EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF FASHION LEADERS ON FOLLOWERS' PURCHASING BEHAVIOR: INSIGHTS FROM KESERWAN.

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Abstract

Purpose – This research aims to explore the impact of fashion leaders on followers' shopping frequency in Keserwan, Lebanon. This thesis will study the relationship between celebrity influencers, fashion influencers, in-store fashion employees, demographics and followers' shopping frequency. The purpose is to have those findings become helpful for Lebanese fashion retailers within knowing how to be able to know what items will sell more than others and how to manage inventory as well as reduce loss of profit.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing a deductive approach, this study presents one main research question and quantitatively tests 4 hypotheses using a sample of 320 Lebanese citizens residing in the Keserwan region.

Findings – The findings show that consumers shopping behavior varies according to two demographic factors, income and age. As for the independent variables, celebrity influencers have been found to have the highest causal weight on consumer's shopping behavior, fashion influencers have also been found to be positively correlated with consumer's shopping frequency while as in-store fashion employees have not been found to be correlated with shopping frequency.

Practical implications – The findings provide Lebanese fashion retailers with empirical proof that celebrity influencers, fashion influencers, age and income positively affect consumers' shopping frequency causing them to buy more. This can help Lebanese fashion retailers with trend prediction, by knowing how to follow an efficient marketing strategy with the help of influencers and knowing how to target

their audience's age as well as income levels according to their age. This marketing strategy will help increase the number of sold items of marketed goods allowing retailers to know in advance how many items to purchase of those products.

Theoretical implications – This study acts as predecessor to consumer behavior within the Lebanese market in the fashion design industry, a field that is poorly studied and researched academically. Therefore this study acts as a path to a new research topic where other researchers can deeply assess other factors within the Lebanese fashion market.

Keywords Fashion leaders, fashion follower, celebrity influencers, fashion influencers, shopping frequency.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1- General background about the topic

Throughout time fashion retailers have been able to target their selected market based on many factors such as market demand or need, seasonal trends that are set by a group of decision makers in the fashion industry, direct marketing techniques such as ads and billboards and most recently indirect marketing where fashion consumers get influenced by what leaders or influencers are wearing and wish to imitate their style or even purchase the same products they are wearing. The before mentioned influence on consumers is known as consumer behavior. Consumer behavior is the study of how humans behave and act when it comes to any purchase activity that is either related to goods or services. This study also includes the product or the service's life cycle where the first phase of this cycle is growth; during this phase certain consumers might be uncertain about a new product but this is where influencers convince them otherwise, the next phase in the cycle is where the product reaches maturity; meaning that influencers were able to perform the task they have been assigned and succeeded in increasing the sales of the new product, before finally falling into declination and disposal of the new product while it gets replaced with another new one.

The two main categories that fall under consumer behavior or in this case consumer buying decisions are fashion leaders and fashion followers Some authors argue that fashion leaders are able to influence purchasing decisions that a few consumers make allowing them to be categorized as fashion followers while other authors argue that

some styles are initiated by individuals with no fame or leadership and an average socioeconomic status and have been imitated by more affluent people according to Tortora et al. (2015) this theory is called the 'bottom-up theory'. A different theory that is the opposite of the bottom-up is the 'Trickle-down theory' where styles are initiated by affluent people and imitated by the less affluent, Tortora et al (2015).

Theories such as the Newsvendor and Bass model have also been used by retailers in order for them to better learn about trend prediction, Spragg (2017).

This paper will study the relation between fashion trends and consumer behavior and suggesting practical implications for trend forecasting.

1.2- Need for the study

With all of this fluctuation between followers and leaders, it is quite hard to figure out a way to predict trends in order to forecast sales.

Studies conducted have highlighted the fact that sales forecasting heavily rely on the use of past data of sales in order to be able to predict the possible consumer behaviors in the future, Spragg (2017).

Other techniques that analyze fashion trends try to identify trend forecasts for demand on the long terms, however these techniques have been found to be inaccurate since they require stability throughout seasons and most importantly stability in consumer behavior from year to year or between one season to another. This renders the studies to be inaccurate and ineffective and such techniques cannot be applied within the fashion field.

The ineffectiveness of forecast in the fashion field has led observers to believe that trend forecasting could not be applied in fashion and consequently the fashion industry faces the constant threat of poor inventory management. Usually anticipated inventory does not match the season's demand that was predicted by retailers during their studies, which leads to loss in revenue either due to over stocking that will lead to markdowns, discounts and promotions or under stocking which also leads to loss in potential revenue.

In order for fashion retailers to try to find a solution for the inaccuracy in forecasting have followed different managerial styles that has allowed them to somehow be able to manage forecasting, those managerial styles include lean managerial strategies when it comes to dealing with their suppliers which will allow them to have decreased stock inventory while at the same time having fast replenishment orders when certain stocks are low. This managerial style has allowed retailers to reduce their risk of loss in revenue. However, manufactures are still required to be able to obtain a more accurate trend forecasting method in order to be aware as to how much raw materials they will be needing in order to manufacture the required demand and most importantly to reduce as much as possible the lead time delivery system.

As stated above, knowing or predicting the number of sales for a certain product is quite a difficult task when it comes to fashion due to multiple reasons and the fact of having so many uncertainties such as knowing who is the leader and who is the follower, what are the trends, who are the influencers, what motivates people to buy, how does age affect buying decisions and so multiple other reasons adds a lot of uncertainty and leaves many questions unanswered.

The need for this study is to help retailers and marketers have a better understanding of Lebanese consumers and possibly Lebanese consumer psychology in order to know how to better target their audience.

1.3- Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study has two natures, the first purpose is for the findings to be beneficial for fashion retailers; these finding will be able to assist retailers with trend forecasting. Trend forecasting in the fashion field is a key aspect that should be well studies since it does affect stock management. The proper trend forecast can help decrease the risk of either overstocking or under stocking, both of which are indicator of revenue loss in management. The purpose is also, to prove that consumer-buying decision is linked to sales forecasting and that age is linked to consumer buying decision.

1.4- Brief overview of all chapters

This thesis contains five chapters; each chapter is detailed in the following manner:

Chapter two: discusses different aspects of the field such as knowing the difference between fashion leaders and followers, who influences fashion leaders, where do trends come from and many other aspects.

Chapter two also discussed previous studies that have done within the field.

Chapter three: talks about the methodology of the study. The epistemology of this research will follow a positivist approach since it involves hypothesis generation and testing while separating reality from knowledge since so far, one might have the knowledge or assume that the majority of Lebanese consumers are followers but since it has not yet been proven it cannot be considered as a reality. Therefore deductive reasoning will be used throughout this study starting with the general consumer behavior understanding to the specific factors that influence consumer behavior.

The principle of positivism relies on quantifiable observations that allow themselves to statistical analysis therefore; the strategy that will be followed during this study is quantitative through a survey using the method of a questionnaire.

Sample size is targeted towards 329 of Lebanese residents in Mount Lebanon. Although younger residents might not have the finances to support their purchasing behavior but they are old enough to choose what they want to buy.

Sample size is 329 residents of both sexes, Females and Males; all different statuses (married, single…) and from different occupational fields (employee, employer, free lancer…).

Chapter four: Is about the analysis of the gathered data statistics, this is where the Y and X variables have been chosen and tested to see if there is a positive or negative correlation through variation analysis.

The Y is shopping frequency where the X variables are: Fashion influencers, celebrity fashion leaders and in-store fashion employees.

Chapter five: Discussed the results of chapter four and included the practical implications that can be given to fashion retailers in order to help them with trend prediction and discusses the limitations of the study.

1.5- Conclusion

This chapter discusses the purpose and need of the study. The purpose is for the findings to be beneficial for fashion retailers; which should help them with trend forecasting within the fashion industry so they you be able to minimize as much as possible the risk of either overstocking or under stocking.

The need for this study is to help retailers and marketers have a better understanding of Lebanese consumers and possibly Lebanese consumer psychology in order to know how to better target their audience.

The following chapter will discuss previous literature and studies conducted in the fashion consumer field.

Chapter 2 – Review of literature

2.1- State of knowledge in the area of interest

In the first part of chapter 2 we are going to review different approaches in the area of this research starting with defining and discussing previous authors work about; consumer behavior, types of consumers, social media and trend forecasting.

2.1.1- Definition of consumer behavior

Consumer behavior is the study of people's purchase activities, use of purchased products and also the disposal of the product. The study also includes the mental as well as emotional state of the consumer. Consumer behavior first appeared during the 1940's and 1950's as part of strategies related to marketing, it covers different subjects such as the consumer's psychological processes that allows the person to recognize his or her needs, find a solution in order to fulfill those needs and finally making a purchase decision, Howard (1977).

Hoyer et al. (2010) identifies consumer behavior as a totality of consumer decisions in regards to the act of acquiring, consuming and disposition of goods or services through decision-making.

It is clear that consumer behavior often includes decisions within a retail environment that serves as a boundary of frames its conditions. Since the definition of human behavior states, the scope of consumer behavior is extensive and the components of these issues are reflective of that breadth. For example; the ethnographic investigation

of a retail brand and studies of how time and money affect each consumer differently, Hardesty et al. (2009).

Previous consumer behavior literature reports wide studies and research about how consumers process information and how those processes impact research, Moorthy et al. (1997). Monga et al. (2009), study the effect of how time vs. money control the link between the search for the right cost, the search for the right benefits and consumer's willingness to search for both. The study contains important implications for retailers and shows their attempt to attract consumers in either retail or online environments. They indicate that consumer's willingness to search is not affected by changes in costs and results in spending time rather than money. Burton et al. (2009) study the accuracy of consumer estimates regarding sodium, calorie and fact contents of fast food, which is a large retail industry, and conclude that nutritional information influences product choice and the results demonstrate the effects expectations when nutritional information is provided.

2.1.2- Compensatory consumer behavior

The human psyche constantly tries to maintain stable levels of psychological assets related to the self, such as self-esteem, belongingness, feelings of power, and feelings of control that are present in a person's environment. During this self-regulation process, individuals monitor the distance or the gap between their present state or who they currently are and a goal state or what they ideally like to become.

Compensatory consumer behavior begins when a person perceives the gap between their ideal self and actual self; this gap is also identified as self-discrepancy. For

example, if a student fails an exam he or she might see themselves as unintelligent thus experiencing a gap or self-discrepancy between how they perceive themselves now as unintelligent and how to wish to see themselves in the future as intelligent. Normally, an occurring event is what causes a self-discrepancy to occur, such as failing an exam or that drives an existing self-discrepancy to re-appear.

Self-discrepancies have several important features; they include a variety of domains such as intelligence, sense of power, or affiliation. Second, they usually are psychologically averse. Third, due to their aversive nature, people are impelled to apply self-regulation efforts in order to restore their desired state. These self-regulation efforts can be translated in different forms of consumer behavior. If consumer behavior that works towards removing this self-discrepancy is successful in, it will then reduce the psychological discomfort created by the discrepancy. Figure 1 discussed this process.

