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Beyond the Glamour: How Fashion Influencers Drive Gen Z Decisions

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ABSTRACT

The current research focuses on the impact of influencers' characteristics on information search behavior and purchase decisions of generation Z consumers. Particularly, it is interested in the impact of attitude toward influencers, expertise, credibility, and physical attractiveness on information search, and the impact of information search on purchase decisions. In total, data were collected from 470 participants through purposive sampling, but only 407 were valid following the removal of outliers. The collected data was analyzed through the use of partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). It is evident from the analysis results that attitude toward influencers, expertise and credibility positively impact information search, while physical attractiveness does not have any significant impact. Information search positively impacts purchase decisions. Indirect effects show that information search is a mediator in the relationships between attitude toward influencers, expertise, and credibility and purchase decisions, but not attractiveness.

Keywords: Gen Z, Influencer Marketing, Purchase Decision, Attitude, Information Search

INTRODUCTION

Social media has altered the way consumers search, evaluate, and purchase fashion products. Fashion influencers play a central role in this change and Generation Z is the cohort that is most affected by this change. There is evidence from focus groups in the United Kingdom about how Instagram advertisements, opinion leaders, and user-generated content lead Gen Z women to make impulsive fashion purchase (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). According to a survey, the influencer marketing industry reached an estimate of $32.55 billion in 2025 compared to $24 billion in 2024 (Naceva, 2026). A systematic review on micro-influencer literature states that fashion and beauty are the most common products marketed, while Instagram is the most used platform (Aw and Chuah, 2021).

A meta-analysis discovered that influencer marketing affects both non-transactional outcomes (attitude, engagement, purchase intention) and transactional outcomes (purchase behavior, sales), partly through persuasion knowledge and source credibility (Pan *et al*., 2025). Influencer marketing has roots in the source credibility theory (Hovland and Weiss, 1951) and the source credibility was traditionally defined by its expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. This is also apparent from the reviews where the most widely studied variable in the field is the source credibility (Chen *et al*., 2024; Ismagilova *et al*., 2020).Empirical findings point to the connection between positive attitude towards fashion influencers and consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Chetioui *et al*., 2020) and between perceived credibility and expertise and consumers' evaluations and behavioral intentions (Handranata and Kalila, 2025). Attitude mediates the effect of credibility-related attributes onto purchase intention (Magano *et al*., 2022). Moreover, followers' trust in branded content (Lou and Yuan, 2019) and perceptions of influencer authenticity

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(Ünalmýþ *et al*., 2024) influence purchase intention through trust and attitude. Thus, there is a significant body of literature, which highlights the importance of influencer characteristics for consumer response, and yet, the overwhelming focus on attitudinal and intentional outcomes implies a possibility to investigate more closely the relation of these characteristics to information search and purchase decision-making processes.

However, three problems persist. First, the dependent variable is usually purchase intention. Intention and engagement are the two main dependent variables in the micro-influencer research literature (Chen *et al*., 2024). Evidence from a meta-analysis reveals that intention and purchase behavior are driven by different variables (Pan *et al*., 2025). Some recent works have already acknowledged the fact that intention does not necessarily lead to purchase (Oliveira *et al*., 2026). In most of the studies mediators are all related either to attitude or affect, brand attitude (Chetioui *et al*., 2020), trust and attitude toward branded posts (Vilas Chavare *et al*., 2024), and fear of missing out and parasocial relationships (Liu, 2025). Third, there are conflicting pieces of evidence of how the stage in which the follower seeks for information is affected by influencers, and no study has tested this stage in the case of fashion. For instance, trust in the influencer influences post credibility, which then affects interest and willingness to search for more information (Martínez-López *et al*., 2020).

