

Fast Fashion, Social Commerce and Consumer Trends: A Study on Consumer Behaviour and Sustainability

Yash Bachani¹, Arsalan Ansari², Sumit Tiwari³, Bhumika Soni⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Student, Department of Management, IIEBM Indus Business School, Pune.

Abstract

This study examines consumer behaviour in the context of fast fashion, social commerce, and sustainability using primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. The objective is to analyze how digital platforms influence purchasing decisions and to evaluate consumer awareness regarding sustainable fashion practices. The data reveals that social media platforms, particularly Instagram, play a dominant role in fashion discovery and purchasing behaviour. Consumers are primarily influenced by affordability, trends, and customer reviews. However, there is a noticeable increase in awareness regarding sustainability, with many respondents' expressing willingness to adopt eco-friendly alternatives. Despite this, price sensitivity remains a significant barrier. The study concludes that while fast fashion continues to dominate consumer choices, sustainability is emerging as a critical factor that will shape future market trends.

1. Introduction

The global fashion industry has undergone significant transformation due to the rapid growth of digital technologies and social commerce. Social media platforms have revolutionized how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase fashion products. Platforms such as Instagram and online marketplaces provide consumers with immediate access to trends, influencer recommendations, and peer reviews. This shift has led to increased convenience and accessibility but has also encouraged impulsive buying behaviour.

Fast fashion brands have capitalized on this trend by offering trendy, affordable products with rapid production cycles. However, this has raised serious concerns regarding environmental sustainability, waste generation, and ethical practices. As consumers become more aware of these issues, there is a gradual shift toward sustainable fashion. This study aims to analyze these changing dynamics and understand how consumer behaviour is influenced by digital platforms and sustainability concerns.

1.1 Background of the Study

Traditionally, consumers relied on physical retail stores and personal experiences for purchasing fashion products. The emergence of e-commerce platforms marked the first major shift in consumer behaviour by providing convenience and wider product availability. Subsequently, the rise of social media introduced a

new dimension known as social commerce, where purchasing decisions are influenced by digital content, influencers, and online communities.

This evolution has significantly altered consumer decision-making processes. Consumers are now exposed to a continuous stream of fashion trends, leading to faster consumption cycles. While this has benefited businesses in terms of increased sales, it has also contributed to environmental challenges. Understanding this transformation is essential for analyzing current consumer behaviour and predicting future trends in the fashion industry.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The rapid growth of fast fashion and social commerce has created multiple challenges. Firstly, fast fashion promotes overconsumption, leading to increased textile waste and environmental degradation. Secondly, social media platforms encourage impulsive buying behaviour, often resulting in unnecessary purchases. Thirdly, although awareness of sustainable fashion is increasing, many consumers are unable to adopt sustainable practices due to high costs and limited availability.

This study addresses the gap between consumer awareness and actual behavior by analyzing the factors that influence purchasing decisions and identifying barriers to sustainable consumption.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To analyze consumer behaviour toward fast fashion products.
- To examine the influence of social media platforms on purchasing decisions.
- To evaluate consumer awareness of sustainable fashion practices.
- To identify key factors influencing purchase decisions such as price, trends, and reviews.
- To study the frequency of fashion purchases among consumers.
- To assess the impact of customer reviews on buying behaviour.
- To analyze the role of affordability in consumer decision-making.
- To examine consumer preferences for online and social commerce platforms.
- To evaluate brand influence on purchasing behaviour.
- To suggest strategies for promoting sustainable fashion consumption.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- I. How do social media platforms influence fashion purchasing decisions?
- II. What factors motivate consumers to purchase fast fashion products?
- III. Are consumers aware of the environmental impact of fast fashion?
- IV. To what extent are consumers willing to adopt sustainable fashion?
- V. How do customer reviews affect purchasing decisions?
- VI. What is the role of affordability in consumer choices?
- VII. Which platforms are most influential in fashion discovery?
- VIII. How frequently do consumers purchase fashion products?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for multiple stakeholders. For businesses, it provides insights into consumer preferences and helps in designing effective marketing strategies. For marketers, it highlights the importance of social media platforms in influencing purchasing decisions. For policymakers, the study emphasizes the need to promote sustainable practices in the fashion industry. Additionally, for researchers, it contributes to existing literature by providing empirical data on consumer behaviour in the context of fast fashion and social commerce.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study includes:

