with sales volume, which indicates the necessity of enriching the quality of the study with statistical information (Statista, 2022).
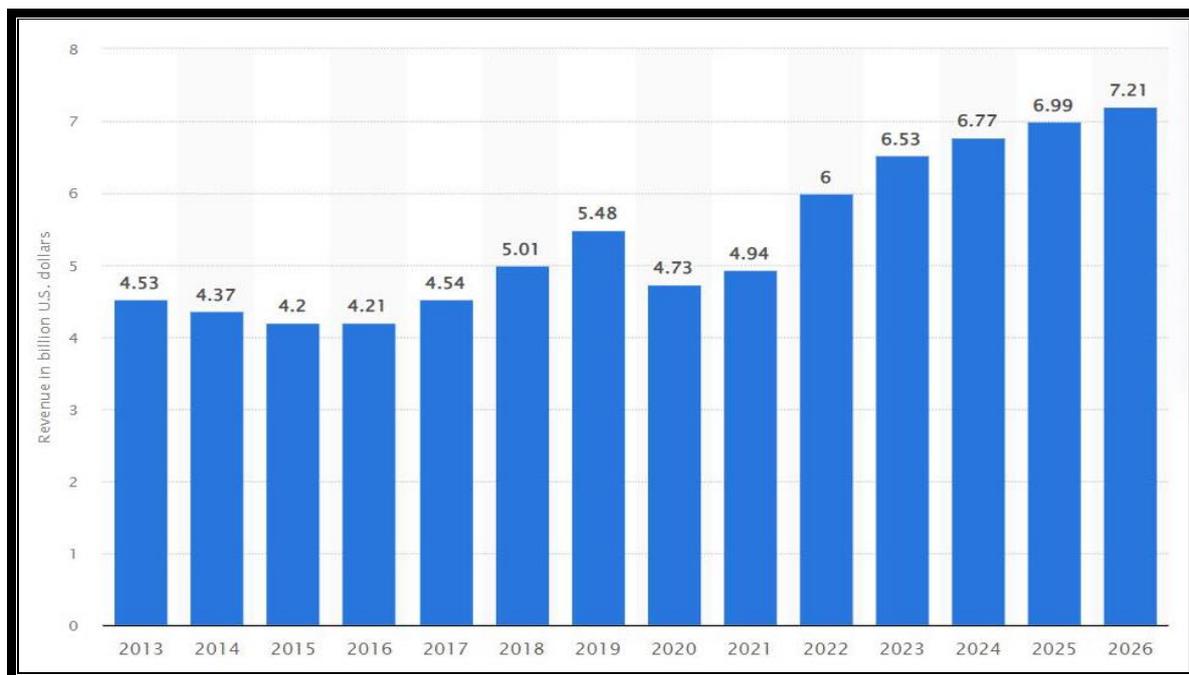
Figure 1: Revenue of the clothing market in Thailand from 2013 to 2026
(in billions of US dollars), Source: Statista (2022)

The country exported 64.8-billion-baht worth of clothes and 188.6-billion-baht worth of textiles in the first 11 months of 2021. Due to the trade war between the US and China, the US bought more clothes from Thailand. Thailand's textile exports were helped by factories that make clothes in places like Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Europe, and the US (The Nation, 2022).

Moreover, 50% of the revenue from the fashion houses in Thailand comes from tourists. The tourists are surprised by the small fashion houses and the quality of the Thai fashion industry (Sawatenarakul & Roopsing, 2021). Therefore, the government in Thailand has focused on this industry and has contributed to its growth by supporting many of the local brands and the

recovery of the tourism industry. Thai people are found to be extremely fashion-conscious people, which creates a demand for clothing in the home market (Hamid & Aslam, 2017). Every year, 10 million tourists come to the country to promote new ideas. The government has also secured 1.2 million jobs in this industry and has educated 6,000 fashion people, consisting of merchandisers, designers, and production specialists. This has improved the overall design quality and manufacturing in this industry. For the last few years, the apparel market has been challenging for Thailand because of the increasing competitiveness from countries that are producing cheaper textile products like China, which has emerged to be a market leader (Kantajorn, 2022).