Commercial orientation of influencer posts decreases willingness to seek information due to low trustworthiness and perceived credibility (Gamage and Ashill, 2023). However, these studies measure only willingness to search and do not study purchase decisions. Moreover, they do not study fashion or Gen Z consumers. On the contrary, in a descriptive study of mostly 15- to 24-year-old Portuguese social media users, no relationship has been revealed between influencer product reviews and need recognition and information search, which might mean that influencer content complements the followers' searching activities and acts at a later stage of decision making (Oliveira *et al*., 2026). The only study that addresses fashion examines perceived credibility and content usefulness of influencers as drivers of purchase decisions among Malaysian consumers (Hasim and Mahbob, 2025), yet content usefulness refers to the content, not searching behavior. These studies add value to the knowledge about the influence of influencer characteristics on consumer responses. However, due to differences in the relationships and outcomes considered, it remains unclear what conditions encourage information search and whether such search relates to the formation of purchase decisions. It should be noted that willingness to conduct information search does not always imply that consumers actually search for information and that the obtained information influences their decision to buy.

Consumer decision-making process provides a theoretical basis for testing this. Stage models state that purchase is the result of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase, while evidence from structural equations on online shoppers shows that perceived trust and quality increase information search, which leads to evaluation of alternatives (Petcharat and Leelasantitham, 2021). Considering that context, the focus of analysis could shift to the relation of the characteristics of the information source and consumers' information search. Consumers' attitude towards an influencer could determine their readiness to consider influencers' recommendations. Trustworthiness and expertise of influencers could determine the extent to which influencers' recommendations could be seen as credible and informative enough to trigger consumers' information search. The attractiveness of an influencer does not imply the same informational basis for further search even though this characteristic of a source is often considered in the source credibility theory. This becomes especially important as the characteristics considered could play different roles in the decision-making process. Analysis of impulsive purchases made under the influence of an influencer demonstrates that the purchase decisions could be made in the absence of extensive deliberations (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).

The present study explores how attitude toward fashion influencers and the three dimensions of credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) influence information search of Generation Z consumers and how information search drives fashion purchase decisions. It makes three contributions. First, it changes the dependent variable from intention to purchase decision in a segment where impulsive purchase is common. Second, it tests information search as the mediator between influencer cues and purchase, providing structural evidence for the literature which so far provided only inconsistent results regarding information search. Third, it tests expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and attitude all together,

allowing understanding of why credibility cues have different effects in different contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Source Credibility

Source Credibility Theory (SCT) examines how the perceptions of the audience regarding the communicator determine the persuasive power of the message (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). SCT consist of three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Source credibility theory has been extensively applied to endorsements (Ismagilova *et al*., 2020; Sardar and Vijay, 2025), and source credibility is the most frequently explored variable in influencer studies (Bhardwaj *et al*., 2024). Trustworthiness captures whether the source is seen as honest, reliable, and sincere. Expertise captures the knowledge, experience, and credentials of the source. Attractiveness involves the physical attractiveness and style, for instance elegance and class (Kant *et al*., 2025). In this study, the three aforementioned dimensions, along with attitude towards fashion influencers, are the antecedents of information search. SCT is traditionally used to explain the relationship between credibility and attitudes or intentions, and at a dimension level the results are inconsistent. In a study involving luxury fashion brands, trustworthiness was most important, followed by attractiveness, while expertise was completely irrelevant (Wiedmann and von Mettenheim, 2020). For urban Indian Gen Z, trust and expertise were predictors of credibility, while attractiveness was not (Garg and Bakshi, 2024). The present study tries to bridge a gap as no prior study on fashion influencer uses SCT to explain information search as the behavioral mechanism linking credibility with purchasing decisions of Gen Z fashion followers.

Consumer Decision Making Process

Stage models involve a series of steps in which consumption occurs as the last step, need recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase (Petcharat and Leelasantitham, 2021). At the stage of information search, consumers collect product information, and evaluate the quality and price and online it is determined by trust (Ngo *et al*., 2024). The study, define information search as followers' utilization of fashion influencers' contents to collect product information and compare products before buying them. In influencer marketing, information seeking is one of the two main tasks of followers, besides affective relationship building (Wang *et al*., 2025). Considering information search as a stage which allows to make influencer cues act as inputs to the search process rather than as stimuli to purchase. Studies on this stage of consumer behavior in influencer marketing have produced only fragmented results. Trust and credibility predict the willingness to search (Gamage and Ashill, 2023; Martínez-López *et al*., 2020), yet the consequence is a search intention, not a purchase decision, and the evidence does not pertain to fashion or Gen Z. In one study, influencer product reviews did not generate need recognition and search (Oliveira *et al*., 2026).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the perception of honesty, dependability, and sincerity of an influencer (Rambocas and Metivier, 2024). It is the most stable source credibility dimension according to previous research: it topped in the luxury fashion experiment (Wiedmann and von Mettenheim, 2020) and influenced credibility among Indian Gen Z (Garg and Bakshi, 2024). Trust in an influencer positively influences post credibility, which in turn positively influences interest and willingness to search for information (Martínez-López *et al*., 2020). When commercial orientation decreases trustworthiness, it negatively impacts the willingness to search (Gamage and Ashill, 2023). Consumer trust increases their willingness to search during online shopping (Zhang and Abdullah, 2026).