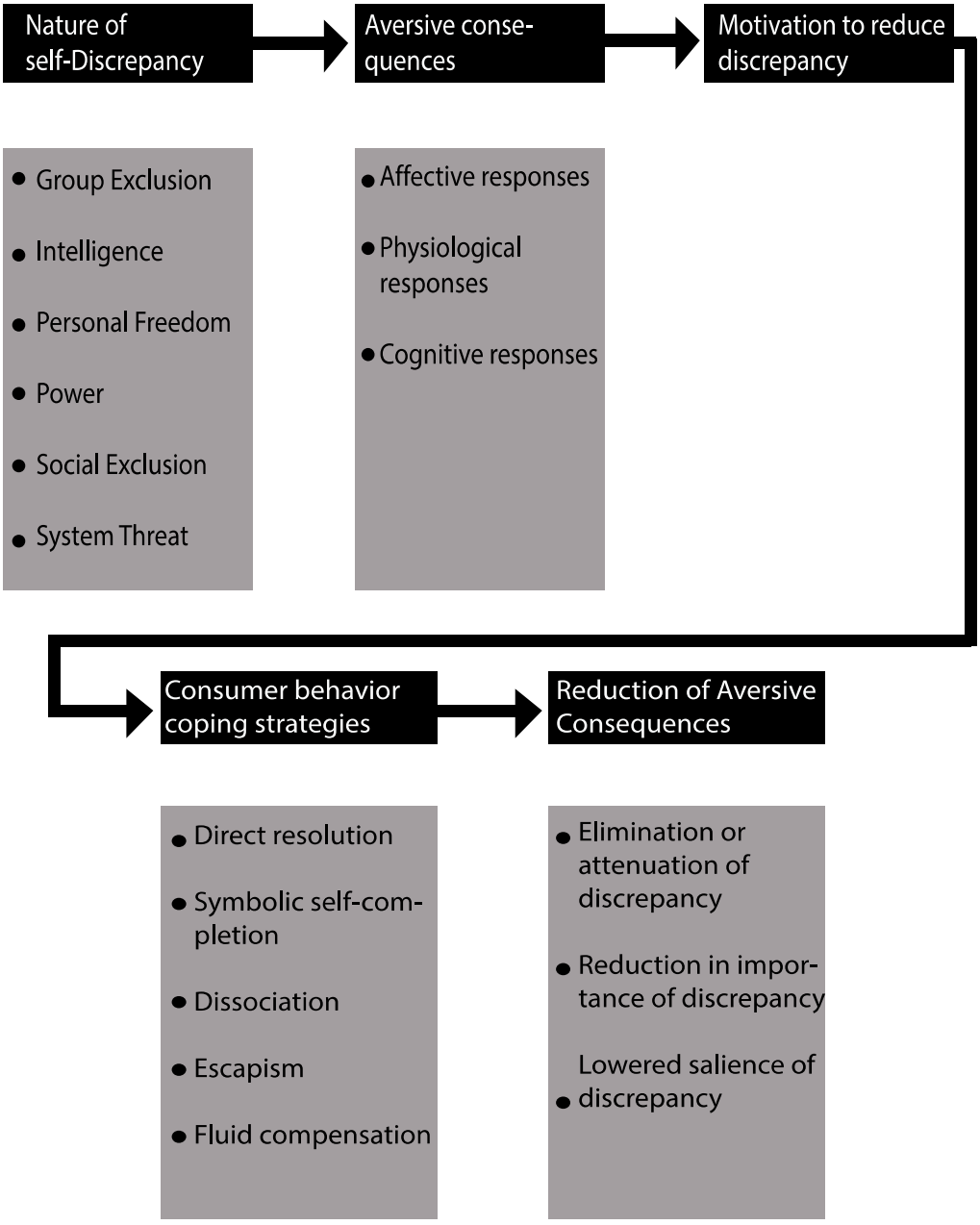

Figure 1- The five steps of self-discrepancies

Source: (The 5 steps of self self-discrepancy, Mandel 2016).

Once a self-discrepancy is present, it can produce affective, physiological, or cognitive consequences (second column in figure 2.1) that will push people to resolve the discrepancy. The desire to resolve the discrepancy can affect consumer behavior in 5 different ways: direct resolution, symbolic self-completion, dissociation, escapism and fluid compensation. At the final sage of figure 1, consumer behavior will have the potential to reduce self-discrepancy.

The experience of self-discrepancy causes psychological pain and results in negative emotions such as disappointment and dissatisfaction which will in turn produce emotional reaction such as embarrassment or guilt eventually leading to compensatory strategies.

The fact that self-discrepancies stimulate negative emotions is reason enough to drive individuals into reducing them using compensatory consumer behavior, Mandel (2016).

2.1.3- Types of consumers and Gender based consumers

A study conducted by Zheng et al. (2013) highlighted the fact that in order for people to be recognized by society and in order for them to conform to society's set norms and means, consumers have been categorized into two main categories the first being the elites or the leaders and the second category are the masses or the followers.
The elites or the fashion leaders are more fashion oriented and would like to be distinguished or they would like to separate themselves from the masses or fashion followers by their way they dress and sense of style, while the masses or the fashion

followers copy or imitate the styles of the elites. Zheng then moves on to explain more about the nature of both categories, stating that the elites or fashion leaders control and lead the fashion trends while as the masses or fashion followers follow the actions of the leaders. This facts has the result of having interdependent demand meaning that the demand of fashion leaders and followers are linked and the demand of followers is a consequence to the demand of the leaders.

A study conducted by Ying-Feng et al. (2013), showed that online female shoppers outnumber online male shoppers since the population of employed women has been growing as well as the tendency to shop online since women no longer have the time to do that, Ministry of economic affair (2009). A study by Popcorn et al. (2000) suggests that women make 80% of the shopping decisions. While online shopping for female targeted products like make up, fashion apparel and accessories are leading the charts and becoming more frequent and higher in numbers, Business next (2008).

2.1.4- Fashion change agents (leaders) and fashion followers

a- Fashion influencers' effect on fashion leaders and followers as well as on their shopping frequency

According to Goldsmith (2000), fashion innovativeness is identified by a person's willingness to adopt new fashion products earlier than other consumers within a society. Consumers with high fashion innovativeness amount to a small segment of the market but are the spark or reason behind the mass adoption of certain products or even brands, Goldsmith et al. (1992).

Fashion innovators tend to purchase new fashion products sooner than other consumer groups even if the purchase might involve higher risk, Beaudoin et al. (2006).
Opinion leadership is about consumers that learn from the mass media, as well as form opinions from the media and are able to influence other consumer's decisions from the two-step flow theory.

The two-step flow theory concludes that consumers are not directly influenced by mass media but are rather influenced by opinion leaders who have a better understanding of what social media does and what messages it delivers. Opinion leaders are hence individuals that influence the decision of consumers within their social circle, Brannon E. L. (2010).

According to Workman at al. (1993), fashion consumer groups have four categories: fashion innovators, innovative communicators, fashion opinion leaders and fashion followers. The first three aforementioned groups can be considered of the same nature which is fashion leader leaving us with basically two groups, fashion leaders or fashion change agents and fashion followers.

Fashion change agents tend to possess innovation, knowledge and interest in fashion they tend to spread new fashion trends within their social groups. They also seem to have a high need for change, they enjoy to shop and spend more money on fashion apparel than non fashion change agents or fashion followers, Cho et al. (2015).

Fashion opinion leaders enjoy adventure and seek excitement while shopping, it is common for them to have a great need for stimulation and seek high levels of

sensation and experiences. They tend to use multi-channels for search of the newest trends to shop. The most notable search channel used is social media, Cho et al. (2011).

b-Fashion change agents (leaders) and fashion followers within an age group

Overall, fashion change agents or fashion leaders that have high innovativeness and of course a strong opinion are different than fashion followers in the adoption of the latest fashion trends and consumption. According to Baker et al. (2019), it was assumed that fashion consumers that fall in a certain age category of teenage groups are segmented into fashion change agents and fashion followers; it was also assumed that fashion change agents in the 'tween' consumer group is leading the tween consumer market, Baker et al. (2019).

2.1.5- Quick response strategies in the fashion industry that increase shopping frequency

a- Quick response and enhanced design strategies that change consumer behavior into buying more

Firms in the fashion apparel industry such as Zara, H&M, and Benetton have been applying the fast fashion model for quite some time. Fast fashion focuses on two main aspects; short production and distribution lead-time and a trendy or fashionable product design also referred to as enhanced design techniques.

Short lead-time is based on local production that allows frequent and easier replenishment as well as inventory; while as trendy product design is established by carefully monitoring consumer demands for unexpected trends but has higher cost of production due to its larger employee base as well as a different production line.

Quick response strategies are plans that retailers follow in order to influence consumer behavior; it works by matching demand with fast supply and reducing the frequency and intensity of end-of-season sales and clearances. These strategies have proven to yield significant profits to businesses.

However, designing trendy and fashionable apparel has received less attention than quick response strategies due to its higher price margins that are caused by fast changes in product design.

Meanwhile, fashion firms are investing in design and in producing trendier products without reducing lead-time since it faces many challenges and difficulties such as constant redesigning the supply network, Cachon et al. (2020).

In the paper of Cachon G. et al. (2020), they develop a framework that focuses on the value of quick design strategies and enhanced design strategies. They conclude that enhanced design strategies are of great value to consumers and add that consumers are willing to pay high prices for such products. Hence, firm's willingness to exploit this fact and charge higher prices on those trendy or fashionable garments while maintaining lower prices on conservative products.

Quick response strategies reduces chances of having the same inventory available during clearance period while as enhanced product design offers customers fashionable and trendy products of higher value which makes them willing less and less to wait for clearance period. Therefore both strategies have been effective in changing consumer behavior since they focus on product availability and value Cachon et al. (2020).

b- Not all brands follow quick response strategies

The see-now buy-now has been expected to flatten the seasonal peaks in the fashion industry through the launching of cruise collections and trans-seasonality collections as well. For instance, in 2016, the fashion house of luxury consumer goods Burberry launched its 'straight-to-consumer' collection since it was created in order to have a season-less fashion calendar, even though it broke all the rules at the London Fashion Week, Brown (2016) and Rodulfo K. (2016). However, data and analytics propose that fashion is always seasonal and impacted by seasonal trends. This is probably because of the see-now, buy-now trend that is unsuccessful in becoming an industry standard especially after some of the early adopters such as Tom Ford found that it did not produce the desired results but instead has backfired, and such as the Kering Group that has also shown resistance towards the see now buy now strategy, Reuters (2018).

2.1.6- The impact of social media on the fashion industry

Amidst the 2008 financial meltdown, retailers were facing a two-factor dilemma that is one part economic and one part psychographic; they were wondering how they would be able to convince upper class customers to purchase fashion items even when the wealthy were cutting back? How to be able to plan for the new collection in stores such as Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus and Sacks Fifth Avenue when sales are drawing back? The crisis has even reached Paris at the time, where all retailers were very cautious about the situation. Retailers had to inform designers that they would have to delay their orders and even reduce them in size.

Consequently; a large number of designers developed new marketing strategies in order to attract customer's attention.

That strategy was creating social media accounts that would attract consumer's attention and make them feel closer to the brand and helped them identify and match their character to the brand's character. A phenomenon that later helped gain loyal customers but at the same time allowed economically conscious customers pay high prices for their purchases, Mohr (2013).

2.1.7- Social Media & Quick response strategy

In previously stated work by Cachon at al. (2020), quick response was identified by two factors, faster lead time and enhanced product design while as Choi (2018) identifies quick response strategies by shortening lead time and usage of data to improve demand forecast that will allow good inventory planning. Choi then states that those strategies are being implement heavily for supply chain management and

that even if this strategy has been introduced to the industry in the last decades; it is still a very important and timely supply chain management system.

Fashion retailers are currently using big data to operate, Chan et al. (2016) such as cloud computing, enterprise systems, business analytics applications, mobile technologies and product tracking technologies have revolutionized the way fashion retailers operate. Such as Sears; that has heavily invested in big data technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and many others to observe comments from consumers on those platforms which will in turn affect fashion retailers towards future market demands, Choi (2018).

With large quantities of data being available on social media platforms, the technical term "social media analytic" surfaces and it is affecting business operations. Abedi et al. (2014) launched a study on how word to mouth through social media platforms is able to support new product being launched into the market, the study then introduces an analytical model to develop marketing strategies that work along side the 'word to mouth' phenomenon.

2.1.8- Importance of In-Store fashion employees

In-store employees are a very important aspect in building and maintaining lasting and profitable relationships with customers, Xie et al. (2016). When it comes to the luxury fashion industry, it is very significant to create a connection between the sales person and customer since luxurious brand environment require high involvement as well as services such as customization and customers would be willing to pay high prices for such services, Kim et al. (2014). Therefore, sales people for such luxury

brands should develop rapport-building behavior in order to create a connection with their customers, Sresnewsky et al. (2020).

Previous research defined rapport as an interaction that is both enjoyable and harmonious between two or more participants that would result from a certain connection and understanding, Kaski et al. (2018).

2.1.9- The five phases of in-store employees rapport with customers

The rapport that is built between customers and sales people is described by Nickels et al. (1983), as the following:

1- First interaction between customer and salesperson
2- Behavior adjustment from salesperson after receiving cues from customer
3- The customer will feel confortable with the salesperson after the behavior adjustment
4- The salesperson would then have a better and deeper understanding of the customer's needs and wants
5- Salesperson would offer the customer products of his/her certain needs
6- Customer makes purchases, he/she is satisfied and valued the interaction with the salesperson

Building a rapport with customers in extremely important in the service industry mostly due to the characteristic or services and their relational aspect, Macintosh (2009). When salespeople establish this rapport with their customers, feelings of trust will occur between the two, Macintosh (2009).

The importance of this trust falls on two reasons, the first being that rapport-building are the reason why trust is built during this exploration phase of a relationship,

Campbell et al. (2006). Second, when trust is built salespeople will be on their way to building customer satisfaction and eventually customer loyalty, great referrals and most importantly successful sales and an increase in sales, Nickels et al. (1983), Hyun et al. (2014), Kim et al. (2014), Kaski et al. (2018).

2.1.10- History of trend forecasting

The use of trends is an integral part of forecasting market demand and many methods as well as tools have been used in order to improve the accuracy of demand forecasts, Bermudez et al. (2006).

Trend forecasting's importance grew until it became a very integral part of supply chain management, it was used to project demand either directly or indirectly through projecting its sources, Wheelwright et al. (1985). However, trend forecasting does ignore its impact on systems whose structure is not often recognized leading to creating variability in its performance, Van Vught (1987).