The apparel industry is one such industry in which there are frequent changes taking place, and social media is now being prominently used as a cheap and convenient means for communication about such changes. Social media has also become a promotional tool used by businesses in this industry (Puthipad, 2021). In Thailand, online shopping has become a social activity, with purchases on social networks comprising 20% of the total e-commerce in the nation (Ono, 2018). Other factors contributing to the greater involvement of consumers on social media are the need for a strong social presence and the penetration of the internet in Thai households, especially among Thai millennials (Lee et al., 2018).

One of the key factors impacting consumers' buying intentions and their decisions in the apparel industry is access to information. Consumers look for information to influence their buying decisions as they engage in information searching before they undertake any buying (Victor et al., 2018). Price is also considered to be a very important factor for influencing the buying intent of consumers, as most Thai consumers believe that price is an indicator of the quality of the product. Therefore, consumers are often found to be reluctant to pay for high-priced goods, and they often engage in a comparison of the prices of similar goods to take the purchase decision (Hanaysha, 2018). Aside from price, consumers consider the quality and variety of products available when purchasing a product. The other related factors are ease of shopping and payment-related convenience that influence the intent of consumers to buy from a particular brand or platform (Gopinath, 2019).

However, the limited studies that have been done on how social media affects real-world buying decisions in the fashion apparel industry have led to the following research objectives:

- To investigate how social media effects Thai consumers' buying decisions in the apparel business;
- To examine if factors related to social media can affect the buying decisions of Thai consumers in the apparel industry;
- To evaluate the impact each factor has on the buying intention and decisions of Thai consumers regarding the fashion apparel industry.

The study will address the following research questions:

- How does social media affect the buying decisions of Thai consumers in the apparel industry?
- Do social media-related factors affect the buying decisions of Thai consumers regarding the apparel industry?
- What is the impact of each factor on the buying intention and decisions of Thai consumers regarding the fashion apparel industry?

METHOD

The main focus of this study is on the research that has been done on the effects of social media on marketing. In this review, Webster and Watson's (2002) method for doing a concept-driven systematic review was used. This method looks at the literature from the point of view of the ideas presented by all authors. This is different from the author-driven method, which looks at how each author has analysed different ideas in different articles (Webster & Watson, 2002). Since the role of social media seems to be a newer field, this method was found to be appropriate in this review. In addition, this method makes it much easier to find studies that are related. In the literature review, there will be a discussion of the aspects of the review paper that would help to improve the understanding of the effect of social media on the buying decisions of consumers in the fashion apparel industry in Thailand. For this section of the review paper, secondary data and data from journals published in the last five years would be used to answer the research questions. The information is gathered from 50 articles and journals published on the research topic that has been published for the last 5 years as a secondary source. When searching the articles and journals, relevant keywords would be used to make sure that the past studies used are relevant to the research being done.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fashion Apparel Industry in the Digital Environment

Digitalization has touched every aspect of life and every business is now delivering the potential provided by digital media and social media to develop their potential to improve their business and reach consumers more effectively. Lay (2018) states that with the growth of technology, the fashion industry has been subject to large-scale changes, but there are also challenges posed by digital transformation to the brand and reputation that need to be protected in this complex environment. With digitalization, the consumers in the fashion clothing industry have shifted performance to assume the position of governance. They are not just buying fashion products but are also empowered by digital media platforms and social media to interact, influence, and belong. With the emergence of social media, there is a greater engagement of consumers online and their intention to buy fashion apparel is being influenced by the buying of other consumers and reviews. Consumers have now become more informed and selective, and are taking charge of their buying. This has made it imperative for businesses in the fashion apparel industry to become more digital-savvy brands and use social media channels to develop an entire experience network. It is through this network that they can learn about the choices and preferences as well as the dislikes of the consumers and also influence them. Therefore, the studies of Mizuno (2020) remind fashion apparel companies that the digitization of the fashion industry has been associated with the reputational risk emerging from the need for the protection of the brand during such change times. The digital transformation is being achieved through the movement toward omnichannel, with fashion revenues being driven by online channels (Chakraborty et al., 2021).