H1. Trustworthiness positively influences information search.

Expertise

Expertise refers to the knowledge, experience, and qualification of an influencer (Huy Hung *et al*., 2025). Source credibility acts as a cue for evaluating information's usefulness (P *et al*., 2025), and the information of an expert source requires low searching costs since it is believed to be diagnostic. The evidence regarding the impact of expertise is inconclusive. It had practically no influence in the luxury fashion experiment (Lau *et al*., 2022), but it significantly impacted credibility among Indian Gen Z (Vilas Chavare *et al*., 2024). Among Indian youth consumers, it was the most powerful predictor of attitude towards the influencer, surpassing trustworthiness and attractiveness (Kant *et al*., 2025). This inconsistency indicates that expertise is especially important for behaviors involving assessment of the quality

of information, like comparisons of products.

H2. Expertise positively influences information search.

Attractiveness

Attractiveness is associated with the physical appearance and style of an influencer (Huy Hung *et al*., 2025). The evidence is controversial as it ranked second in the luxury fashion experiment (Lau *et al*., 2022) and predicted attitude towards the influencer among Indian youth consumers (Kant *et al*., 2025), but it did not predict credibility among Indian Gen Z (P *et al*., 2025). Attractive and trendy influencers keep followers attracted to their posts, which ensures exposure to product information.

H3. Attractiveness positively influences information search.

Attitude towards fashion influencers

Attitude is a learned predisposition guiding behavior towards its object (Ajzen, 2011). In fashion, attitude towards influencers is based on perceptions that influencers set trends, provide better deals, serve as reliable sources of information, and inspire (Chetioui *et al*., 2020). The influence of attitude towards the influencer was proved to transmit the effect of credibility-related characteristics on purchase intention (Magano *et al*., 2022). Followers with favorable attitude not only have a reason to seek help from influencers but also a habit.

H4. Attitude towards fashion influencers positively influences information search.

Information Search

Information search is the stage of the decision process at which consumers acquire product information and compare quality and price (Saima and Khan, 2020). Here it means followers' acquisition of fashion information from influencers' posts. Information search from trustworthy sources is a risk management technique that increases purchase intention (Wang *et al*., 2025). Purchase of fashion is accompanied by risks relating to fit, quality, and value. Fashion purchases involve a lot of uncertainty, which can be decreased through search. In influencer marketing, information search positively related to purchase intention among US followers (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Online search intention positively influences purchase intention (Ngo *et al*., 2024). In online shopping, search serves as a basis for evaluation and intention to purchase, which, in turn, predicts purchase behavior (Xiao *et al*., 2018). There are two reservations. First, influencer reviews did not stimulate early search among mostly 15- to 24-year-old followers (Oliveira *et al*., 2026), and fashion purchases by Gen Z tend to be impulsive (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Previous studies have used mediators explaining how source cues affect consumer responses, for example attitude towards the influencer between credibility-related characteristics and purchase intention (Magano *et al*., 2022). The research on information adoption confirms the same pattern: judgments about information carry the effect of source influence (Petcharat and Leelasantitham, 2021).

H5. Information search positively influences purchase decision.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling

Quantitative research approach was adopted in order to examine the relationships between the attributes associated with influencers, information search and purchase decisions of Generation Z fashion consumers. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data from Gen Z through a structured questionnaire. Data were obtained from respondents who matched the Generation Z criteria and were exposed to fashion influencers via social media. In total, 470 responses were obtained, out of which 407 responses were included in the analysis after eliminating the outliers.