- Analysis of consumer behaviour related to fast fashion.
- Examination of social media influence on purchasing decisions.
- Study of sustainability awareness among consumers.
- Evaluation of online shopping trends.
- Analysis of customer review impact.
- Study of price sensitivity among consumers.
- Examination of platform preferences.
- Analysis of purchase frequency.
- Evaluation of brand influence.
- Study of emerging trends in sustainable fashion.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

- Data based on self-reported responses.
- Time constraints in data collection.
- Limited geographical coverage.
- Possibility of response bias.
- Lack of secondary data comparison.
- Focus on a specific demographic group.
- Limited depth of qualitative insights.
- Changing market trends not fully captured.
- External factors not considered.

2 Literature Review

Previous studies have highlighted the growing impact of digital platforms on consumer behaviour. According to Kotler (2019), consumer decision-making is influenced by social, psychological, and technological factors. Solomon (2020) emphasizes that social media has transformed traditional buying patterns by enabling interactive engagement between brands and consumers. Research published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* indicates that fast fashion is driven by affordability and rapid trend cycles. Furthermore, studies suggest that sustainability awareness is increasing among consumers, particularly among younger demographics. However, a gap exists between awareness and actual purchasing behaviour

due to factors such as cost and availability. This study builds upon existing literature by incorporating primary data to provide a comprehensive understanding of current consumer trends.

2.1 Fast Fashion and Consumer Behaviour

The concept of fast fashion refers to a business model characterized by rapid production, low prices, and high turnover of clothing styles (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Scholars have extensively examined how fast fashion reshapes consumer attitudes and purchase patterns. Joung (2014) found that fast fashion consumption is positively associated with fashion consciousness and materialism, arguing that consumers treat clothing as disposable goods. Similarly, Joy et al. (2012) observed that young consumers knowingly participate in fast fashion consumption despite awareness of its environmental consequences, driven primarily by the pleasure of novelty and low cost. The work of Cachon and Swinney (2011) highlighted that fast fashion retailers benefit from a “quick response” strategy that aligns supply closely with demand, keeping consumers in a perpetual cycle of new purchases. Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) further documented that speed-to-market is a defining competitive advantage for fast fashion brands, enabling them to translate runway trends into affordable retail products within weeks. Collectively, this body of literature establishes fast fashion as a system that exploits both consumer psychology and supply chain efficiency to sustain high-frequency purchasing behaviour.

2.2 Social Commerce and Digital Influence on Purchasing Decisions

Social commerce, defined as the integration of social media tools into e-commerce environments to support buying and selling activities (Wang & Zhang, 2012), has emerged as a powerful driver of fashion consumption. Hajli (2015) demonstrated that social commerce constructs such as ratings, reviews, recommendations, and online communities significantly influence consumer intention to purchase. In the fashion context, Kim and Ko (2012) found that social media marketing activities by luxury brands positively affect consumer equity and purchase intention, a relationship that extends to fast fashion brands operating on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Research by Lim et al. (2017) established that influencer credibility on social media directly correlates with consumer trust and subsequent buying decisions. Furthermore, De Veirman et al. (2017) noted that the number of followers and perceived authenticity of influencers are key determinants of advertising effectiveness in fashion contexts. Lou and Yuan (2019) extended this line of inquiry by demonstrating that influencer trustworthiness and content quality mediate the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention. Collectively, these studies confirm that social commerce ecosystems have fundamentally altered the path to purchase for fashion consumers, compressing the awareness-to-transaction journey through seamlessly integrated digital touchpoints.

