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Opinion Leadership in Clothing Fashions with Specific Reference to Student Community: An Analysis

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Abstract: ***This study investigates the role of fashion opinion leaders and followers in information seeking within the clothing fashion domain. The research focuses on examining the number, frequency, type, and variety of fashion information sources used by leaders and followers during different stages of the fashion adoption process, namely awareness, comprehension, and legitimation. However, opinion leaders demonstrated a higher propensity to consult a greater number of sources and do so more frequently compared to followers. Moreover, both leaders and followers recognized marketer-dominated sources as influential in creating awareness of new clothing styles. Notably, during the comprehension stage, the most significant sources differed between the two groups, with opinion leaders relying more on marketer-dominated sources, while followers leaned towards consumer-dominated sources. Additionally, the research examined demographic characteristics of the respondents but found no significant differentiation between opinion leaders and followers based on these factors. This suggests that the distinction between leaders and followers in fashion opinion is not necessarily driven by demographic attributes.***

These findings contribute to the understanding of opinion leadership and information seeking in the context of clothing fashion. The study emphasizes the importance of opinion leaders in driving fashion-related information dissemination, as well as their inclination towards a diverse range of sources. The differential reliance on sources between leaders and followers during the comprehension stage further highlights the unique role played by opinion leaders in influencing fashion adoption.

The implications of this research extend to marketers, fashion designers, and retailers, providing insights into effective communication strategies and the identification of influential individuals who can shape fashion trends. By recognizing the sources that hold the greatest influence at different stages of the fashion adoption process, industry practitioners can tailor their marketing efforts to engage both opinion leaders and followers effectively. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on opinion leadership and information seeking in the realm of clothing fashion. This research focuses on the behavior of leaders and followers and their utilization of diverse information sources. It provides valuable insights for understanding and navigating through the complex dynamics of fashion trends and consumer preferences.

Keywords: Fashion opinion leaders, Fashion awareness, opinion leaders, clothing fashion, fashion information

I. INTRODUCTION

Opinion leadership refers to individuals who are considered experts or trendsetters in a specific domain, such as clothing fashion. These opinion leaders have the ability to influence the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of others in their social network, based on their perceived knowledge and expertise. In the fashion industry, opinion leaders can take various forms, such as fashion bloggers, influencers, celebrities, or fashion experts. Their influence has become increasingly important with the rise of social media and the abundance of fashion-related information available online. Understanding the role of opinion leadership in the fashion industry is crucial for marketers and advertisers seeking to influence their target audience. Information seeking can be defined as an active process of searching for and obtaining information on a particular topic or subject. It involves a range of activities, including defining a problem or information need, identifying relevant sources of information, gathering and evaluating information, and applying the information to make informed decisions or solve a problem. In the context of clothing fashion, information seeking is an important part of the decision-making process for fashion consumers. It can involve searching for information on current fashion trends, styles, designers, and brands, as well as seeking advice and recommendations from fashion experts, friends, and family members. Consumers may gather information through various sources, such as fashion magazines, social media platforms, online fashion blogs, retail websites, and fashion events.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The consumption of clothing, especially fashionable clothing, serves as a way for individuals to communicate information about their personality and status to others.

Some consumers develop a strong interest and knowledge in clothing and fashion, leading them to become opinion leaders who influence the choices of others.

These fashion opinion leaders are crucial for the spread of new fashion trends as they share information and advice with other consumers, who seek them out for guidance. Numerous studies have examined opinion leadership in general and specifically in the fashion domain. However, there is still limited understanding of the personality traits and motivations that drive fashion opinion leadership, which prompted this study.

In parallel to opinion leadership, there is opinion seeking behavior, which complements the influence of opinion leaders. Opinion seekers play a vital role in disseminating new fashion trends by acting upon the information received from opinion leaders and may even become opinion leaders themselves.

Opinion seekers generally have a lesser interest and knowledge in the product category compared to opinion leaders, which is why they seek information and advice from the latter. However, opinion leadership and opinion seeking are not mutually exclusive behaviors.

It is suspected that opinion leaders, driven by their interest in the product category, also seek information from others who share the same interest.

Opinion seekers may also spread word-of-mouth about the category based on the information received from opinion leaders. Hence, there is likely to be an overlap between opinion leadership and opinion seeking. Several studies have reported positive correlations between the two behaviors across different product categories, indicating a relationship.

The motives for fashion opinion seeking extend beyond the need for information to make good choices. Despite having a lesser interest in the product category than opinion leaders, opinion seekers still strive to make informed decisions in clothing and fashion due to the social implications associated with this consumption. It has been proposed that opinion seeking is related to two consumer behavior concepts that capture the influence of others on consumers: the consumer need for uniqueness and attention to social comparison information.