The sample included 204 females and 203 males aged between 18 and 27 years. Instagram and YouTube were found to be the commonly used platforms that respondents were using to be exposed to influencers on social media; 91% of the respondents belonging to Generation Z used these platforms to be exposed to social media influencers. The other respondents used platforms like Facebook and Pinterest in addition to Instagram and YouTube for the same purpose.

Measurement Instrument

A questionnaire was used in the study to measure the variables. Measurement items were taken from well-established studies related to influencer marketing and online consumer decision making process. All constructs were measured through 5-point likert scale. Sources of measurement items along with the items themselves are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Constructs and Items

Construct	Items	Source
Expertise	5	Adapted from Kant *et al.* (2025)
Attractiveness	4	Adapted from Huy Hung *et al.* (2025)
Trustworthiness	4	Adapted from Lui (2025)
Attitude toward fashion influencers	4	Adapted from Chetioui *et al.* (2020)
Information search	5	Adapted from Petcharat and Leelasantitham (2021)
Purchase Decision	3	Adapted from Handranata and Kalila (2025)

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was used in the study in order to analyze the measurement and structural models. Therefore, the analysis consisted of assessment of reliability and validity of the measurement model and examination of hypothesized relationships between the study constructs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model

Reliability and Validity

An assessment of the reliability and validity of the measurement model was carried out to check whether the model meets the requirements for reliability and validity (Hair *et al*., 2019). As seen in Table 2, the values of Cronbach's alpha were from 0.773 to 0.860, the values of rho_A were from 0.792 to 0.864, while the values of composite reliability were from 0.854 to 0.906. The values of AVE were from 0.572 to 0.710. Thus, the results can be considered indicative that the constructs meet the criteria for reliability and convergent validity.The data proves that the constructs have an acceptable level of internal consistency and sufficiently explain the proportion of variance in the indicators. Thus, the measurement model can be used as an adequate base for the subsequent assessment of the structural model and Fig. 1 shows measurement model.

Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criteria

According to Fornell-Larcker results, the square root of the AVE for each construct (diagonal values) exceeds correlation with other constructs. For instance, the value on the diagonal line for Attractiveness is 0.771, whereas correlations with other constructs range from 0.479 to 0.586. Likewise, the diagonal values of ATI (0.840), Expertise (0.785), Information Search (0.843), Purchase Decision (0.756) and Trustworthiness (0.829) are higher than their inter-construct correlations. Therefore, the discriminant validity of the measurement model is proved as shown in Table 3.

HTMT

According to HTMT results, the discriminant validity

Table 2 : Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
A	0.773	0.792	0.854	0.595
ATI	0.860	0.863	0.906	0.706
E	0.839	0.863	0.887	0.616
IS	0.795	0.813	0.880	0.710
PD	0.810	0.864	0.863	0.572
T	0.848	0.853	0.898	0.687

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker Criteria

	A	ATI	E	IS	PD	T
A	0.771					
ATI	0.514	0.840				
E	0.544	0.649	0.785			
IS	0.479	0.698	0.654	0.843		
PD	0.586	0.625	0.606	0.618	0.756	
T	0.480	0.617	0.641	0.612	0.593	0.829

Table 4: HTMT

	A	ATI	E	IS	PD	T
A						
ATI	0.618					
E	0.666	0.756				
IS	0.591	0.830	0.793			
PD	0.713	0.702	0.677	0.696		
T	0.592	0.718	0.752	0.743	0.647	