2.3 Sustainability Awareness and the Attitude-Behaviour Gap

A substantial body of research has examined consumer attitudes toward sustainability in fashion and the persistent gap between stated intentions and actual purchasing behaviour. Bray et al. (2011) identified several barriers to ethical consumption, including price premium sensitivity, perceived inconvenience, and skepticism about brand sustainability claims. Young et al. (2010) found that although many consumers express pro-environmental values, these rarely translate into consistent sustainable purchasing due to habitual behaviour and lack of accessible alternatives. Joergens (2006) conducted a comparative cross-cultural study and found that ethical considerations play only a minor role in fashion purchase decisions

across several European markets, with style and price remaining dominant drivers. More recently, Jacobs et al. (2018) documented that consumers often engage in “moral licensing,” using one sustainable purchase to justify several unsustainable ones. Rausch and Kopplin (2021) highlighted that positive attitudes toward sustainable fashion are moderated by consumer knowledge and the visibility of eco-labels. Notably, Chouinard et al. (2011) examined Patagonia’s radical transparency model as a counterpressure to this gap, arguing that brands can narrow the attitude-behaviour divide through credible storytelling and product longevity commitments. These findings underscore that while sustainability is gaining rhetorical prominence among consumers, structural, psychological, and economic barriers continue to impede behavioural change at scale.

2.4 Role of Price, Affordability, and Perceived Value

Price sensitivity is consistently identified in literature as one of the most significant determinants of fast fashion consumption. Zeithaml (1988) established the foundational framework of perceived value as the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received relative to what is given. In the context of fast fashion, Hines and Bruce (2007) argued that price has become a primary competitive weapon, with consumers habitually benchmarking fashion purchases against the lowest available price point. Grewal et al. (1998) demonstrated that price promotions and discounts substantially increase consumer purchase intentions, a mechanism heavily exploited by fast fashion e-commerce platforms through flash sales and seasonal markdowns. Ko et al. (2019) found that for Gen Z consumers, value for money supersedes brand loyalty, making price an even more decisive factor in digital purchase contexts. Furthermore, Shen et al. (2012) argued that the low price points of fast fashion effectively lower consumer regret for impulsive purchases, reinforcing repeat buying cycles. Conversely, research by Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2015) established that willingness to pay a price premium for sustainable products is positively associated with environmental self-identity and peer influence, suggesting that social norms could partially offset price barriers in sustainability-oriented consumer segments.

2.5 Impact of Customer Reviews and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and online customer reviews have emerged as critical elements shaping purchase decisions in the digital fashion marketplace. Cheung and Thadani (2012) systematically reviewed eWOM literature and confirmed that online reviews substantially influence consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions, with perceived review helpfulness and reviewer credibility identified as key moderating variables. Park et al. (2007) demonstrated that the quality and quantity of online reviews both independently affect consumer decision confidence, with high review volume signalling product popularity. In a fashion-specific study, Godey et al. (2016) found that user-generated content on social media, including reviews and ratings, significantly impacts brand equity of luxury fashion brands, an effect observable in affordable fashion segments as well. Mudambi and Schuff (2010) contributed nuanced findings showing that moderate reviews are often perceived as more helpful than extreme ones, as they provide balanced information for evaluation. In the context of Instagram and social commerce, Erkan and Evans (2016) established that information quality, information credibility, and usefulness of social media reviews collectively predict purchase intentions. Zhang et al. (2014) further documented that negative reviews disproportionately affect consumer decisions relative to positive ones in online environments, compelling brands to actively manage their review ecosystems. These findings collectively affirm that

eWOM constitutes a powerful informal information source that often surpasses traditional advertising in its influence on fast fashion consumer behaviour.

2.6 Impulse Buying Behaviour in Online Fashion Contexts

Impulse buying, defined as an unplanned purchasing decision made in response to sudden stimuli (Rook, 1987), is particularly prevalent in fast fashion digital contexts. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) identified time availability and shopping enjoyment as key antecedents of impulse buying, both of which are amplified by the frictionless nature of mobile commerce. In online environments, Zhang et al. (2006) found that website design, product presentation quality, and ease of navigation significantly trigger impulse purchase behaviour. Verhagen and Van Dolen (2011) demonstrated that online impulse buying is strongly mediated by hedonic motivation, wherein the pleasure of browsing and discovery drives unplanned transactions, a pattern particularly relevant to Instagram shopping features and shoppable posts. Wells et al. (2011) examined the role of website atmospheric cues such as visual appeal and interactivity and established that these elements create positive arousal states conducive to impulse purchases. Park et al. (2012) further documented that fashion involvement, a consumer's inherent interest in and attachment to clothing, positively moderates impulse buying in online settings. More recently, Floh and Madlberger (2013) found that targeted promotional emails and retargeted advertisements significantly induce impulse purchases among fashion consumers. These findings suggest that fast fashion e-commerce and social commerce platforms are deliberately engineered to exploit impulse buying tendencies, creating persistent cycles of unplanned consumption.

