

Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Brand Relationship of Branded Fashion in SL with Moderating Role of Consumer Innovativeness

Darshana T. Jayasinghe
W.M.C.B. Wanninayake
University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Social media disrupted the communication strategies of organizations globally and brought opportunities for marketers to reach customers effectively. Influencer Marketing (IM) is relatively a new discipline in contemporary marketing to interact and engage with stakeholders in social media. The increasing importance of social media influencers (SMIs) has been acknowledged by marketers and gained attention of the academics. Theory of human brands and theory of attachment contributed marketing domain by supporting to appreciate the relationship of traditional celebrities, consumers and brands. However, SMIs as human brand has not been explored in theories owing researchers to connect new dynamics of SMI marketing into theories and models. Largely fashion brands deploy SMIs to boost their sales and further COVID-19 pandemic drove fashion industry to accelerate use of digital channels to reach customers. As a result, 60% of the fashion industry goes for SMIs campaigns to increase consumer relationship and conversion. However, barely no empirical studies were carried out to signify the impact of SMIs on consumer brand relationship (CBR) and how does consumer innovativeness (CI) moderate the relationship in the context of Sri Lankan branded fashion retail market. Therefore, this study followed a deductive approach to review extant literature and subsequently an empirical study carried out to evaluate the impact of SMIs on CBR with moderating relationship effect of consumer innovativeness (CI) for branded Sri Lankan fashion products. The result of this study contributed to an increased understanding about how branded fashion organizations can use SMIs with the right attributes that match the brand value, which in turn could contribute to increase CBR and to optimize marketing budgets. A cross-sectional quantitative study using an online survey via structured questionnaire in western province of Sri Lanka carried out to gauge results using multiple regression analysis. Findings proved that attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise positively influenced the CBR for branded fashion retail products. Surprisingly, CI did not moderate the relationship between SMI's attributes and CBR. Therefore, this study would facilitate fashion marketers to consider an important attribute of SMIs when choosing rather merely relying on reach, follower base and engagement scores on SMIs.

Keywords: *Branded Fashion Retail, Consumer Brand Relationship, Consumer Innovativeness, Influencer Marketing, Social Media Influencers*