The increase use of demand forecasts in supply chain management has also increased the bullwhip effect, which exhibits increases in inventory cycles as one moves farther from demand in the supply chain. The bullwhip effect will result in tremendous inefficiencies in inventory management and investment, poor customer service, loss in revenues and misguided capacity planning. A clear and definite guideline for the efficient use of trend forecasting does not exist and it is used in order to improve the performance of the supply chain, Lee et al. (1997). In today's new age technology and software support, trend forecasting continues to be used without focus on problem solving, Saeed (2008).

2.1.11- Importance of trend forecasting

During the 1970s, trend forecasting played the role in turning a threatening future into an opportunistic one first by breaking down the barriers between firms and the cultures in which they existed, and also by allowing the trend to become a window through which to see the future of that culture prematurely. In the following two decades, Newsweek would describe trend forecasting among the decade's most popular missions, they even indicated that it had become too popular and was therefore due for a retrenchment. During this period, relentless unpredictability had not only become a major part in American life, but had become a basic element or almost a necessity of business operations, Powers (2018).

Forecasting the future appeared to put an end to this instability, but it in fact accentuated it, in part by categorizing it, naming it, and repeatedly reintroducing it back into the culture, Powers (2018).

It is a matter that should sound familiar to us today, as trends sear at high speed through our social media platforms while our statistical analytics aim to interpret its signals. Early trend forecasters predicted this development as they analyzed and decoded information flows, translated definitions out of given signs and projected recommendations about what actions companies should take tomorrow. Accuracy and inaccuracy are thus the wrong measures to use when considering trend forecasters' projections, trend forecasters neither predicted the future nor created instead, they brought the future into being, Powers (2018).

2.2- Previous research

In the second part of chapter 2 we are going to review previous work of different researchers that were studied starting with discussing previous authors work about; fashion design, consumers, brands and age's effect on fashion.

2.2.1- Theories in Fashion design; the origin of fashion trends

In Survey of historic costume, Tortora et al. (2015) could not identify why fashions change and it has been a matter of debate among scholars.

One of the common theories behind the change in fashion trends and styles is the 'trickle-down theory', which suggests that the styles first originate within the upper class society and then those styles would later be copied by the lower class society hence its name; trickle-down. Once the upper classes noticed that their originally initiated styles are being copied by the lower classes – whom they look down at – they initiate new styles and the cycle will begin again.

On the other hand, during the 1960's, some trending and stylish wear seemed to have originated not from the upper classes but from the lower classes this time, people that are less affluent and have formed style tribes or subcultures such as the mods in England and the hippies in the United States. Scholars have labeled this fact the 'Bottom-Up Theory' that is the opposite of the trickle-down.

Throughout the 70's, 80's and 90's, both theories could be clearly seen. Fashion consumers spanned from billionaires that became patron of luxury designers to passionate rock fans who imitated the styles of their favorite singers, and the fashion industry tried to please them all.

The two existing world could clearly not stay entirely separated, French couture designers such as Gautier and some of the Japanese designers like Kenzo that started out in Paris drew their inspiration from London street fashion.

2.2.2- Fashion celebrities' influence on fashion

Tortora et al. (2015) also discussed the influence of social elites and political leaders on fashion trends, adding that ever since centuries, members of royal families have always influenced fashion trends and those individuals had always the attention of the public, especially when romance was involved in their lives.

In 1981, when Prince Charles of England married Princess Diana Spencer of Whales, their wedding was the talk of the decade and her wedding dress was the center of attention. Her dress became the number one best seller in imitator bridal gowns and fashion critics, historians and commentators kept on running commentary about her daily styles and the way she dressed throughout the 1980's and 90's.

In the 1986 wedding of British Prince Andrew to Sarah Ferguson, the bride's dress featured a back fullness that was not trending at the time. But since their marriage also created a wide talk, this style was revived and came back into fashion.

In 1980, and during Ronald Reagan's presidency in the United States, the white house provided a stage to display fashions during social activities. Following in the footsteps of Mrs. Kennedy, Nancy Reagan was scrutinized for the amount of money she spent on clothing.

In 1994, after the passing of first lady Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy, the styles that have been related to her underwent a revival, this was due to the auction of her personal items from her estate in April 1996. The Kennedy's have always had the attention of the media and of the public and this was the fact when Carolyn Bessette married John F. Kennedy Jr. in September 1996, when her weeding dress because an instant success and also became a large fashion influence on bridal gowns during the 90's and even early 2000's.

2.2.3- The effect of socioeconomic status on fashion consumers

In a paper written by Galak et al. (2016) sartorial or fashion consumers that exist within a society, will conform to society's accepted fashion norms no matter what the circumstances are.

Once those consumers move their socioeconomic status upwards, they will begin to accept and conform to the approved fashion norms of society even more. Those consumers would then shift from being fashion followers to being fashion leaders.

While as, mid ranked fashion consumers that are placed among the middle of the socioeconomic ladder usually use self-expression as a mea instead of simply conforming to society's fashion accepted norms.

All of the above are indicators that the fashion norms of the rich will eventually trickle down to the lower classes since they are looking to conform to society's accepted norms and since lower masses always aspire to become one of those 'elites'.

2.2.4- Consumers living in a collectivist society that are influenced by celebrities

A study conducted by Loureiro et al., (2017) stated when consumers exist within a society labeled as 'collectivist society' - which is a society that emphasizes making choices as a whole instead of individual choices – they tend to make their decisions based on the opinions of those close to them such as family members and friends. It is also more common that people living in such a society are majorly and mainly influenced by famous celebrities such as actors, singers, models, designers, politicians, TV hosts or news anchors whose style appeals to them.

Strategically, brand management should invest more in social media platforms and digital media or create collaborations with different celebrities. Such strategies include paid partnerships with famous super models like the collaboration between Gigi Hadid with Adidas or even the different collaborations between international mass production brand H&M with Versace, Martin Margiela, Anna Dello Russo and many more and focus less on traditional television advertisement.

2.2.5- Fashion influencers instead of celebrity influencers

A study by Martensen et al., (2018) stated that the preferred choice between fashion celebrities and fashion influencers, are fashion influencers that are more reachable and attainable since celebrities exhilarate high status and have an unreachable

approach or feel which would in return make consumers feel less comfortable. This process would in fact lessen the reach of celebrities with fashion consumers and highlight the importance of the influence of fashion influencers – people that are not famous or celebrities - on consumer buying choices.

Martensen then adds that there are two important factors for choosing a fashion influencer, the candidate should have a large number of followers on their social media account and those followers should in fact feel that their lifestyle and choices are related to those of that influencer; this way they would feel comfortable enough with this influencer and a sort of bond or trust will form which will increase the influence on followers.

Lastly the fashion influencer should share personal content about their daily life, routine, likes/dislikes and even struggles that employs storytelling since it will increase persuasiveness and help create a strong bond between them and their followers.

2.2.6- Gossiping as means to spread fashion trends

A paper written by Lee et al., (2013) mentioned that there are other methods to the spread of fashion such as gossip that leads to self-monitoring that studies the impact of gossip between fashion consumer goods in relation to self-monitoring; a fact that might make consumers aware of what their surroundings think of them which will in turn make them monitor their own behavior. Among the methods mentioned by Lee et al., (2013) is another one that is quite known, word of mouth that is known to be of the main channels of the spread of fashion.

The questionnaire used for the study included scales to measure the following: tendency to gossip, self-monitoring, fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership.

When compared with fashion followers, fashion change agents or leaders had a high score on tendency to gossip, self-monitoring, and on tendency to express themselves to others. The research was able to prove that tendency to gossip and self-monitoring were positively correlated.

2.2.7- Luxury fashion brands as trend leaders

So far, both the trickle down and bottom up theories as well as fashion leaders and fashion follower groups have been studied with fashion consumers but have not been studies or tested with fashion brands.

In the fashion branding and consumer behaviors book written by Choi (2014), luxury fashion brand are responsible for the trending fashion garments of the season and they are the ones that help develop the most important and best fashion products in the market making them the main fashion leaders. This fact has contributed to the birth of imitator fashion brands that produce in masses for lowers prices. The book discussed luxury fashion houses such as Burberry and Gucci as one of the most prominent and recognized luxury brands that have implemented different managerial strategies in order to revive and give the brand and new and up-to-date profile that had allowed them to become contemporary, young and trending classifying them as trend setters in the market.

Consequently, fast fashion retailers such as Zara, H&M and many others are considered to be the imitators of high end and luxurious brands. These brands follow a unique and fast supply chain replenishment system as well as offering consumers

the most trending brands right off the runway for very affordable prices, a fact that allowed them to grow into an international chain.

2.2.8- Product life cycle; In-store fashion employees encouraging the fast fashion model

In a paper written by Spragg (2017) the four stages of a product life cycles are: introduction, growth, maturity and finally decline.

Within the introduction phase lies the highest level of uncertainty since the product being launched is new to the market and the sales of this product might be either high or low but most importantly the dangerous aspect is that demand is quite low at this phase since consumers have not yet seen this product before and might not like its style.

The second phase of the product's life cycle is growth. After phase one or the introduction of a new product, consumers might like the product hence the demand for it will increase consequently increasing revenue as well. The most important aspect during this phase is to have a strong supply chain management in order to maintain a high supply flow to the retailer in a timely fashion.

The third phase is maturity; this is where the product has reached its highest point in revenue-generated sales. How long will this phase last depend on how much the consumer's are still demanding this product.

This period can be prolonged by marketing efforts, celebrity endorsement (influencers) and the effect of in-store sales people on customers by highlighting the importance of the product and that it aligns with the current trend of the season.

Weather conditions, income of targeted consumers, speed and ability to produce the products by manufacturers and fast supply chain management are all factors that can help prolong this phase.

The fourth and last phase is the declination phase, it is where consumers no longer are demanding the product or are simply bored of it and sometimes it is due to the fact of having a new product launched that has replaced the existing one.

This phase can happen either overnight or all of a sudden or it can the course of a longer period of time. In order for retailers to have some assistance or help within this decline and how sharp of a decline it might be, they need to use their past experiences to help them anticipate such a decline.

2.2.9- Fast Fashion; leading the way to higher shopping frequency

Choi et al., (2014) stated in a paper that fast fashion is a retail management style that is highly practiced in fashion retailing.

The key highlight of fast fashion is to deliver 'right off the run way' looks to consumers in a fast manner with low and affordable prices. This concept is repeated at the end of every fashion show that is exhibited by high-end luxury brands and usually its lead-time is within two to three weeks after the runway looks have been exhibited during fashion week.

Fashion retail brands like Zara, Top Shop and H&M are applying the fast fashion model ever since it first started during the 90's. The success behind Zara has been the

implementation of the two week supply chain management where the product's design, manufacturing distribution and in-store display for it to be ready to be sold all occur within those two weeks. This fast fashion cycle has been the main contributor to Zara's international success.

2.2.10- Mass production brands being leaders within social media

So far, the main topic was about having fast fashion retailers that produce in bulk or mass following the lead of luxury brands and the success of Zara was one example to be taken into consideration while discussing this theory but this is not the case in a paper written by Ramadan et al., (2018) that argues differently. The paper talks about how luxury brands have followed in the footsteps of mass production brands when it was concerning social media. At first luxury brands did not find social media accounts to be aligned with their exclusivity but once they have studied the impact it has created on mass production brands, they soon followed their example.

At first, luxury brands were unsure of having exposure on social media since they mainly promote and extremely highlight the fact that they are exclusive brands and not everyone can reach out to them a fact that separates them from other mass production brands. The fact that mass production brands have high exposure on social media has also discouraged them at first as well.

Having perceived their products and image to be accessible for royalty, influencer leader, political leaders, rich members and society's elites these luxury brands did not accept the social media trend, however they are facing a lot of challenges when it

comes to social networking since they are still trying to preserve their exclusivity which is their distinctive characteristic.

2.2.11- The use of brand collaborations to increase shopping frequency

In the book titled 'fashion branding and consumer behavior' by Choi (2014), Choi speaks a new strategy that has been used by luxury fashion brands in order to grow their targeted markets beyond their already existing niche market, this strategy is brand collaboration.

Brand collaboration is when a luxury brand creates a partnership with a mass production brand and designs a limited time collection by the mass production brand with the brand name of the luxury brand. The products would be sold with affordable prices for the mass production market. Previous collaborations such as the one between H&M and luxury designer brands like Karl Lagerfeld, Madonna, Roberto Cavalli, Lanvin, Stella McCartney, Jimmy Choo, Marni, Viktor & Rolf, Comme des Garcons, and Versace have created a sharp increase of H&M's sales in such short periods of time and have paved the way for other collaborations.

Fashion consumers would stand in line the night before the collection launching so they would have the chance to buy designer garments but with an affordable price, in the case of Marni for H&M the entire collection was sold out by lunchtime on the first day of the launching in London.

It was thanks to this collaboration that the brand image of fast fashion brands has increased alongside its equity while on the other hand the luxury fashion brands have benefited from such collaborations which was the case with Lavin, where it has gained a wider audience and new liking after having been labeled as an old fashioned brand. Such a collaboration or co-branding has shown a substantial marketing response as it created a beneficial situation for both brands.