The value of analytics and information has increased, and fashion brands are engaging with clients by establishing a long-term association with them based on their preferences and habits. In the new digital environment, clienteling is being handled through digital means by the use of leading-edge processes, commerce and sales platforms, and analytics to deliver a personalised experience to the consumers by increasing the conversion rate (Shrivastava et al., 2021). In the specific context of the fashion apparel industry in Thailand, Alcocer (2018) points out that high fashion and established labels are getting democratised by the use of social media and are running professional marketing campaigns to reach global consumers who are now more informed than before. Daowd et al. (2020) state one significant aspect of the use of social media in the retail or clothing industry in Thailand is the rise of independent brands that are

now using the boom in the use of Instagram to create personal brands and also to develop warm communities with consumers that purchase these brands. Independent brands like Irada and Salisa are known as independent labels because of how they work with their customers on Instagram.

An important aspect of the digitalization of the fashion industry in Thailand is the rise of Pomelo, the famous digital fashion brand in Southeast Asia, which was established in Thailand in 2013. Pomelo is the outcome of the digitalization of the fashion industry, specifically after the impact of COVID-19. (Onto & Sirisuthikul, 2021) argues that this fashion brand has been an innovation of a new platform with the local Thai brands in Southeast Asia that can assist the brand to stand out and compete with the international brands and overcome the digital challenges. Many local fashion brands in Thailand have signed up for Pomelo, which is helping them build their brands and reach their online sales goals. Ajanpanya (2021) reveals that in 2020 the site had over 40 million visits to the website and applications, and there were 200 third-party brands on this platform. Moreover, Guenther and Park (2019) state that there are also Instagram brands enlisted on this platform, showing the usefulness of social media in the development of local fashion brands and their ability to compete with international brands on the E-Commerce platform. It is evident from the trends in the study of Guenther & Park's (2019) case study on Pomelo fashion in Thailand that the best growth has been achieved by the Instagram brands in which the entrepreneurs manufacture and sell the products using their Instagram accounts.

Social Media and implications

There are different kinds of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Charoennan and Huang (2018) argue that it is now imperative for fashion merchants to use these social media platforms to increase their profitability manifold by influencing the buying decisions of their consumers. Instagram is a winner compared to other platforms for people of all ages, and even fashion experts are moving to Instagram to promote their brands and stay in touch with their customers. Facebook and Instagram are primarily being used for maintaining direct contact with customers and also promoting brands. Moreover, young Thais are also using Pinterest to witness new trends and new businesses are promoting their brands on Pinterest. Muangmee (2021) states that these social media platforms are also being used for building followers and to have updated information about the target market for the products and the brand. Fashion merchant Monki

used Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook accounts, and the YouTube account of the brand has received a lot of likes in engagement from the users to check the latest collection and to appear in the video (fashinza, 2022). Yet the highest numbers of Web traffic and sales have been generated from the use of Instagram and Pinterest, which are being used for uploading the catalogue of products.

Social commerce is an extremely popular avenue for apparel shopping in Thailand. Ma (2020) states that Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and LINE are the most popular social media platforms being used by consumers in Thailand and also the platforms for independent fashion brands as well as high-end fashion names. According to the report submitted by the Electronic Transaction Development Agency (Ma, 2020), sales through the use of social media in Thailand had doubled in 2017 to 334.2 billion baht ($10.9 billion). Reuter's (2019) study shows that sales from social media accounted for 44% of the total e-commerce sales in the country in 2019, a jump from 21 % in the earlier year. It has been found that adult consumers in Thailand find the product on Instagram or Facebook, and that charts and payments take place on the different applications. Jansom & Pongsakornrungsilp (2021) argue that for adults, the appeal of shopping on social media is the direct communication with the merchants. Sritanakorn & Nuangjamnong (2021) add that the consumers of fashion retail love to browse and share, and favour social media in this regard to the big shopping malls.