The consumer need for uniqueness refers to individuals' tendency to seek differentiation from others in the market by acquiring and using products and brands that enhance their self and social image. It consists of three factors: creative choice counter conformity (selecting products that differ from established norms but are still acceptable), unpopular choice counter conformity (making choices that position the individual as distinct from the group), and avoidance of similarity (intentionally avoiding commonly used products or brands).

These counter conformity dimensions are particularly relevant as they reflect a deliberate deviation from established social norms in the consumer context

III. OBJECTIVE

To understand and leverage the profound interest in fashion and trends within the student community for the purpose of influencing and shaping fashion trends, while simultaneously serving as a source of fashion advice and information.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This is primary research focused to investigate the opinion leaders among the student community of management schools. 100 percent of the sampling population considering the entire management students in the Management schools in the sector was considered for the study. Random sampling method was adopted. The sample population chosen for study was 118, Likert scale tested for validity and conformity was used as the survey instrument. Analysis and Interpretation is presented.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

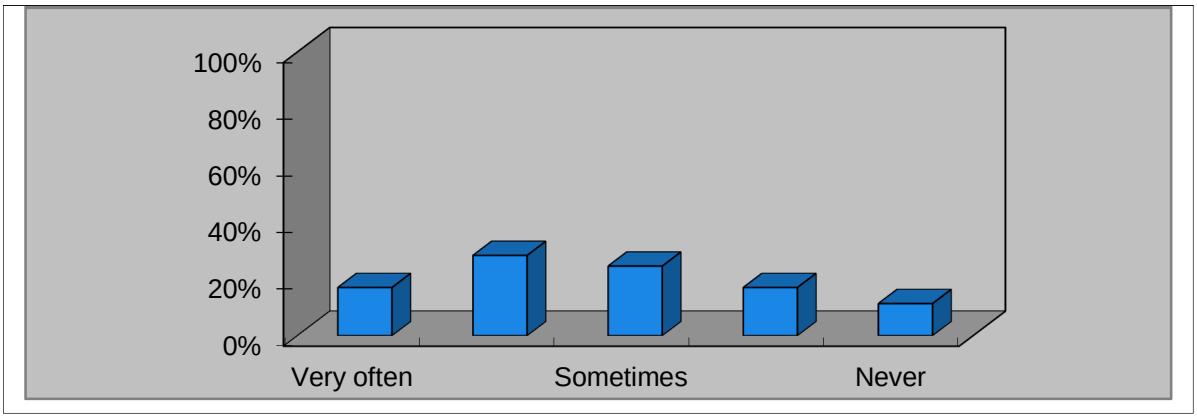
A. Informal Consultation with Friends and Peers on Fashion

Informal consultation with friends and peer community on fashion and trends had been an often-ongoing activity among 28 percent of the student community. Only 11 percent oof the student population never spoke or consulted on fashion with fellow colleagues. It is indicative 20 percent discussed fashion and trends and advocated to peer community very often being the opinion leaders.

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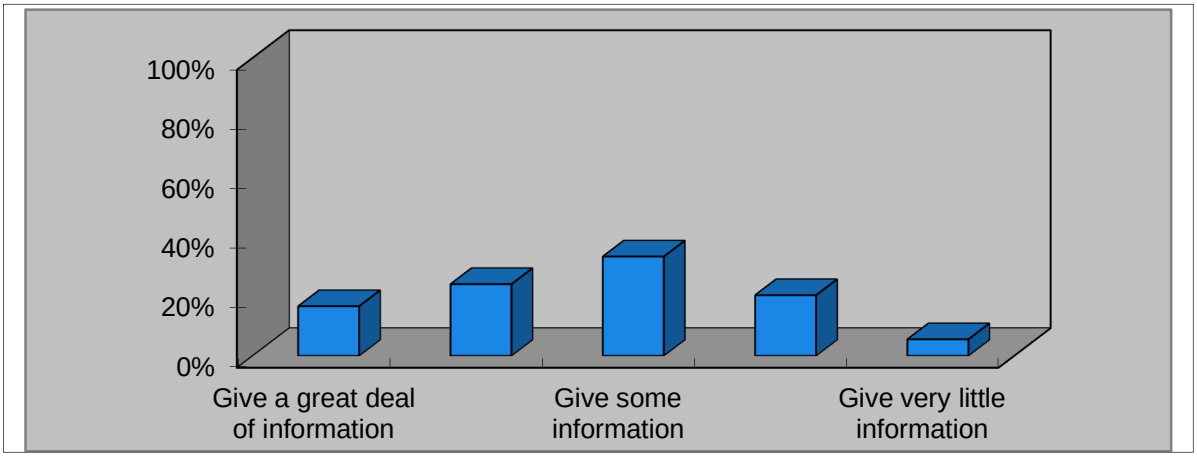
Fig.1 Informal Consultation with friends and peers on Fashion



B. Scale of Information and depth of Discussion shared among Peers

It was Observed 17% of the student Community Give a great deal of information while 24% Provide a lot of information,33% give some authentic information. Only 6% shared a meagre information on fashion amidst their friends and peer group.