2.2.12- Similarities between fashion followers and leaders

The identification of who follows whom and who can be categorized as a follower or a leader has become quite blurry. In a paper written by Collinson (2006) the author argues that post-structuralist perspectives believe that the identities of both leaders and follower are somehow linked adding that the identities are a condition of one another. Meaning that not only do leaders affect followers' identities but also followers might affect leaders identities. The view of post-structuralist focuses on the idea that follower and leader identities are inseparable and that authors and researchers should not only concentrate on followers.

2.2.13- The ineffectiveness of forecast in the Fashion field

With the uncertainty of who follows whom and who is classified as fashion follower or fashion leader it have become even more difficult to predict trends in order to forecast sales. In a paper written by Spragg (2017), it was mentioned that in order to help with sales forecasting, retailers or manufacturers can use data of previous sales to help with prediction of future consumer behaviors as well.

Different analytical techniques such as regression and correlations try to define trend forecasts that are supposed to be long term, however the latter require stable demand levels across seasons and would have to assume that consumer behavior is consistent from one season to another, which could not be the case within the fashion industry.

Since trend forecasting in the fashion industry has been inefficient and ineffective, observers has been forced to believe that trend forecasting could not be applied in the fashion industry and therefore this industry will constantly face challenges in inventory management.

It is usual to find that the seasonal demand that was predicted not to be matched with inventory, a phenomenon that will cause loss in revenue from either having a lot of unsold products due to their lack of demand in the market, in order for retailers to reduce this loss they will either create promotions or discounts for such products or if the product is in high demand but retailers do not have it in their stock this will also lead to potential revenue loss.

In order for fashion retailers to address the before mentioned forecasting issue, they have applied multiple management techniques such as lean and agile management styles with their suppliers.

While maintaining a lean and agile strategy with supplier will help reduce risk for fashion retailers as well as maintaining low stock level, this strategy will not help benefit manufacturers since they still need to forecast sales in order for them to know how much raw materials they should purchase. Manufacturers need to have the supplies they need on hand in order to shorten the lead-time of delivery of the goods they offer.

2.2.14- The need of fashion manufacturers to predict trends

Other than lean and agile management styles, retailers can also apply – from a theoretical point of view – the marketing model that includes the four phases of the product life cycle; introduction, growth, maturity and decline.

From a numerical point of view, Spragg (2017) mentioned in his article that fashion retailers could apply the Bass model, which was introduced by Frank Bass in the 1960's. This model emphasizes the link between demand and consumer types, consumer types include innovators (leaders) and followers (imitators). The innovators consumer groups are individuals that seek change and favor novelty while as imitators follow the actions of innovators.

The timing and strength of demand depend on the desire of novelty and intensity of imitation among followers. The basis of this model consist of an equation where:

N = is the number of people that have purchased a product at time t,

m = is the number of people that will end up buying the product

p = is the coefficient of innovation

q = the coefficient of imitation

Meaning that demand at D_{t+1} is therefore:

$Dt+p(m-Dt)+qDt(m-Dt)/m$

The Brass model also explains that the increase in sales is equal to sum of the innovator consumers and a time varying proportion of imitation consumers that are going to purchase the product but haven't purchased it yet.

Meaning that: $D_{t+1}-D_t = p + q(D/m)$

The reasoning behind the Brass model is that the initial sales are those of innovators while later sales are those of imitators that have seen the trend in magazines and follow media and got interested in imitating the trend after it made huge fuzz. And where sales formula during a certain t is:

$$Sales(t)=mf(t)=m(p+q)2e-(p+q)tp[1+(qp)e-(p+q)t]2$$

Where f(t) = the density function of time distribution until a purchase.

Even though the Bass model does share similarities with the marketing model, it just did not gain the same fame as the marketing model and has had little attention from fashion forecasters. A fact that seems odd since the Bass model formula mirrors the four stages of the marketing model and exhibits insights from the purchasing process. One down side would be choosing the right values for p (the coefficient of innovation) and q (the coefficient of imitations) noting that choosing the right number for m (the number of people that will eventually purchase the product) will add to the problem. However, the Bass model can serve as the basis of study in order to better understand stock management that is subject to change according to seasonal demands.

2.2.15- Google trends as fashion forecaster

Fashion consumers have been using Google very actively to shop. They look for ideas, try to find the best designs and usually end up making a purchase with just a tap, Boone (2016). During 2016 alone, Google received four million search queries per minute from 2.4 billion Internet users per day, Wedel et al. (2016).

Having data analytics on such online behavior allows Google to predict the next big fashion trend, Bain (2016).

Google trends are growingly influencing retailer's business decision-making in different types of industries and not only in the fashion industry due to its ability to act as a key indicator for forecasting key variables of interest, Yu et al. (2019).

The fashion industry is able to benefit from Google Trends for forecasting fashion variables, which helps in predicting future purchase decisions, helping to determine the effectiveness of marketing campaigns as well as forecasting online consumer brand engagement, Silva et al. (2019).

Boone (2016) confirms that Google Trends indicates which styles really catch on with shoppers when search patterns and geographic factors were analyzed in 2016; those styles were the leading styles that drove the biggest fashion trends.

Figure 2.2 below shows Google Trends for bomber jackets which grew 297% YoY in the UK and 612% YoY in the US between 2010 and 2016, Boone (2016).

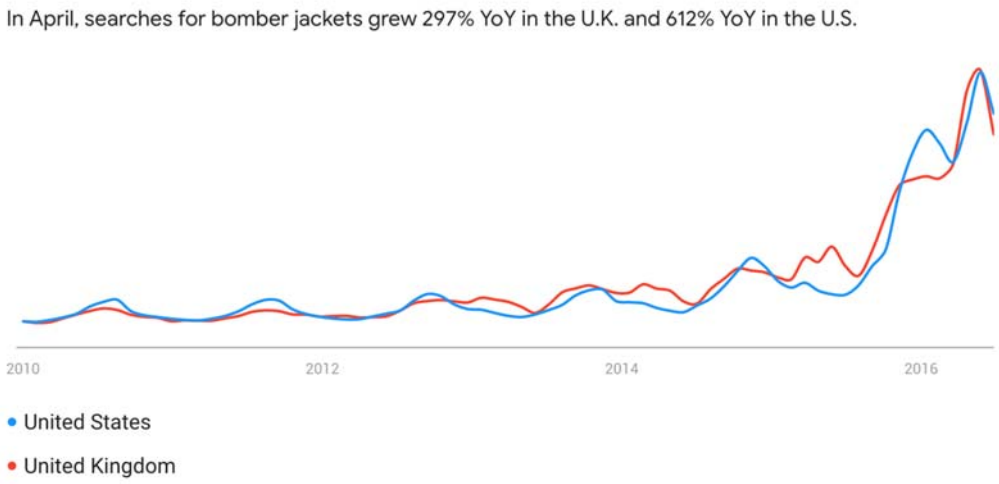

Figure 2- Google search trends for bomber jackets in UK and US

Source: (Boone 2016).

Moreover, fashion retail companies can track Google searches in order to identify and pinpoint purchasing decisions so they can move forward towards meeting this demand, Hastreiter (2016). Due to the high competition in the industry, such data and analytics can present any retailer or brand with a competitive advantage in regards to efficient resource allocations and reducing waste.

2.2.16- The influence of celebrities on adolescent's (age group) buying decisions

A study conducted on 100 male and female adolescent high school students with ages ranging between 16 and 18 years by Knezevic et al. (2016) concluded that adolescent's buying decisions are highly influenced by celebrities they follow on the the internet and see on television since this young group of people are still looking for their fashion sense.

Adding that more than 60% of the sample state that they are influenced by the media while making purchases.

The study also concluded that the impact of friends and family on the purchases made by adolescents were substantial, where 49% of the sample claim that their friends influence their purchasing decisions while family members have a 43% impact on their buying decisions.

The most interesting finding in this study was that when asked about wearing clothes similar to what other people are wearing, 48% of the sample buy clothes similar to what other people are wearing adding that 57% of the respondants believe or consider themselves having a fashion sense or being fashion concious while 5% of respondants do not find themselves being fashion concious.

When asked about the financial source for their buying decisions, 71% of the students are financed by their parents, 5% of students buy clothing with their earned money and 24 % of the students buy clothing with their allowance or pocket money.

2.2.17- Age's effect on fashion

Other authors such as Hervé et al. (2009) mentioned the effect age has on consumer behavior and how it influences their buying decisions. The paper concluded that when consumers are searching for their need, they seek out criteria and that this criteria changes according to the age of the consumer. The study concluded that young consumers pay attention to the price of the products, older consumers focused on

suitability while the elderly chose durability. The study was conducted on a sample with an age range between 18 and 90 years old.

2.2.18- Cognitive Age & Fashion Consumption

Fashion consumption is a method that consumers use in order to demonstrate and express their characters or personalities. Possessing trendy or fashionable clothing might be considered an extension of the self and Belk et al. (1988). Hence, the consumption of fashion apparel is a phenomenon closely linked to the consumer's self-concept, Banister et al. (2004), Phau et al. (2004), Grant et al. (2005). Nonetheless, research that revolved around fashion consumers and the age a person perceives himself to be was often focused on and perceived as cognitive age, Blau (1956), Guptill (1969) and Barak et al. (1981) and is seldom expressed by how a person feels, thinks and looks as well as by the things this person does, Kastenbaum at al. (1972) and Stephens (1991). Fashion consumers' behavior is based on their cognitive age, Kastenbaum at al. (1972), Stephens (1991) and Wilkes (1992) and therefore, these consumers have their own perception about which fashionable items fits them and what constitutes fashion. This means that consumers age impact the marketing positions of fashion brands which leads to consumers choosing the products or brands that they believe fits their age and their purchasing choices as well as behavior are determined by their cognitive age, Yu-Tse et al. (2011).

2.3- Conclusion

2.3.1- Main conclusion

In this chapter work of previous research discussed that there are fashion leaders and fashion followers within consumers, and that fashion leaders affect fashion followers purchasing behavior.

Scholars have categorized leaders into celebrity influencers that include actors, singers, TV personalities, royal families and politicians while on the other hand some leaders are not celebrities, they are just fashion influencers that have a higher number of followers on social media on which they also have an effect on their shopping behavior. Other studies have also highlighted the effect of in-store fashion employees on consumers shopping behavior adding that they are also a key indicator in the sales of products and affect consumers shopping decisions.

Other than fashion leaders affecting fashion follower's choices there are other factors that are related to demographics that affect shopping behavior. Such demographics include; age, sex, income, status and employment. Papers in chapter 2 discussed for example how age might affect consumer's shopping choices and how income affects the shopping frequency of consumers.

Another major part that was discussed in chapter 2 was the ineffectiveness of trend forecasting within the fashion design field. Many researchers agreed that trend forecasting is quite difficult when it comes to fashion trends; and that factors such as seasons, purchasing behaviors and taste made it even more difficult to be able to predict trends. And since the fashion field's calendar is about seasons, this factor even made it more challenging to predict trends for just a small period of time.

A lot of researchers argued about who is a stronger influencer on fashion followers between celebrity influencers or fashion influencers while some identify with the low-key status of fashion influencers others identify with the high status of fashion celebrities; therefore this thesis will study the effect that fashion leaders (celebrity influencers, fashion influencers that are not celebrities, and in-store fashion employees) have on decision choices of followers.

Figure 3 at the end of the chapter will help better explain the different hypothesis that were discussed above and how they are linked to follower's shopping frequency.

2.3.2- Research questions

After going over multiple articles about previous research concerning fashion and the multiple variables that affect fashion consumers the following questions emerged concerning the subject.

RQ1: How can fashion leaders affect the buying decisions choices of followers?