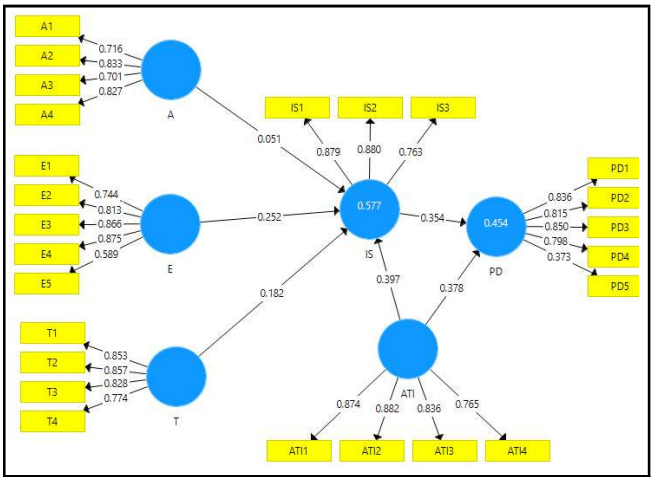


Fig. 1 : Measurement Model

of the measurement model is also confirmed as shown in Table 4. HTMT values range from 0.591 to 0.830, and the maximum value corresponds to the comparison of Attitude towards Influencer with Information Search (0.830). The other values do not exceed the mentioned figure, which means that the constructs are adequately distinctive empirically.

Structural Model

VIF

The problem of collinearity was tested by means of the variance inflation factors (VIF) values shown in Table 5. The VIF values vary between 1.217 and 2.803, none of which exceeds the critical value of 5.00. Hence, there is no indication of the presence of collinearity among the predictors, and it would be reasonable to assume that the multicollinearity problem will not influence the estimation of the structural model (Hair *et al*., 2019).

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The degree of explanation of the endogenous constructs' variances is provided in Table 6. According to the data, the model explains 57.7% of the variance in Information Search (R^2 = 0.577; adjusted R^2 = 0.573).

Table 5: VIF

	VIF
A1	1.332
A2	1.751
A3	1.473
A4	1.687
ATI1	2.487
ATI2	2.803
ATI3	2.112
ATI4	1.562
E1	1.642
E2	2.109
E3	2.512
E4	2.530
E5	1.266
IS1	1.988
IS2	1.941
IS3	1.450
PD1	2.198
PD2	2.178
PD3	1.926
PD4	1.752
PD5	1.217
T1	2.064
T2	2.162
T3	2.002
T4	1.603

The results mean that the predictors have strong potential for explaining Information Search. Concerning the Purchase Decision construct, the model explains 45.4% of its variance (R^2 = 0.454; adjusted R^2 = 0.452). Therefore, the structural model has a considerable power of explanation in respect to both of the constructs; however, there is more variance in Information Search explained than in Purchase Decision.

Table 6: R^2

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
IS	0.577	0.573
PD	0.454	0.452

Model Fit

SRMR, d_ULS, d_G, Chi-square and NFI were

used for testing the fit of the model (Table 7). The SRMR values are 0.072 for the saturated model and 0.083 for the estimated model. It means that there is an acceptable level of the approximate model fit. The d_ULS and d_G values do not differ too much in both cases; however, the NFI values of 0.875 (saturated model) and 0.895 (estimated model) point at the satisfactory model fit. The Chi-square values are 1371.966 for the saturated model and 1437.125 for the estimated model. Thus, the set of the fit indices allows stating the acceptability of the proposed model (Hair *et al*., 2019).

Table 7: Model Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.072	0.083
d_ULS	1.663	2.225
d_G	0.613	0.651
Chi-Square	1371.966	1437.125
NFI	0.875	0.895

Hypothesis Testing

For the hypothesized direct relationships, bootstrapping technique was used. The result is given in Table 8. From the analysis, Attitude towards Influencer, Expertise and Trustworthiness have a significant effect on Information Search while there is no significant effect of Attractiveness on Information Search. Particularly, the path from Attitude towards Influencer to Information Search ($\beta = 0.397$, $t = 5.900$, $p < 0.001$), from Expertise to Information Search ($\beta = 0.252$, $t = 3.789$, $p < 0.001$) and from Trustworthiness to Information Search ($\beta = 0.182$, $t = 2.891$, $p = 0.004$) have a positive effect. On the other hand, Attractiveness does not significantly affect Information Search ($\beta = 0.051$, $t = 1.067$, $p = 0.287$).

Information Search positively and significantly affects Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.354$, $t = 4.999$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the result shows that H3 is not supported but H1, H2, H4 and H5 are supported. In addition, there is a significant positive direct relationship between Attitude towards Influencer and Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.378$, $t = 5.629$, $p < 0.001$). The additional structural relationship is significant in the model and as such reported in Table 9. The finding reveals that Attitude towards Influencer is the most important predictor of Information Search, followed by Expertise and Trustworthiness while Attractiveness does not have a significant direct effect. Information Search, in turn, positively and significantly affects Purchase Decision.