Thailand is among the fastest growing markets in Southeast Asia for influencer marketing. A Digital Advertising Association of Thailand (DAAT) report has revealed that in 2020 there were 52 million users on the internet and a similar number of social media users in Thailand according to (any in-group, 2022). YouTube and Facebook have captured the young population in Thailand, holding 94% of the total internet users. Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, along with Facebook and YouTube, make up the five most used social media platforms in Thailand. Chankoson & Thabhiranrak (2019) argue that a very important aspect of the social media rise is the progress of influencer marketing with the predominance of influences on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The share of social media users in Thailand by 2021 can be seen in the following figure.
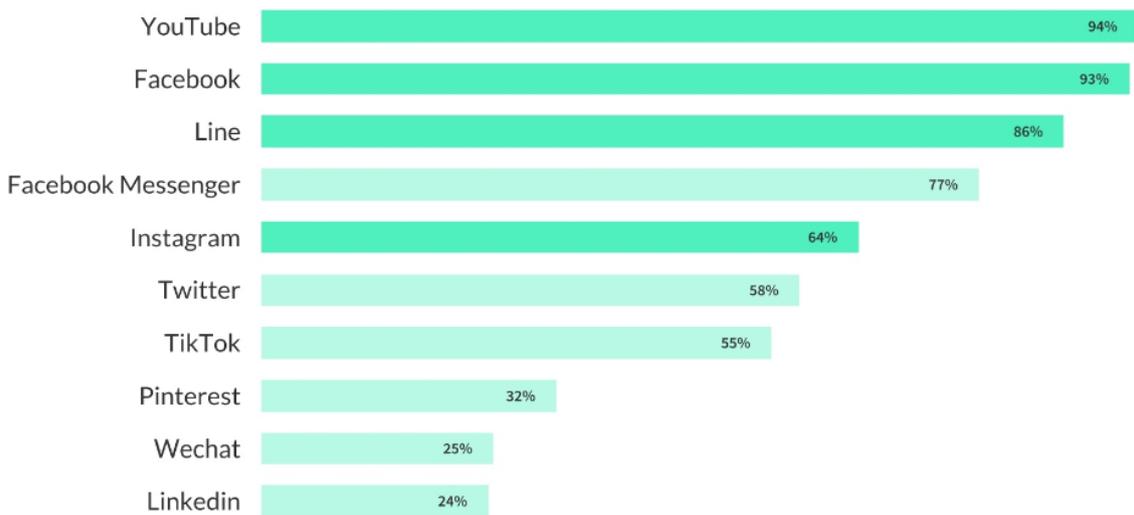
Figure 2: Share of Social Media users in Thailand
Source: Digital Business Lab (2021)

Social media and the intention of Consumers to buying

Ananda et al. (2019) argue social media is used by the fashion clothing industry since social media is a combination of communication channels and online platforms used by people for sharing information and can be used by businesses for providing consumers access to such information that would bring the businesses closer to the consumers. Beig and Khan (2018) state that, considering the convenience and easiness with which social media gives access to consumers and creates opportunities to influence consumer behaviour, it has emerged to be the latest method for reaching consumers and also influencing them. The progress of social media has brought a revolution in the world of marketing and communication and has altered the thinking of consumers and their attitudes and behaviour. Jain et al. (2018) argue that Ducoffe's Advertising Value Model has identified three important factors contributing to the evaluation of social media advertising by consumers: informativeness, credibility, and entertainment. In the case of the fashion industry, young working Thai people, in particular, see the sentence as personalising the preferences that are important to them, and this has a significant impact on the perception of social media advertising. Furthermore, Arora and Agarwal (2019) state that the more informative the consumers feel about the content on social media, the more strongly the consumers perceive the advertising and information on social media channels. Al-Maatouk et al. (2020) state technology acceptance model (TAM) further helps to understand the use of the latest technology, inclusive of social media, by consumers and its impact on them. The

theory states that the increased use of technology by young consumers has made them emerge as social media users and they enjoy using technology, which further influences their potential behaviour to use such technology for all their activities, including buying decisions. Additionally, Gunasagaran et al. (2019) argue that fashion brands are making various appeals to influence the attitude and intention of buying goods and services through advertisements. However, the only way in which the buying intention of the consumer can be influenced is through placing the advertising messages on the right platform and in the right way. Jinarat (2022) argues that given the higher level of attractiveness and visibility of content on social media platforms, there is a relationship between the usage of social media, information search and the buying intention of consumers.