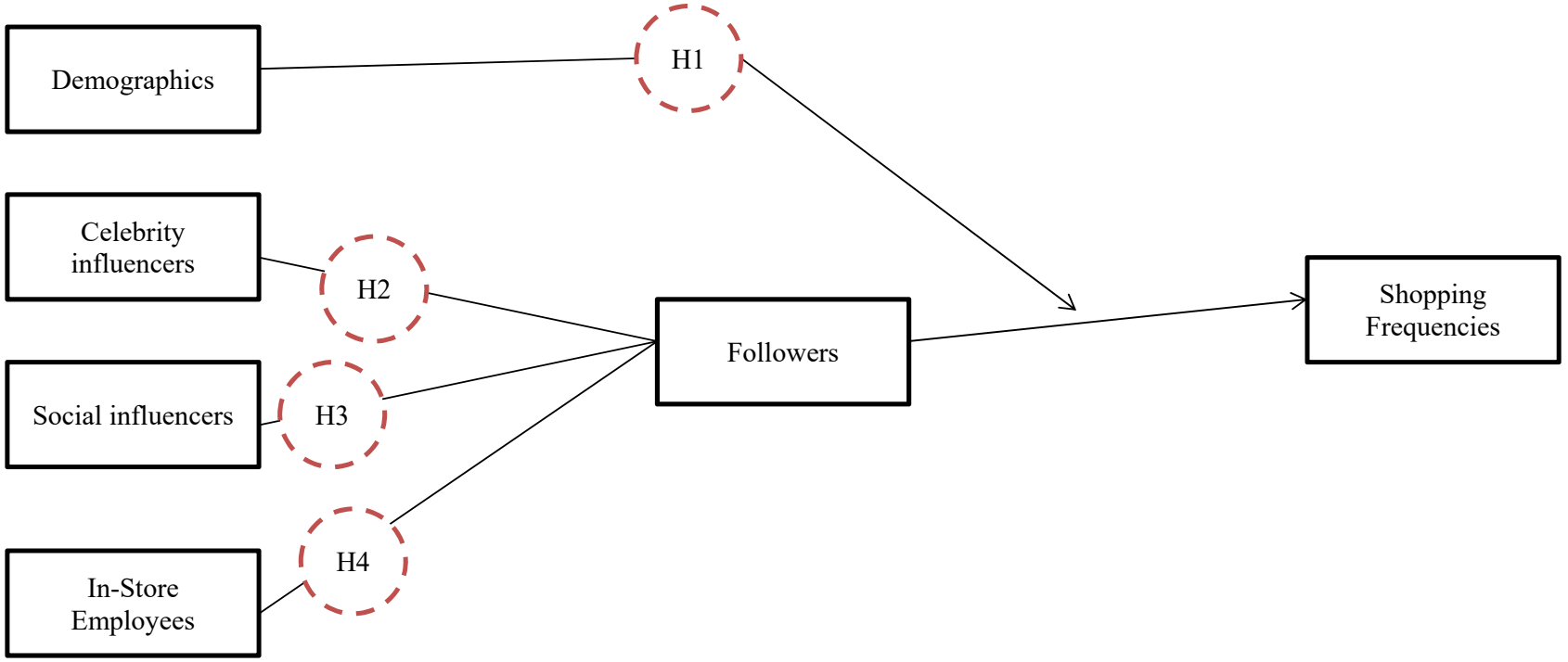

Figure 3- Conceptual Framework

Source: (Own author elaboration 2020)

Chapter 3 – Procedures and Methodology

3.1- Introduction

After reviewing different articles about fashion consumers, trend forecasting within the fashion industry, the effect of social media on the fashion industry and the influence of celebrities and fashion influencers on consumer's buying decisions and shopping frequency in chapter 2, chapter 3 will discuss the adopted strategy for this research and the methodology. This chapter will also discuss the hypotheses that are going to be tested, the dependent and independent variables, targeted population and sample size, the selected data collection tool as well as the analysis framework.

3.2- Hypotheses

In order to understand what causes the increase of consumer's shopping frequency and to understand if and how celebrities, fashion influencers or in-store fashion employees impact consumer-buying choices, the following hypotheses were developed based on previous literature.

H1: Followers' **shopping frequency** varies with respect to **demographics**

H2: Celebrity influencers have a positive effect on followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

H3: Social influencers positively affect followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

H4: In-store fashion employees positively affect followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

3.3- Selected variables

3.3.1- The independent variables

a-Demographics

Independent variables such as gender, age, marital status, type of employment and income are all believed to affect consumers' shopping frequency. According to as Hervé et al. (2009) mentioned the effect age has on consumer behavior and how it influences their buying decisions. The paper concluded that when consumers are searching for their need, they seek out criteria and that this criteria changes according to the age of the consumer. The study concluded that young consumers pay attention to the price of the products, older consumers focused on suitability while the elderly chose durability. The study was conducted on a sample with an age range between 18 and 90 years old.

While other articles studied the effect of consumers income in regard to their shopping frequencies, amidst the 2008 financial meltdown, retailers were facing a two-factor dilemma that is one part economic and one part psychographic; they were wondering how they would be able to convince upper class customers to purchase fashion items even when the wealthy were cutting back? Consequently; a large number of designers developed new marketing strategies in order to attract customer's attention.

That strategy was creating social media accounts that would attract consumer's attention and make them feel closer to the brand and helped them identify and match their character to the brand's character. A phenomenon that later helped gain loyal customers but at the same time allowed economically conscious customers pay high prices for their purchases, Mohr (2013).

b- Celebrity fashion leaders

According to previous literature fashionable celebrities have been the main fashion trendsetters for centuries. Tortora et al. (2015) also discussed the influence of social elites and political leaders on fashion trends, adding that ever since centuries, members of royal families have always influenced fashion trends and those individuals had always the attention of the public, especially when romance was involved in their lives.

Another study conducted on 100 male and female adolescent high school students with ages ranging between 16 and 18 years by Knezevic et al. (2016) concluded that adolescent's buying decisions are highly influenced by celebrities they follow on the the internet and see on television since this young group of people are still looking for their fashion sense.

Adding that more than 60% of the sample state that they are influenced by the media while making purchases.

c- Social influencers that are not celebrities

These represent individuals that are not celebrities but have a large group of followers on social media that are interested in their style and follow their accounts with the interest of viewing their wardrobe choices. A study by Martensen et al., (2018) stated that the preferred choice between fashion celebrities and fashion influencers, are fashion influencers that are more reachable and attainable since celebrities exhilarate high status and have an unreachable approach or feel which would in return make consumers feel less comfortable. This process would in fact lessen the reach of celebrities with fashion consumers and highlight the importance of the influence of

fashion influencers – people that are not famous or celebrities - on consumer buying choices.

Martensen then adds that there are two important factors for choosing a fashion influencer, the candidate should have a large number of followers on their social media account and those followers should in fact feel that their lifestyle and choices are related to those of that influencer; this way they would feel comfortable enough with this influencer and a sort of bond or trust will form which will increase the influence on followers.

Lastly the fashion influencer should share personal content about their daily life, routine, likes/dislikes and even struggles that employs storytelling since it will increase persuasiveness and help create a strong bond between them and their followers.

d- Fashion experts of in-store fashion employees

Previous literature discussed the importance of in-store employees with the spread of fashion trends and their influence on consumer's shopping frequency. Zara's mother company Inditex focuses the importance of sales training that grows their selling skills for certain key products that are best sellers.

In-store employees are a very important aspect in building and maintaining lasting and profitable relationships with customers, Xie et al. (2016). When it comes to the luxury fashion industry, it is very significant to create a connection between the sales person and customer since luxurious brand environment require high involvement as well as services such as customization and customers would be willing to pay high prices for such services, Kim et al. (2014). Therefore, sales people for such luxury

brands should develop rapport-building behavior in order to create a connection with their customers, Sresnewsky et al. (2020).

Previous research defined rapport as an interaction that is both enjoyable and harmonious between two or more participants that would result from a certain connection and understanding, Kaski et al. (2018).

3.3.2- The dependent variable

Consumers' shopping frequency

The focus of this paper is to study the effect of demographics, celebrity influencers, fashion influencers and in-store fashion experts on consumers' shopping frequency. The literature review in chapter two has shown the role that the independent variables play on the shopping frequencies.

3.4- Methodology used

3.4.1- Sample & Data used

In order to collect the needed data for the study, a survey that targeted a random sample size was chosen to represent the sample size. We used a probability sample randomly selected as a simple random technique. The population will be the Lebanese consumers residing in Keserwan, aged between 17 and 62 with the majority being aged between 20 and 25. A quantitative questionnaire was filled by the sample of 329 respondents, where 75 were males and 254 were females and its findings were tested

in order to study the effects on consumers buying frequencies. The epistemology of this research will follow a positivist approach since it involves hypothesis generation and testing while separating reality from knowledge since so far, one might have the knowledge or assume that consumers shopping frequency is affected by celebrities or influencers or fashion experts but since it has not yet been proven it cannot be considered as a reality. Therefore deductive reasoning will be used throughout this study starting with the general consumer behavior understanding to the specific factors that influence consumer buying choices.

3.4.2- Pilot test

Data collection consisted of two phases, the first was created to be used as a pilot survey and was directed to determine the research restrictions and to test the validity and consistency of the instruments used in the study.

The prepared questionnaire was based on what the literature in chapter two suggested, a pilot test targeting ten individuals consisting of professors, colleagues and friends was conducted in order to establish inter-rater reliability. The specific aim of the pilot test was to evaluate the consistency of the variables, make sure that the questions do not touch base with any sensitive topics, as well as ensure that the questionnaire is clear and understandable. The average time for completion of the questionnaire by the ten respondents of the pilot test was estimated to be within 5 minutes, and hence guaranteeing an adequate time frame that supposedly leads to a high response rate.

3.4.3- Instrumentation

In the second phase of data collection, the primary data was collected using the instrumental tools of the study. The reason behind choosing a quantitative questionnaire as the data collection method resides in its ability to obtain the required number of observations, within the spatial and temporal constraints that surround the research. Furthermore, the results of the collected data will be used to statistically test and either confirm of fail to confirm the previously mentioned hypotheses.

The questionnaire starts with an introductory paragraph that explains the purpose of the study, as well as includes the privacy of information provided by the respondents according to the code of confidentiality and states that the participation is not mandatory. Section one of the questionnaire revolves around background information such as gender, age, marital status, type of employment and income. Section two tackled the independent and dependent variables, with all relevant items being measured using seven point quasi-metric scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” .The below table 3.1 features the dependent and independent variables along with the measurement instrument for each.

Dependent variable	**Measurement**
Y: Consumer shopping frequency	It is measured using a seven point quasi-metric scale from 1 to 7
Independent variables	**Measurement**
X1: Gender	Nominal form
X2: Age	Numeric
X3: Marital status	Nominal Form
X4:Type of employment	Nominal Form
X5: Income	Numeric
X6: Celebrity influencers	It is measured in metric form
X7: Fashion influencers	It is measured through 7 metric intervals, each denominating an ordinal category
X8: In-store fashion employees or fashion experts	It is measured through 7 metric intervals, each denominating an ordinal category

Table 3.1- Measurement of dependent & independent variables

3.4.4- Analysis framework

The data collected from the questionnaire was measured using SPSS, and was later analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

The first step in statistics is descriptive statistics that will be produced through; central tendencies, dispersion and frequencies for parametric variables such as: age; shopping frequency, celebrity influencers, non-celebrity influencers and in-store fashion employees they will be measured through mean or standard deviation.

As for non-parametric variables such as; gender, marital status, type of employment and income they will be measured through mode or range without forgetting to mention that all variables will be measured for normality of sample using kurtosis and skeweness.

The second step of statistics is inferential but in order to conduct such tests conditions should be met such as Cronbach alfa to establish reliability.

Inferential statistics allows us to make inferences (conclusions) regarding the data and relationships between variables. It is of two types: non-parametric and parametric.

As for parametric and non-parametric tests within inferential statistics; the first step is to test for correlation using Spearman, Pearson, ANOVA or T-test. If the search for correlation was indeed successful we then test for variation using either Kruskal-Wallis, U-test (also called Mann-Whitney) and classical linear regression for parametric and non-parametric variables. In case we were able to test for variation we then move on to test for causality using factor analysis for parametric testing and non-parametric regression but it is barely studied due to the fact that iy's not mathematically powerful.

3.5- Conclusion

In this chapter, four hypotheses were formulated based on the independent variables that might affect consumer's shopping frequency – the dependent variable - as suggested by the literature. The 4 hypotheses are the following:

H1: Followers' **shopping frequency** varies with respect to **demographics**

H2: Celebrity influencers have a positive effect on followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

H3: Social influencers positively affect followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

H4: In-store fashion employees positively affect followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

The instrumentation is a quantitative questionnaire as the data collection method resides in its ability to obtain the required number of observations, within the spatial and temporal constraints that surround the research. Furthermore, the results of the collected data will be used to statistically test and either confirm of fail to confirm the previously mentioned hypotheses.

Moreover, the study is based on a post-positivist perspective, along with being deductive in nature. Moreover and as previously mentioned, the used method is a quantitative questionnaire, which ultimately allows the conduction of inferential statistics. In the following chapter, the results of all statistical tests will be featured, along with a profound analysis of the findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings

4.1- Introduction

In the previous chapter four hypotheses were formulated and were tested in a quantitative questionnaire that not only allows for descriptive statistics but also inferential statistics.

In this chapter the finds of the questionnaire will be first described and then analyzed with the literature that was mentioned in chapter 2 to either prove for existence of correlation, variation and causality in either of the independent variables or to prove that there was no existing correlation between the independent and dependent variables.