Specific indirect effects were evaluated in order to assess whether Information Search transmits the effects of the antecedent constructs to Purchase Decision. As shown in Table 9, the indirect effect of Attractiveness via Information Search is insignificant ($\beta = 0.018$, $t = 1.015$, $p = 0.311$). On the contrary, the indirect effects of Attitude towards Influencer, Expertise and Trustworthiness via Information Search are significant and positive. Particularly, the indirect effects of Attitude towards Influencer ($\beta = 0.140$, $t = 3.987$, $p < 0.001$), Expertise ($\beta = 0.089$, $t = 2.867$, $p = 0.004$) and Trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.064$, $t = 2.331$, $p = 0.020$) are significant.

It is evident from the finding that Information Search significantly transmits the effects of Attitude towards Influencer, Expertise and Trustworthiness to Purchase Decision. However, there is no significant indirect effect

Table 8: Hypothesis Result

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
A → IS	0.051	0.046	0.048	1.067	0.287
ATI → IS	0.397	0.397	0.067	5.900	0.000
ATI → PD	0.378	0.381	0.067	5.629	0.000
E → IS	0.252	0.251	0.066	3.789	0.000
IS → PD	0.354	0.352	0.071	4.999	0.000
T → IS	0.182	0.185	0.063	2.891	0.004

Table 9: Specific Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
A → IS → PD	0.018	0.017	0.018	1.015	0.311
ATI → IS → PD	0.140	0.139	0.035	3.987	0.000
E → IS → PD	0.089	0.089	0.031	2.867	0.004
T → IS → PD	0.064	0.066	0.028	2.331	0.020

for Attractiveness. Fig. 2 shows structural model after the testing.

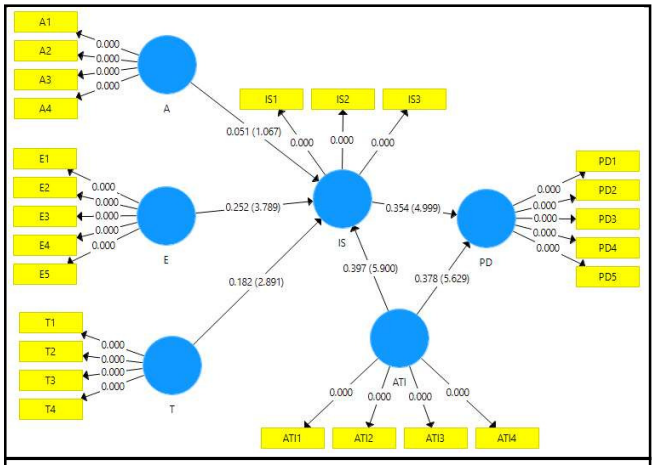


Fig. 2 : Structural Model

Prediction Relevance (Q^2)

Prediction relevance was assessed based on the cross-validated redundancy (Q^2) values. The Q^2 values are shown in Table 10 and they are all positive for both endogenous constructs. Information Search had a Q^2 value of 0.397 while Purchase Decision had a Q^2 value of 0.240. It means that the structural model has prediction relevance for both endogenous constructs. The relatively higher Q^2 value for Information Search indicates a better prediction relevance for this construct, while the positive Q^2 value for Purchase Decision also means that the model has prediction relevance for the outcome construct (Hair *et al*., 2019).

Table 10: Construct Cross validated Redundancy

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
A	1628.000	1628.000	
ATI	1628.000	1628.000	
E	2035.000	2035.000	
IS	1221.000	736.680	0.397
PD	2035.000	1545.823	0.240
T	1628.000	1628.000	

The results provide an insight into how Generation Z consumers respond to fashion influencers during information search and purchase decision-making processes. As opposed to having the same impact on consumer information search and purchase decision-making, different influencer characteristics were found to have significantly distinct roles in these processes. Specifically, attitude toward the influencer, expertise and trustworthiness significantly encouraged consumers' information search, whereas attractiveness did not play a role. Information search was also significantly positively related to consumers' purchase decision. The overall pattern of results is generally consistent with previous research on influencer marketing (Tarnanidis *et al*., 2026; Wu, 2026) while at the same time expanding it in the way that indicates that the path from influencer exposure to purchase decision is characterized more by information/evaluation aspects than attractiveness.