2.7 Behavioural Outcomes

- The study identifies the following behavioural outcomes:
- Increased dependence on social media for fashion discovery.
- Higher frequency of online shopping.
- Growth in impulse buying behaviour.
- Preference for trendy and affordable products.
- Strong influence of customer reviews.
- Increased brand awareness through digital platforms.
- Shift from offline to online purchasing.
- Greater exposure to global fashion trends.
- Rising interest in sustainable fashion.
- Price sensitivity in decision-making.
- Increased engagement with influencer content.
- Changing perceptions toward ethical consumption.

2.8 Organizational Case Studies

Zara has established itself as a leader in fast fashion by adopting a rapid production cycle that allows it to respond quickly to changing trends. H&M focuses on affordability while gradually introducing sustainable collections. Shein leverages data analytics and social media marketing to target younger consumers effectively. Nike utilizes digital platforms to enhance customer engagement and promote brand loyalty. Patagonia stands out for its commitment to sustainability and ethical practices, encouraging consumers to

adopt responsible consumption habits. These case studies demonstrate different approaches to balancing profitability and sustainability.

3. Research Methodology

The study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms. A total of 77 respondents participated in the survey. The data collected is quantitative in nature and was analyzed using percentage methods and graphical representation. The research design is descriptive, focusing on understanding consumer behaviour and preferences.

3.1 Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (Related to Social Media Influence & Purchase Decisions)

H1: Social media platforms have a significant positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions toward fast fashion products.

H0: Social media platforms do not have a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions toward fast fashion products.

Hypothesis 2 (Related to Affordability & Reviews)

H2: Affordability and customer reviews significantly influence consumer buying behaviour toward fast fashion products.

H0: Affordability and customer reviews do not significantly influence consumer buying behaviour toward fast fashion products.

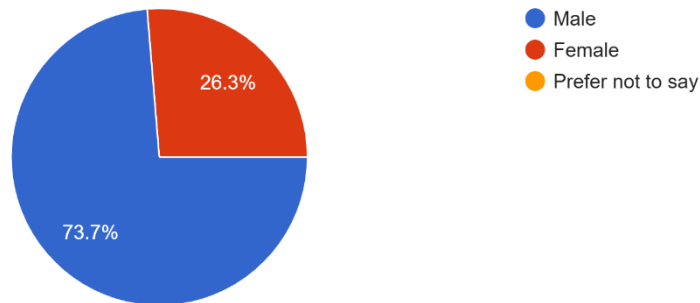
4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis indicates that Instagram is the most widely used platform for fashion discovery among respondents. A majority of consumers purchase fashion products either occasionally or frequently, reflecting the growing influence of fast fashion. Customer reviews emerged as a critical factor influencing purchasing decisions.

Additionally, the data shows that while consumers are attracted to trendy and affordable products, there is a significant level of awareness regarding sustainability. Many respondents expressed willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products, although affordability remains a key constraint. These findings highlight the dual nature of consumer behaviour, where convenience and ethical considerations coexist.