4.2- Analysis framework

Since the employed questionnaire was of quantitative nature, data was entered into SPSS, as it was deemed as the most suitable tool for conducting the intended statistical tests. Internal consistency reliability was then checked using Cronbach Alpha, which should have a coefficient of 0.7 or higher in order for the spaces to be deemed reliable as per the UCLA institute for digital research and education. Initially, descriptive statistics including frequencies and measures of central tendency and dispersion were produced. Then, Kurtosis and Skewness were measured in order to check for normality of the sample for the purposes of conducting parametric tests. Correlation between each of the demographic variables and shopping frequency was tested using Spearman, as this information was measured using nominal and ordinal scales. Variation analyses were then conducted for the correlated items at the 5% level

through Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U-test. As for metric items, correlation was measured through Pearson correlation, and causality was tested via classical linear regression modeling.

4.3- Reliability Analysis

In order to check the reliability of scales, Cronbach alpha was measured for all 16 items and showed 0.97 as shown in the below table 1 Hence, the scales are considered as sufficiently reliable as the obtained alpha exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.7 in social science research.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.970	16

Table 1- Reliability Statistics

4.4- Descriptive statistics

4.4.1- Demographic variables

As shown in Table 2, the received sample of 329 respondents living in Keserwan consisted of 75 males and 254 females, respectively constituting 22.8% and 77.2%

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	75	22.8	22.8	22.8
	Female	254	77.2	77.2	100.0
	Total	329	100.0	100.0	

Table 2- Gender

The demographic variable marital status included 4 sub-groups, those being single, married, widowed, and divorced. As shown in the below Table 3, the vast majority of respondents were single and made up 83.3% of the total sample, then followed by those who are married (15.5 %), and then those who are Widowed (0.6%) and Divorced (0.6%).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	274	83.3	83.3	83.3
	Married	51	15.5	15.5	98.8
	Widowed	2	.6	.6	99.4
	Divorced	2	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	329	100.0	100.0	

Table 3- Marital Status

Concerning the demographic variable type of employment which contained 4 categories, the below table 4 shows that the majority of respondents were students and totaled 157 individuals, followed by those who are unemployed (34.7%), then those who are self-employed (9.7%), and those who are employed in the private/public sectors (7.9%).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	157	47.7	47.7	47.7
	Unemployed	114	34.7	34.7	82.4
	Private/Public sector	26	7.9	7.9	90.3
	Self-employed/Freelancer	32	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	329	100.0	100.0	

Table 4- Type of employment

The variable Age was subdivided into two almost equal sub-categories, those being 23 and less, and more than 23. As shown in the below table 5, those who were 23 and less accounted for 54.1% of the total sample, while those more than 23 accounted for the remaining 45.9%

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	23 and less	**178**	**54.1**	54.1	54.1
	More than 23	151	45.9	45.9	100.0
	Total	329	100.0	100.0	

Table 5- Age Group

Regarding the income variable and as shown in the below table 6, the majority of the respondents made less than 1500000 LBP/month (158). Moreover, 114 individuals reported earning between 1,500,000 and 3000,000 LBP/month, and 41 reported making More than 3,000,000 LBP/month. It is also noticeable that 16 individuals abstained from responding to this aspect for reasons unknown, and consequently were omitted from the statistical tests relating to this variable in particular.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1,500,000 LBP/month	158	48.0	50.5	50.5
	Between 1,500,000 and 3000,000 LBP/month	114	34.7	36.4	86.9
	More than 3,000,000 LBP/month	41	12.5	13.1	100.0
	Total	313	95.1	100.0	
Missing	System	16	4.9		
Total		329	100.0		

Table 6- Income

Table 7 features the measures of central tendency and dispersion that were produced for all demographic variables. The mean for age was 25.3, and hence indicating that the average age of respondents was around 25 years old. The median for income shows 1, and hence indicated that the majority of respondents are from the first category (less than 15000000 LBP/month). The mode for Gender is 2, and therefore implying that most respondents are from the second category (females). The mode for marital status is 1, and hence indicates that the majority of respondents are from the first group single. Lastly, the mode for type of employment reads 1, and therefore indicating that the majority of respondents belong the first category student.

As for dispersion, the standard deviation for Age reads 7.93, and hence indicating a high standard deviation and that the observations are spread out along a relatively wide range around the mean. The variance for Income reads 0.498 and hence implies that there is low variance and that the observations are closely dispersed along the mean. As for Gender, marital status, and type of employment, the respective ranges of

1, 2, and 3 represent the differences between the largest and smallest values in each variable.

	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Type of Employment	Income
N Valid	329	329	329	329	313
Missing	0	0	0	0	16
Mean		**25.3070**			
Median					**1.00**
Mode	**2**		**1**	**1**	
Std. Deviation		7.93648			
Variance					.498
Range	1		3	3	
Minimum	1	17.00	1	1	1
Maximum	2	62.00	4	4	3

Table 7- Total Statistics for demographics

4.4.2- Metric variables

As shown in the below table 8, the mean for the dependent variable shopping frequency was 4.7257, while those of the independent variables Celebrity influencers, social influencers, and fashion workers were respectively 4.0015, 3.9498, and 4.1413. Moreover, the standard deviation for shopping frequency was 1.65, and which can be regarded as slightly lower than the average -/+2 SD from the mean. As for the three independent variables, they all show standard deviation figures that suggest that the observations are slightly more dispersed from the mean. Table 4.7 also showcases the Skewness and Kurtosis figure for all the metric variables. It can be seen that all Skewness figures fall within the acceptable range of -1.5 and 1.5, as well as that all Kurtosis figures fall within the acceptable range of -3 and 3, and hence confirming normality.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Shopping Frequency	329	1.00	7.00	**4.7257**	1.65134	-.457	.134	-.925	.268
Celebrity Influencers	329	1.00	7.00	**4.0015**	2.14499	-.144	.134	-1.578	.268
Social Influencers	329	1.00	7.00	**3.9498**	2.13371	-.132	.134	-1.547	.268
Fashion employees	329	1.00	7.00	**4.1413**	2.01570	-.237	.134	-1.411	.268
Valid N (list wise)	329								

Table 8- Total Statistics for metric variables

4.5- Inferential Statistics

4.5.1- Spearman Correlation

In order to test for correlations between each of the non-parametric items and shopping frequency, spearman correlation was used. As shown in table 20 (attached in the appendix), there was a significant positive correlation between gender and shopping frequency at the 1% level (0.000). Moreover, there was a significant positive correlation between income and shopping frequency at the 5% level (0.014). As for marital status, type of employment, and age group, no significant correlations were found at the 95% confidence level.

4.5.2- Kruskal Wallis Variation

Since the two demographic variables gender and income were found to be significantly correlated with shopping frequency respectively at the 99% and 95% confidence level, variation analyses were conducted via the use of Mann-Whitney/U-test and Kruskal-Wallis tests. As shown in the below figure 4, the Mann-Whitney/U-test shows that there was a significant variation at the 1% level in shopping

frequencies across the categories of gender (0.000). In other terms, the test indicates that the male and female respondents within the obtained sample exhibit significantly different purchasing frequencies. More specifically and as displayed by Table 4.11, the mean for the female category (5.00) exceeds that of the male group (3.76), and therefore implies that females are more frequent shoppers than males. In this line, there's a significant variation in shopping frequency between males and females at the 1% confidence level with females exhibiting a higher shopping frequency than males.

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of ShoppingFrequency is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 4- Hypothesis test summary

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Shopping Frequency	Male	75	**3.7667**	1.51029	.17439
	Female	254	**5.0089**	1.58587	.09951

Table 9- Group Statistics

Regarding income, and as shown in the below figure 5, the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there is a significant variation at the 99% level across the three included categories(0.048**).**

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of ShoppingFrequency is the same across categories of Income.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.048	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Figure 5- Hypothesis test summary

In order to test for further variation across each 2 sub-groups, Mann-Whitney/U-test was used. As featured in table 10, there was a significant variation at the 1% level in shopping frequency between those earning less than 1,500,000 LBP/month and those earning between 1,500,000 LBP/month and 3,000,000 LBP/month. More specifically and as shown in table 11, the mean for category 2 exceeded that of the first 4.9211 >4.6028 and consequently suggesting that those belonging to the second group are more frequent shoppers than their counterparts. Henceforth, there is a significant variation in shopping frequency between individuals who make less than 1,500,000 LBP/month and those who earn between 1,500,000 LBP/month and 3,000,000 LBP/month at the 95% level, with those earning more being more frequent shopper

	Shopping Frequency
Mann-Whitney U	7721.000
Wilcoxon W	20282.000
Z	-2.011
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	**.044**

a. Grouping Variable: Income, group 1 and group 2.

b. Group 1 earning less than 1.5 million and group 2 earning between 1.5 and 3 million

Table 10- Test for variation between income and shopping frequency

	Income	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Shopping Frequency	Less than 1,500,000 LBP/month	158	4.6028	1.56039	.12414
	Between 1,500,000 and 3000,000 LBP/month	114	**4.9211**	1.64771	.15432

Table 11- Group statistics

As for the two remaining sub-groups of income, no significant variations in shopping frequency were found at the 5% level as shown in tables 12 and 13.

	Shopping Frequency
Mann-Whitney U	2614.000
Wilcoxon W	15175.000
Z	-1.905
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	**.057**

a. Grouping Variable: Income, group 2 and group 3

b. Group 2 earning between 1.5 and 3 million and group 3 earning more than 3 million

Table 12- Test for variation between income and shopping frequency

	Shopping Frequency
Mann-Whitney U	2162.000
Wilcoxon W	8717.000
Z	-.712
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	**.477**

a. Grouping Variable: Income, group 1 and group 3

b. Group 1 earning less than 1.5 million and group 3 earning more than 3 million

Table 13- Test for variation between income and shopping frequency

4.5.3- Pearson Correlation

In order to test for correlation between each of the independent metric variables with shopping frequency Pearson correlation was used. As shown in the below table 14, there was a significant positive correlation between each of Celebrity influencers (0.000), Social influencers (0.000), and Fashion workers (0.000) with Shopping frequency at the 1 % level.

		Celebrity Influencers	Social Influencers	Fashion Employees	**Shopping Frequency**
Celebrity Influencers	Pearson Correlation	1	.935**	.734**	.659**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	**.000**
	N	329	329	329	329
Social Influencers	Pearson Correlation	.935**	1	.705**	.654**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	**.000**
	N	329	329	329	329
Fashion Employees	Pearson Correlation	.734**	.705**	1	.482**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		**.000**
	N	329	329	329	329
Shopping Frequency	Pearson Correlation	.659**	.654**	.482**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	329	329	329	329

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 14- Correlations

4.5.4- ANOVA Variation

In order to test for variation between the dependent variable shopping frequency and Celebrity influencers as well as social influencers, ANOVA was used and as shown

table 15, there was a significant variation at the 99% level, and thus validating the ability to employ a regression model in order to be able to test for causality.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	388.374	1	388.374	250.957	.000[b]
	Residual	506.057	327	1.548		
	Total	894.430	328			
2	Regression	398.662	2	199.331	131.073	.000[c]
	Residual	495.768	326	1.521		
	Total	894.430	328			

a. Dependent Variable: Shopping Frequency

b. Predictors: (Constant), Celebrity Influencers

c. Predictors: (Constant), Celebrity Influencers, Social Influencers

Table 15- ANOVA

Having met the assumptions that the sample is random, normally distributed, and having obtained an acceptable Cronbach alpha, causality between the correlated independent variables with shopping frequency was tested for, through classical linear regression modeling with the model being constructed as below:

$$Y1 = \alpha + \beta_1 X1 + \beta_2 X2 + \beta_3 X3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

α = the intercept;

β = the regression coefficients;

ε = the error term.

4.5.5- Classical Linear Regression Causality

As shown in the second model in table 16 the coefficient of determination R square was 0.446, and thus meaning that 44.6% of the variations in the dependent variable shopping frequency were caused by the included independent variables of Celebrity influencers and Social influencers. To add, the adjusted R square reads 0.442, and hence implies that adding more variables to this model would not enhance it explanatory power, as the difference between R square and adjusted R square does not exceed 10%. Furthermore the Durbin-Watson score reads 1.874, which is around the value of 2, and hence indicates that there is no significant auto-correlation of the errors.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.659[a]	.434	.432	1.24402	
2	.668[b]	**.446**	**.442**	1.23319	**1.874**

a. Predictors: (Constant), Celebrity Influencers

b. Predictors: (Constant), Celebrity Influencers, Social Influencers

c. Dependent Variable: Shopping Frequency

Table 16- Model Summary

More specifically and as shown in table 17, the Beta for celebrity influencers was 0.289 with a significance of 0.001 and that of Social influencers 0.234 with a significance of 0.01. This implies that Celebrity influencers have a higher causal weight than that of Social influencers on shopping frequency. In detail, there is a significant positive causal relation between Celebrity influencers and shopping frequency at the 99% confidence level. Moreover, there is a significant positive causal relation between Social influencers and shopping frequency at the 95% confidence

level. Table 17 also shows that all tolerance levels exceeded 0.1, as well as VIF (variance inflation factor) scores were below 10, hence confirming the absence of any multicolinearity issues amongst the variables included in the model.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.696	.145		18.548	.000		
	Celebrity Influencers	.507	.032	.659	15.842	.000	**1.000**	**1.000**
2	(Constant)	2.642	.146		18.157	.000		
	Celebrity Influencers	**.289**	.090	.376	3.233	**.001**	**.126**	**7.959**
	Social Influencers	**.234**	.090	.303	2.601	**.010**	**.126**	**7.959**

a. Dependent Variable: Shopping Frequency

Table 17- Coefficients

As for Fashion employees, they were excluded from the second model due to lack of significance at the 95% confidence level as shown in the below table 18.

Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics		
						Tolerance	VIF	Minimum Tolerance
1	Social Influencers	.303[b]	2.601	.010	.143	.126	7.959	.126
	Fashion Employees	-.002[b]	-.039	**.969**	-.002	.462	2.165	.462
2	Fashion Employees	-.015[c]	-.243	**.808**	-.013	.459	2.178	.115

a. Dependent Variable: Shopping Frequency

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Celebrity Influencers

c. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Celebrity Influencers, Social Influencers

Table 18- Excluded variables

In order to further test the statistical validity of the model, and as shown figure 6, all points in the normal probability plot are dispersed along the normal distribution curve, and hence imply that the residuals are normally distributed.

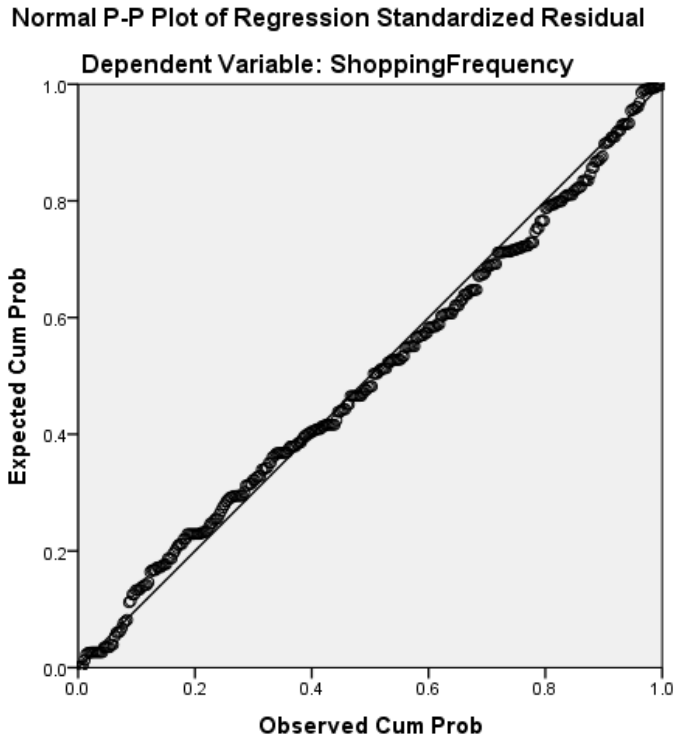

Figure 6- P-P Plot

Moreover and as seen in the below Figure 7, the dots are scattered throughout the plot and do not follow a specific pattern. In this line, the errors are homoscedastic and free of any heteroscedasticity issues. Furthermore, the Loess curve is approximately at 0, and hence confirming the linearity of the errors as well.

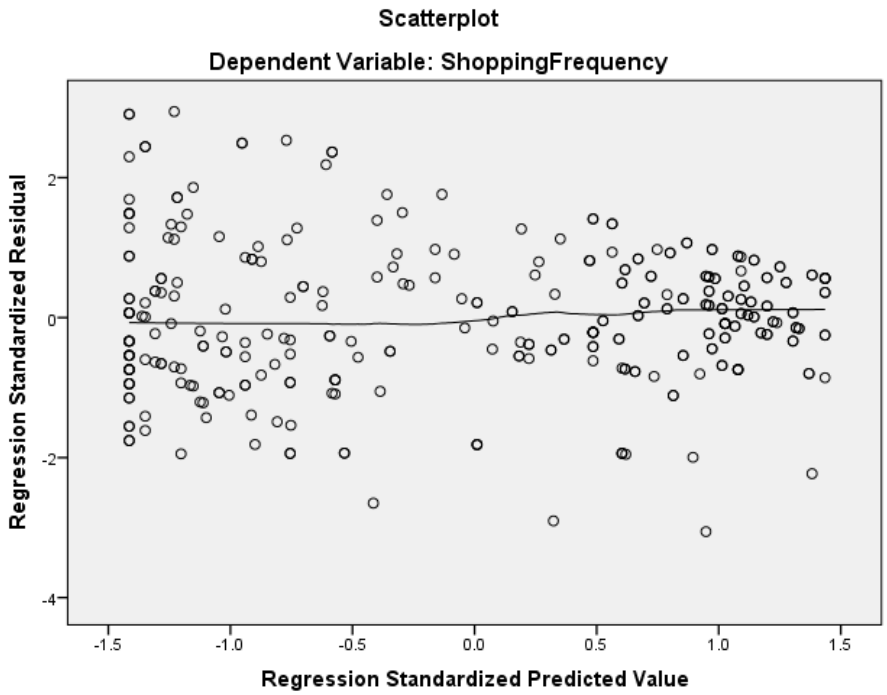

Figure 7- Scatterplot

Lastly and as shown in the below Pearson correlation matrix in Table 19, there were no significant correlations between any of the independent variables with the standardized residuals, and hence signaling the absence of any such statistical issues.

		Celebrity Influencers	Social Influencers	Fashion Employees	Standardized Residual
Celebrity Influencers	Pearson Correlation	1	.935**	.734**	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	**1.000**
	N	329	329	329	329
Social Influencers	Pearson Correlation	.935**	1	.705**	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	**1.000**
	N	329	329	329	329
Fashion Employees	Pearson Correlation	.734**	.705**	1	**-.009**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.869
	N	329	329	329	329
Standardized Residual	Pearson Correlation	.000	.000	-.009	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	1.000	.869	
	N	329	329	329	329

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 19- Correlations

4.6- Discussion of the findings

4.6.2- Females being more frequent shoppers than men

Just like the literature suggests; a study conducted by Ying-Feng et al. (2013), showed that online female shoppers outnumber online male shoppers since the population of employed women has been growing as well as the tendency to shop online since women no longer have the time to do that, Ministry of economic affair (2009). A study by Popcorn et al. (2000) suggests that women make 80% of the shopping decisions. While online shopping for female targeted products like make up, fashion

apparel and accessories are leading the charts and becoming more frequent and higher in numbers, Business next (2008). This is in line with the findings from chapter 4 that highlights the fact that women are more frequent shoppers than men with the used of the Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney/U-test where there was a significant variation in shopping frequency between males and females at the 1% level with females exhibiting a higher shopping frequency than males.

4.6.3- The higher the income the higher the shopping frequency

In a paper written by Galak et al. (2016) Fashion consumers that exist within a society, will adjust to accepted fashion norms defined by society no matter what the circumstances are, and those same consumers will adjust even more to society's accepted fashion norms, once they move upwards on the socioeconomic ladder, an act that will identify them as the 'elites'. This was tested in chapter 4, the test showed that there was a significant variation at the 1% level in shopping frequency between those earning less than 1,500,000 LBP/month and those earning between 1,500,000 LBP/month and 3,000,000 LBP/month. More specifically, the mean for category 2 exceeded that of the first and consequently suggesting that those belonging to the second group are more frequent shoppers than their counterparts.

4.6.4- Celebrity and social influencers affecting shopping frequency

As previously mentioned in the literature; The two-step flow theory concludes that consumers are not directly influenced by mass media but are rather influenced by opinion leaders who have a better understanding of what social media does and what messages it delivers. Opinion leaders are hence individuals- either celebrity influencers or social influencers- that influence the decision of consumers within their

social circle, Brannon E. L. (2010). This was tested in chapter 4, the classic linear regression model and variance test showed that 44.6% of the variations in purchasing frequency were caused by Celebrity influencers and Social influencers, with Celebrity influencers have a higher causal weight than that of Social influencers on shopping frequency.

Other literature further proves the impact of celebrity and social influencers on shopping frequency. A study conducted by Loureiro et al., (2017) concluded that consumers living in a collectivist society – a society that takes decisions as a group and not based on individualism – get influenced by the people that are close to them such as family members and friends. It is also more common that people living in such a society are majorly and mainly influenced by famous celebrities such as actors, singers, models, designers, politicians, TV hosts or news anchors whose style appeals to them.

Martensen et al., (2018) mentioned that it is preferred to choose a profile that seems to be more reachable and attainable to the public instead of choosing a fashion celebrity that will hinder the identification process of followers; those are called fashion influencers who are not famous celebrities.

Other authors such as, Tortora et al. (2015) mentioned that celebrity, political and social elites all directly influence fashion trends stating that this has been going for centuries, such individuals continued to capture the imagination of the public, especially when romance was involved.

Another study that was conducted on 100 male and female adolescent high school students with ages ranging between 16 and 18 years by Knezevic et al. (2016) concluded that adolescent's buying decisions are highly influenced by celebrities they

follow on the the internet and see on television since this young group of people are still looking for their fashion sense.

4.6.5- Fashion employees affecting shopping frequency

As for Fashion employees, they were excluded from the model due to lack of significance at the 95% confidence level. While the literature suggests otherwise: In-store employees are a very important aspect in building and maintaining lasting and profitable relationships with customers, Xie et al. (2016). When it comes to the luxury fashion industry, it is very significant to create a connection between the sales person and customer since luxurious brand environment require high involvement as well as services such as customization and customers would be willing to pay high prices for such services, Kim et al. (2014). Therefore, sales people for such luxury brands should develop rapport-building behavior in order to create a connection with their customers, Sresnewsky et al. (2020).

Previous research defined rapport as an interaction that is both enjoyable and harmonious between two or more participants that would result from a certain connection and understanding, Kaski et al. (2018).

Other authors suggested that the importance of the trust between fashion employees and customers falls on two reasons, the first being that rapport-building are the reason why trust is built during this exploration phase of a relationship, Campbell et al. (2006). Second, when trust is built salespeople will be on their way to building customer satisfaction and eventually customer loyalty, great referrals and most importantly successful sales and an increase in sales, Nickels et al. (1983), Hyun et al. (2014), Kim et al. (2014), Kaski et al. (2018).

4.6- Discussion of the hypotheses

H1: Followers' **shopping frequency** varies with respect to **demographics**

According to the statistical finding this hypothesis has been accepted on the Gender and Income levels only excluding age, marital status and type of employment.

H2: Celebrity influencers have a positive effect on followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

According to the study, this hypothesis has been confirmed since it has been found that not only 44.6% of the variation in purchasing frequency are caused by celebrity and social influencers but that celebrity influencers have a higher causal weight than that of social influencers on shopping frequency.

H3: Social influencers positively affect followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

This hypothesis has been found to be accepted as well but at a lower causal weight than that of celebrity influencers on shopping frequency.

H4: In-store fashion employees positively affect followers' **shopping frequency** of apparel

This Hypothesis has been rejected or found to be null according to the data collected.

4.7- Conclusions

In this chapter the findings of the study have been calculated through SPSS in the first part of the chapter and analyzed in the second part of the chapter.

The finding were that Income and Age are found to be positively correlated with shopping frequency, with females being more frequent shoppers than males and

people earning between 1.5 million and 3 million LBP spending more than people who earn less than 1.5 million LBP. Meaning that from the Independent variable 'Demographics" only Income and Age were found to be positively correlated with follower's shopping frequency and that marital status and type of employment were not found positively correlated and from the age demographic it was found that women appeared to be more frequent shoppers than men. Articles that discuss the effect of age and income on consumers shopping behavior were discussed in chapter 2 and the findings of this thesis configure what authors have discussed in the literature.

Other than the positive correlation between age and income with shopping frequency, this thesis also found that celebrity influencers positively affect consumer's shopping frequency and cause the frequency to rise. Just like the literature that previously stated the impact of celebrity influencers on followers' shopping behavior, the findings of this thesis also approve what scholars have discussed. A study conducted by Loureiro et al., (2017) concluded that consumers living in a collectivist society – a society that takes decisions as a group and not based on individualism – get influenced by the people that are close to them such as family members and friends. It is also more common that people living in such a society are majorly and mainly influenced by famous celebrities such as actors, singers, models, designers, politicians, TV hosts or news anchors whose style appeals to them.

As for the influence of social influencers; this study also found a positive correlation with follower's shopping frequency although not as strong as the influence of celebrities. Here as well the finding go line in line with the previously discussed literature in chapter 2 where followers feel that they are able to identify with those

fashion influencers. Martensen et al., (2018) mentioned that it is preferred to choose a profile that seems to be more reachable and attainable to the public instead of choosing a fashion celebrity that will hinder the identification process of followers; those are called fashion influencers who are not famous celebrities.