Of all influencer characteristics examined in this study, the strongest predictor of Information Search was the attitude towards the influencer. In particular, the significant positive relationship found in the study suggests that Gen Z consumers with positive attitudes towards fashion influencers are more likely to seek additional information from the influencers. Consistently with the above, this finding is aligned with the conclusions made by Su *et al*. (2023) concerning the importance of consumers' attitudes towards fashion influencers. It also builds on the existing evidence of the potential role of influencers' attitudes in consumers' responses to influencer recommendations, which may lead to purchasing decisions. The current study, in its turn, adds to the existing literature by providing the finding that information search represents one of the downstream responses to influencer attitudes. Accordingly, a positive attitude towards the influencer makes the latter an acceptable and accessible information source for Gen Z consumers.

As in the case with influencer attitudes, the expertise demonstrated a significant positive effect on Information Search, thereby supporting the claim that information search tends to be increased if influencers are perceived as knowledgeable. This finding is especially valuable considering that previous evidence on the impact of expertise is rather inconsistent. In particular, Su *et al*. (2023) noted a low influence of expertise in the context of luxury fashion. In contrast, Garg and Bakshi (2024) reported that expertise had an important contribution to influencer credibility for Indian Gen Z consumers. The current study provides additional evidence in support of the idea that the perception of influencers' expertise is particularly relevant if the downstream consumer response concerns information acquisition activity like searching for information. Thus, expertise can be perceived by Gen Z consumers of fashion products as the indication of the possibility of getting useful product-related information from the influencer.

The positive relationship between Trustworthiness and Information Search is also consistent with previous findings. Saima and Khan (2020) and Petcharat and Leelasantitham (2021) reported that trust increases information search, while Martínez-López *et al*. (2020) found that trust contributes to post credibility and additional information seeking. Similarly, Gamage and Ashill (2023) reported that a decrease in trustworthiness due to commercial orientation reduces followers' willingness to search for information. Therefore, the current result highlights the importance of trustworthiness as the factor reducing consumers' uncertainties regarding the provided by influencers information. The perception of the influencer as being trustworthy motivates consumers to make efforts aimed at acquiring and processing information about the product.

Unlike other characteristics, however, Attractiveness failed to demonstrate any significant impact on information search. The importance of this finding lies in the fact that even though attractiveness has traditionally been considered an important source characteristic in influencer marketing, previous evidence on its effect is rather ambiguous. For instance, Lau *et al*. (2022) mentioned attractiveness as an important dimension of influencers' credibility in luxury fashion. At the same time, P *et al*. (2025) did not find any significant effect of attractiveness on influencer credibility among Indian Gen Z consumers. The lack of a significant relationship in the current study suggests that visual attractiveness or stylistic attractiveness is not enough to motivate information search, which represents a more deliberate action than influencer exposure. This conclusion is particularly relevant for information search as it implies that this kind of action goes beyond passive exposure and requires interacting with the information about the product.

Information Search was found to be significantly influential on Purchase Decision, thus confirming the assumption that information acquisition represents an important step in consumers' movement towards purchasing. This result is consistent with the conclusions reached by Petcharat and Leelasantitham (2021) on the position of information search in online purchase decision making and its contribution to subsequent evaluation activities. Additionally, the current finding aligns with the evidence on the positive association between online search intention and purchase intention (Ngo *et al*., 2024; Xiao *et al*., 2018). It is especially relevant for the Gen Z fashion context in which influencer content can serve both as a persuasive communication and the source of product information.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This paper has contributed to influencer marketing literature in terms of focusing on the influence on the information search stage rather than on the general persuasion of influencers on generation Z fashion choices. The literature has mostly been concentrated on influencers' features in relation to the credibility, attitude and purchase intentions while the current study has proven that the effects of these characteristics are not consistent in the case of information search (Kant *et al*., 2025). Significant influence of attitude towards the influencer, expertise and trustworthiness together with non-significant effect of attractiveness prove that information search of Gen Z is more connected to positive attitude and information credibility than visual attractiveness only.