Daowd et al. (2020) argue that consumers now want things to be faster, cheaper, and better, and advancements in technology utilising the advancement of social media have allowed consumers in Thailand to spend the time they want searching for information and comparing prices online. On the other hand, technology has impacted the spending lifestyle of consumers and has changed how they make their shopping decisions. Social media has provided opportunities for young people in Thailand to be involved in different activities such as content consumption, sharing, and discussing with other consumers online.

Social media and Consumer purchase decisions

Jinarat (2022) points out that social media has brought small-scale retailers into head-to-head competition with well-established brands. Instagram has nurtured an army of consumers who are not critical of even the largest department stores operating in Thailand. Data gathered from a survey in Thailand reveals that 76.15% revealed that they bought a product because it was promoted by a social media influencer (statista, 2022). The data provides evidence of the popularity and strength of influencers on social media on the buying decisions of young consumers in Thailand. The effect is noted to be more significant among consumers between the age groups of 14 and 28 years. Nurittamont (2021) argues the effect of social media on consumption decisions is beyond the creation of purchase intentions, but these two concepts are interrelated. Voramontri and Klieb (2019) point out that social media channels such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram, which are primarily used by young people in Thailand, have been associated with the user perception of suggestions and recommendations on products on these platforms. Social commerce tends to redefine fashion retail in the Southeast Asian country, facilitated by parcel delivery services and online payment services. This can be

attributed to the ease of shopping and new opportunities created by different social media channels like Instagram and Facebook (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

There has been a rise in the number of nano and micro-influencers in Thailand, and it is evident that influencer marketing is most prevalent in beauty, fashion, and e-commerce products. Social media influencers have also been the greatest force behind the emergence of the local brands developed and endorsed by the influencers using social media platforms. Influencers are using their popularity among Facebook and Instagram followers to not only promote products and engage in paid advertising, but also to bring their brands to consumers.
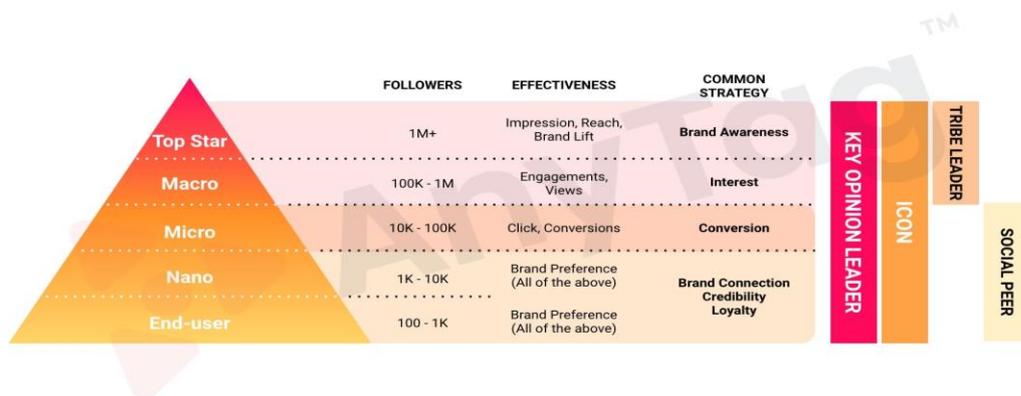
Figure 3: Ranks of social media influencers
Source: Anymindgroup (2020)

Influencers come in various forms, such as top stars with a million followers who are most effective in brand lift and driving impressions. Then some macro-influencers have between 100,000 and a million followers, with the core focus on consumer engagement and increasing views. There are also micro-influencers with followers of between 10,000 and 100,000 that are effective in conversions and driving clicks for fashion products online. Chankoson and Thabhiranrak (2019) state that these three groups of influences are found to be most effective in influencing the buying decisions of consumers on not just social media but also digital media platforms and online sales.