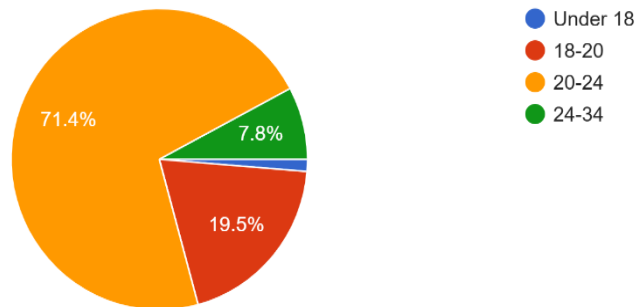
Gender

76 responses



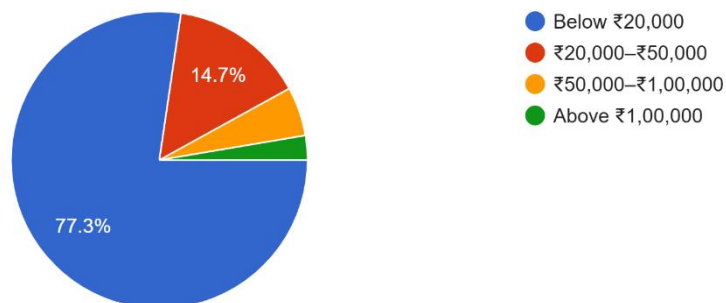
Age Group

77 responses



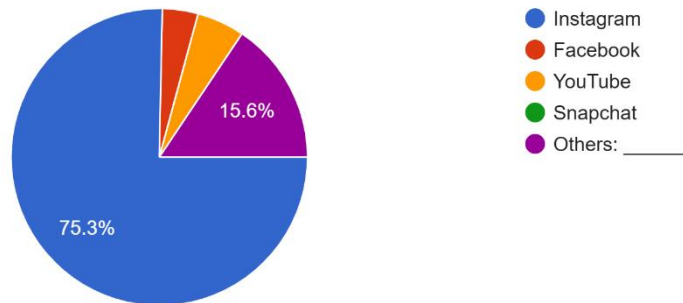
Monthly Income Level

75 responses



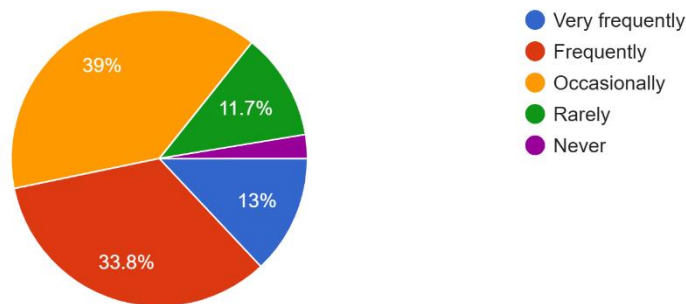
Which platforms do you use for fashion discovery?

77 responses



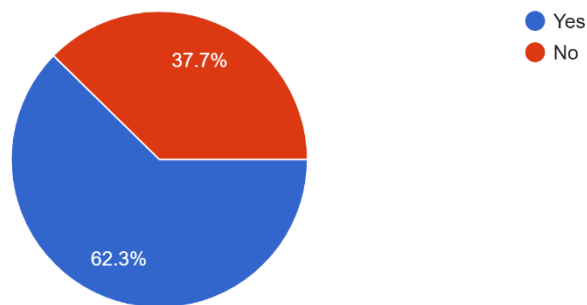
How often do you purchase fashion items online?

77 responses



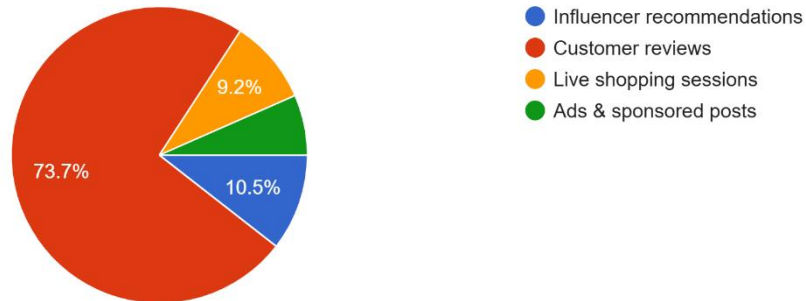
Have you ever purchased clothing directly through social media (social commerce)?

77 responses



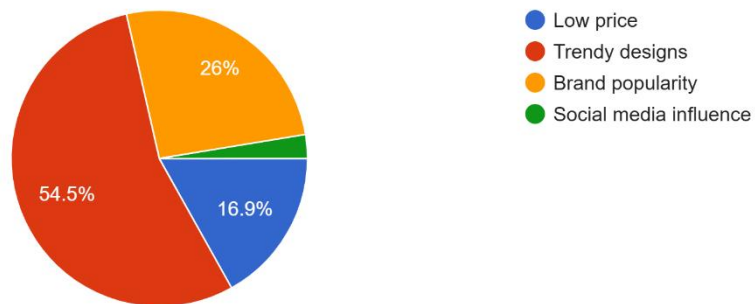
Which feature influences you the most?