The significance of the predictor attitude towards the influencer is the confirmation of the previously found evidence that favourable attitude towards fashion influencers influences the consumers' reactions to influencer marketing (Chetioui *et al*., 2020). It proves that attitude is not only evaluative characteristic but also stimulates information search. Likewise, the significant influence of expertise and trustworthiness confirms the previously found evidence that influencers are credible sources of product information (Janssen *et al*., 2021; Ngo *et al*., 2024).

The non-significant effect of attractiveness makes another contribution to the theory because although the visual attractiveness is one of the crucial aspects in the fashion communication, the current results show that visual attractiveness does not necessarily stimulate consumers to conduct further information search. It means that visual characteristics are different from those which stimulate information processing. The finding makes the current fashion influencers research different from the other works which have found that the attitude of generation Z is less influenced by visual attractiveness.

The significant influence of Information Search on Purchase Decision has confirmed the importance of investigating consumer decision-making stages beyond exposure to influencer content. Instead of perceiving influencer marketing as a stimulus for purchase decision making, the current results have shown that information

search is an important stage through which the consumers interact with product information before making purchase decisions.

Practical Implications

Several implications emerge from the findings of the study with regards to fashion brands and fashion influencer marketers in targeting Generation Z consumers. First, the selection of influencers should go beyond mere physical attractiveness and follower count. In view of the fact that attitude towards the influencer emerged as the most powerful predictor of information search, the choice of influencers by brands should give preference to influencers whose favourable attitude and relationship with consumers is established. Such influencers may prove more effective in motivating consumers to look for more information about the promoted products.

Fashion brands should choose influencers who have credible knowledge and expertise with regard to products and fashion in general. Partnerships should encourage influencers to highlight the characteristics, quality, functionality and appropriateness of promoted products, giving explanations as to how the consumers can style and use the products, what makes the products better than others. The positive effects of expertise and trustworthiness indicate the significance of credibility in encouraging further information search.

The fashion brands should protect the influencer trustworthiness by ensuring transparent communication and recommendations that do not conflict with the established identity of the influencer. Influencer credibility is crucial for information search; hence, poorly-aligned endorsements and excessive commercialism may have a negative impact on it. The alignment and authenticity of recommendations should be taken into consideration when selecting partners for cooperation.

Campaigns involving influencers should provide facilitation of moving from information search stage to purchase decisions. Provision of information such as product specifications, customer reviews, comparisons and direct links to purchase products along with the influencers' posts may facilitate the process of making the consumers go from information search to purchase decisions. In view of the fact that attractiveness was found to have no significant impact on information search, fashion brands should combine the credible and relevant information about products with entertaining content provided by influencers in order to improve the effectiveness of influencer campaigns.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations to this study that offer possibilities for future research. Firstly, the present study used purposive sampling and collected data from Generation Z consumers using social media. This made it possible to study the influence of influencer characteristics on the information search and purchase decisions, but the results may not be generalisable to all Generation Z consumers. It would be interesting to use more diverse samples and compare Generation Z consumers with other age groups and study the effect of influencer characteristics on different consumer segments.

The present study concentrated on four influencer-related characteristics, namely attitude towards the influencer, expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. These variables offered some insights into the factors influencing information search, however there are many other characteristics that might affect consumers' behaviour, such as authenticity, alignment between the influencer and product and usefulness of the content. Further research might focus on these factors to get a broader understanding of information search in fashion influencer marketing.

In addition to this, the present study focused on information search as a predictor of purchase decisions. However, there might be considerable differences in how consumers search for and evaluate information from influencers before making purchase decisions. Information quality, risk perception and comparison of alternatives might play a significant role in these processes and future research should consider these issues.

Findings showed that attractiveness had no significant effect on information search in spite of the importance of visuals in fashion marketing. Future research could find out if the same relationships hold true for different types of products or social media platforms and different involvement of consumers in fashion. Comparison studies could be conducted on various social media platforms, for instance Instagram and YouTube in order to see if the effects of influencer characteristics depend on the type of the platform.

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