Previous Studies	Social Media and Consumer Buying Intention	Social Media and Consumer Buying Decision
Sudha & Sheena (2017)	This can be attributed to the ease of shopping and new opportunities created by different social media channels like Instagram and Facebook.	Nano and micro-influencers are becoming more popular in Thailand, and it's clear that beauty, fashion, and e-commerce products benefit most from influencer marketing.
Sukrat et al. (2018)	The effect of social media on developing the buying intent of young people in Thailand is also associated with the prolonged-time period spent by the users on social media, the impact of the referrals and the popularity of social media on all the activities of the young population.	Social media platforms provide ease of search and the users because of their higher degree of engagement with social media, trust the reviews and the social media just as they would trust it coming from friends and family.
Chankoson and Thabhiranrak (2019)	On the contrary, multi activities on social media have more impact on the positive behaviour and acceptance of social media by consumers than traditional media.	It is this factor of trust in the information and views available on social media that influence the consumers' buying decision.
Mizuno (2020)	Social media has influenced how they perceive themselves in public, and social media has	With the emergence of social media, there is greater engagement of consumers online and their intention to

	influenced their perception of the goods they buy or own.	purchase fashion apparel is being influenced by the purchases of other consumers and reviews.
Charoensereechai et al. (2022)	Social media on the other hand has offered consumers faster, cheaper and better platforms that are also easy to use and influence their information search and buying intentions most significantly.	The perceived ease of use, availability of information, and attractiveness of the contents are the three key factors that influence the buying decision of the consumers.

CONCLUSION

It has been analysed from the data gathered from different sources that social media has emerged as one of the most important marketing and promotional tools for brands in the fashion apparel industry in general. With respect to the apparel industry in Thailand, which is a highly profitable industry, social media has become an important avenue through which the fashion apparel industry has been undergoing a digital transformation that is beneficial for both the retailers and the consumers. The aspect of the high level of engagement and communication between the consumers and the retailers, supported by the browsing behaviour of the consumers, is giving dominance to social media in impacting the consumer's intention to buy and buying decisions. Most fashion retailers are using Facebook and Instagram together as an integrated approach to drive their e-commerce sales. These consumers, as part of the community, are highly informed and engaged because of their consistent presence on the social media channels, and they use the social media channels for various purposes, starting from information search to buying decisions and also influencing others' buying decisions in the community. As a consequence of digitalization, there has been a convergence between technology and fashion in Thailand, and there has been the emergence of fashion communities that has led to the expansion of the digital footprint of local brands on the e-commerce platform.

Consumers, investors, and brands are all getting more involved in social media. It has emerged as a new dimension in marketing that marketers are using to create brand awareness among consumers and influence their purchase decisions by influencing their awareness and providing the necessary information. Social media has influenced how consumers perceive themselves on a public platform, and social media has in turn influenced the idea of the goods they purchase or own. This is how social media impacts the buying decisions of Thai consumers. Fashion brands are reimagining how shopping has changed in the digital world beyond just digitising the shopping process. Overall, it can be concluded from the study that the prospect of media use in the retail or fashion apparel industry is influenced by the growing popularity of social media channels among consumers and the rise of influencer marketing, which has taken the fashion industry by storm. With the advancement in the popularity of social media platforms, there has been the emergence of different kinds of social media platforms that have created their own space in the fashion retail industry. The use of social media has made the fashion retail industry more consumer-centric and there is more standardization. This shows the impact of social media on the buying intentions and decisions of Thai consumers.

Suggestions for future research

The Literature shows that many studies used theories and frameworks for evaluating the effects of technology adoption on businesses and organisations. There is a lack of evaluation of the influence of different social media platforms, such as a comparison of Facebook and Instagram concerning their degree of influence on the buying intention and actual buying behaviour of consumers. Future research needs to significantly address the psychographic factors that can have the impact of social media on the young population (millennials) concerning buying intentions and decisions in Thailand. Based on the review of the literature, there is a need to do a study to look at other aspects of social media that have not been looked at in this study. This study should also look at how social media affects the buying decisions and shopping habits of Thai adults.

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