As for the impact of in-store fashion employees, not positive correlation has been found.

This concludes that 3 of the four independent variables have been proven to cause the increase of shopping frequency. Meaning that H1 has been partly approved but on the level of age and income only, H2 and H3 have been approved while as H4 has not been approved.

The contributions or what this thesis offers is a way to help Lebanese fashion retailers in trend prediction by following a marketing strategy that focuses on fashion celebrities as well as fashion influencers' impact on fashion followers and by also knowing how to target their products based on the age and income of their audience keeping in mind that each age category will have certain economic capabilities in order to make purchases. Therefore, in order to know what might be the possible best selling items, fashion retailers need to have them marketed by those influencers and if offered at the right price for the targeted audience, results are expected to have high number of sales; using this method Lebanese retailers will know how to manage the inventory of their stock and try to minimize loss as much as possible.

Figure 6 below will help to visually summarize the approved or not approved hypotheses.

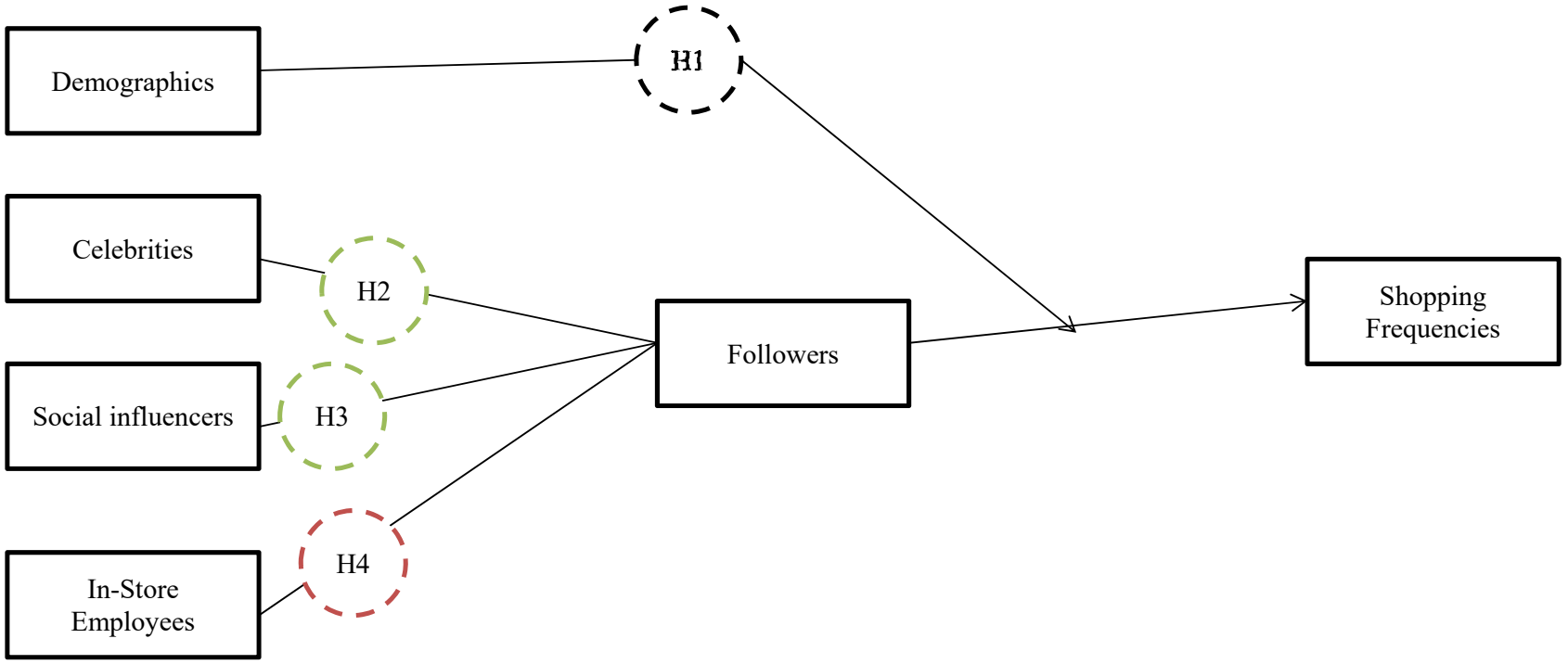

Figure 8- Conceptual Framework

Source: (Own author elaboration 2020)

Black = Hypothesis partially approved partially rejected
Green = Hypothesis approved
Red = Hypothesis rejected

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1- Introduction

The topic of this study revolves around the effect of celebrities, social influencers and in-store fashion employees on consumer purchasing frequencies. The data for this study was collected from a random sample consisting of 329 people living in the Keserwen area in Lebanon through a quantitative questionnaire and a deductive reasoning approach was used from this data collection in order to test the suggested hypothesis that were based on the literature.

Having discussed the main findings of this study in the previous chapter and mentioned which hypotheses were accepted or rejected; this chapter will summarize the results and discuss as well validity, limitations as well as implications.

5.2- Main findings

This study tested the effects that fashion celebrities, fashion influencers and in-store fashion employees have on consumer's purchasing frequency with the later being the dependent variable and the influencers being the independent variables.

Having completed this study and analyzed its finding through the statistical program SPSS. Table 21 (attached in the appendix) summarizes which of the hypotheses were accepted and which were rejected.

Concerning H1; followers' shopping frequency does vary with respect to demographics but only with gender with females being more frequent shoppers than men, and income with people earning between 1.5 million LBP and 3 million LBP being more frequent shoppers than people that earn 1.5 million LBP and less. Regarding age, marital status and type of employment no correlation was found and therefore could be tested for neither variation nor causality.

Concerning H2 and H3; both hypotheses were found to be correlated with consumer frequency and even tested for causality being that celebrity influencers have a higher causal weight than social influencers.

As for H4; the hypothesis was rejected to inexistence of correlation with consumers' shopping frequency.

5.3- Limitations of the research

Concerning the limitations of social research, they may include monetary, temporal as in related to time and access to data limitations. Due to the current social, economical and humane crises currently happening in the country a lot of factor might have indirectly affected the research such as monetary limitations since due to the economic crisis and the pandemic a lot of citizens have become unemployed. Moreover, the crisis and pandemic might have as well affected trends since a lot of shopping districts were affected by the destructions from the Lebanese revolution that started in October 17, 2019 as well as the Beirut blast on August 4th 2020. All of those events might have hindered shopping behaviors as well as influencers and celebrities' influences on shopping frequency.

5.4- Managerial Implications

The theoretical implications of this study highlight the importance of Gender and Income on shopping frequency as well as the importance of celebrity and social influencers on consumers shopping frequency. Not only are such important in nature but also consistent with the previously mentioned literature. Therefore, the findings offer a theoretical empowerment to the topic in regard to consumer behavior and shopping frequency in general, and open way for new research to expand internationally as well as locally.

Therefore it is important for retailers to base their marketing strategies in collaboration with celebrities and social influencers in order to market their products especially if those products revolve around a newly launched trend that has no precedent.

5.5- Contributions

After the discussion of the findings where H1 was partially approved and partially rejected, meaning that in regard to demographics only gender and income were found to be affecting consumer shopping behavior; it was found that age, status and employment do not affect consumers shopping behavior within the Lebanese market.

As for H4: ‘In-store fashion employees positively affect followers' shopping frequency of apparel ‘ The hypothesis was rejected and it was found that in-store fashion employees do not affect consumer shopping frequency with the Lebanese market.

5.6- Future perspectives

This study acts as predecessor to consumer behavior within the Lebanese market in the fashion design industry, a field that is poorly studied and researched. Therefore this study acts as a path to a new research topic where other researchers can deeply asses other factors within the Lebanese fashion market, this can happen through different methodological approaches such as interviews, study groups and so much more. Moreover, other studies might cover a larger target audience that can help better define the Lebanese market.

5.7- Recommendations

After the completion of this study and after being able to prove which hypothesis were approved and which were not, the recommendation for stakeholders other than managers, and those are fashion leaders, would be not to have the findings of this study impact or change the way they are behaving now as this will result in a major change in the study; making the findings unfit to the new behavioral change.

Fashion leaders should keep on following their chosen lifestyles and maintaining the same standards as before, they should also keep their taste in style and fashion since this is the main reason their followers identify with them.

As for in-store fashion employees, since the hypothesis of them being able to affect fashion followers' shopping decisions was found to be not approved, managers should offer employees adequate fashion training in order to help improve the sales of fashion goods while maintaining at first good employee motivation and involvement.

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LIST OF APPENICES:

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE
The effect of fashion leaders on followers' purchasing behavior

Thank you for taking the time to fill this questionnaire, which aims at scrutinizing the effects of fashion leaders on followers' purchasing behavior. Your contributions are essential for the completion and success of this study for my master's degree and will be treated with strict confidentiality as proposed by the ethical code of practice for field research at Notre Dame University. Hence, all gathered information will only be employed in statistical tests and no data about you as an individual will be disclosed. Kindly note that you can choose not to participate in this study and that filling the questionnaire is completely voluntary.

SECTION 1 –Demographic information

Please tick next to the case that best describes you or fill-in the space provided

1.01.Gender ○ Male ○ Female

1.02. Age (please provide your age in years) -

_____

1.03. Marital status ○ Single ○ Married ○ Widowed ○ Divorced

1.04. Type of Employment
○ Student
○ Unemployed
○ Private/public sector employee
○ Self-employed/freelancer
○ Retired

1.05. Income
○ Less than 1,500,000 LBP/mth
○ Between 1,500,000 and 3000,000 LBP/mth
○ More than 3,000,000 LBP/mth$_x$

SECTION 2 –Fashion leaders and followers' shopping frequency

Please circle the number that corresponds to your degree of agreement with the below statements (from 1 to 7, where 1 is Strongly disagree and 7 is Strongly agree)

Kindly consider that clothes refer to items such as shirts, blouses, tops, dresses, skirts, and pants, and **NOT** Items such as shoes, bags, and other accessories.

2.01. I consider myself to be a heavy shopper

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.02. I usually buy clothes whenever I have free time

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.03. I go shopping because I enjoy it

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.04. I go shopping because it's like therapy to me

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.05. I follow celebrities on social media accounts to see what they are wearing

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.06. I usually buy clothing that celebrities are wearing

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.07. I try to buy styles that are similar to that of celebrities I follow

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.08. Celebrities clothing choices affect my shopping decisions

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

The following questions are about social influencers that are different than celebrities. They are people that became famous on social media and are neither actors nor singers nor political leaders.

2.09. I follow social influencers on social media accounts to see what they are wearing

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.10. I try to buy styles that are similar to that of social influencers'

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.11. I usually buy clothing that social influencers are wearing

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.12. The clothes of social influencers affect my shopping decisions

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

The following questions are about in-store fashion employees that are either fashion experts or stylists.

2.13. I take into consideration the opinion of in-store fashion employees when shopping

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.14. The opinion of in-store fashion employees highly affects my shopping decisions

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.15. I always seek the help of in-store fashion employees when shopping

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.16. I ask in-store employees to tell me which trends are in season right now

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

Appendix 2: Table of correlations

Table 20- Correlations

			Gender	Marital Status	Type of Employment	Income	Age Group	**Shopping Frequency**
Spearman's rho	**Gender**	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.109*	.087	-.098	-.008	**.329****
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.048	.116	.083	.879	.000
		N	329	329	329	313	329	329
	Marital Status	Correlation Coefficient	.109*	1.000	.417**	.352**	.486**	.034
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	.	.000	.000	.000	.542
		N	329	329	329	313	329	329
	Type of Employment	Correlation Coefficient	.087	.417**	1.000	.391**	.771**	-.094
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.116	.000	.	.000	.000	.090
		N	329	329	329	313	329	329
	Income	Correlation Coefficient	-.098	.352**	.391**	1.000	.499**	**.139***
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.083	.000	.000	.	.000	.014
		N	313	313	313	313	313	313
	Age Group	Correlation Coefficient	-.008	.486**	.771**	.499**	1.000	-.069
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.879	.000	.000	.000	.	.212
		N	329	329	329	313	329	329
	Shopping Frequency	Correlation Coefficient	.329**	.034	-.094	.139*	-.069	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.542	.090	.014	.212	.
		N	329	329	329	313	329	329

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix 3: Summary of results

Table 21: Summary of results

Research question	Hypotheses	Test	Result
What are the factors that affect consumers' purchasing frequency	H1: Followers' shopping frequency varies with respect to demographics (only gender and income)	Kruskal Wallis and U-test	Accepted
	H2: Celebrity influencers have a positive effect on followers' shopping frequency of apparel	Pearson correlation	Accepted
	H3: Social influencers positively affect followers' shopping frequency of apparel	Pearson correlation	Accepted
	H4: In-store fashion employees positively affect followers' shopping frequency of apparel	Pearson correlation	Rejected