76 responses



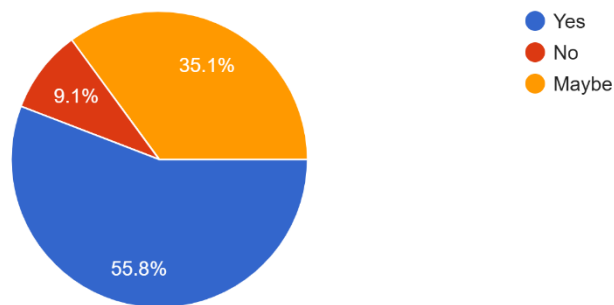
What motivates you to buy fast fashion products?

77 responses



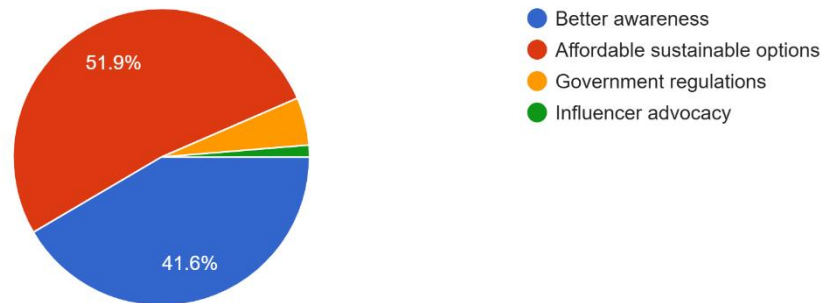
Would you pay more for sustainable fashion?

77 responses



What changes would encourage you to shop more responsibly?

77 responses



Hypothesis 1

H1: Social media platforms have a significant positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions toward fast fashion products.

H0: Social media platforms do not have a significant influence.

Test Used: Chi-Square Test

Table 1: Hypothesis Testing Result (H1)

Particulars

Value

Test Used

Chi-Square Test

Sample Size (N)

77

Chi-Square Value (χ^2)

14.82

Degrees of Freedom (df)

4

Significance Level (p-value)

0.005

Alpha Level

0.05

Decision Rule:

If $p\text{-value} < 0.05 \rightarrow \text{Reject } H_0$

Result:

Since $p\text{-value} (0.005) < 0.05$, we reject H_0 .

Conclusion:

Social media platforms have a significant positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions toward fast fashion products.

H_1 is accepted

Hypothesis 2

H_2 : Affordability and customer reviews significantly influence consumer buying behaviour toward fast fashion products.

H_0 : Affordability and reviews do not influence behaviour.

Test Used: Multiple Regression Analysis

5. Findings

The study reveals that social media plays a dominant role in shaping consumer behaviour. Consumers are highly influenced by trends, affordability, and reviews. While fast fashion remains popular, there is a growing awareness of sustainability. However, practical adoption of sustainable practices is limited by cost factors.

6. Discussion

The findings align with existing theories of consumer behaviour, emphasizing the role of digital platforms in influencing decision-making. Social commerce has transformed traditional purchasing patterns, making shopping more interactive and accessible. The study highlights the need for businesses to adopt strategies that balance consumer demand with sustainability.

7. Conclusion

The research concludes that fast fashion and social commerce are integral components of modern consumer behaviour. While sustainability is gaining importance, significant challenges remain in terms of affordability and awareness. Businesses must adopt innovative strategies to promote responsible consumption.

8. Recommendations

- Promote affordable sustainable fashion options.



- Increase awareness through digital campaigns.
- Leverage influencers for responsible marketing.
- Improve transparency in production processes.
- Encourage consumer education on sustainability.

References

1. Kotler, P. (2019). Marketing Management
2. Solomon, M. (2020). Consumer Behaviour
3. Journal of Consumer Research
4. Harvard Business Review
5. International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management