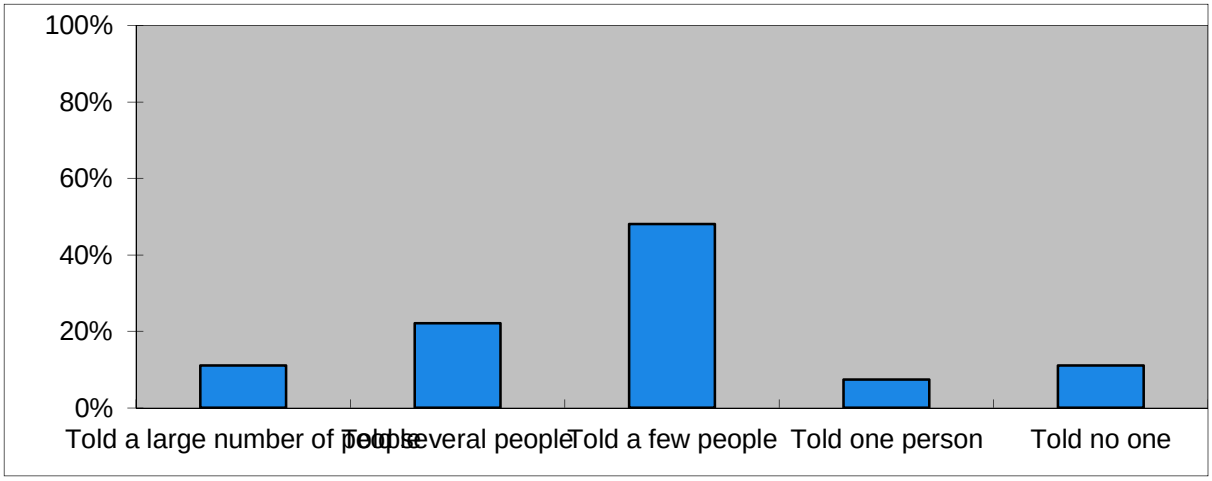
Fig.2 Scale of Information and depth of Discussion shared among Peers



C. Quantum of Information Shared in 6 Months Among the Community

It is indicative from the following figure that 33 percent of the student community shared information on Fashion.11% of the student community never shared any information on fashion trends to anyone.

Fig.3 Information shared among the community

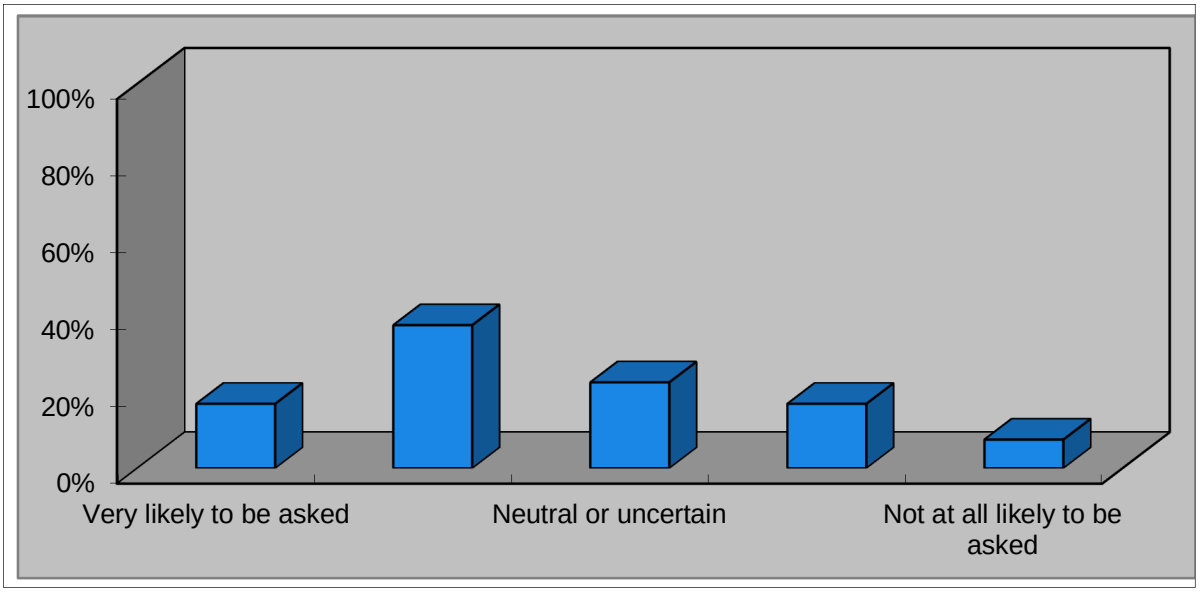


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D. Probability of Discussion on Fashion among Peers and Friends

Analysis gives an insight of 37 percent of the students are sure discussions will be raised on fashion and trends by peers and friends with them, while not likely to be asked by any was only 11 percent.

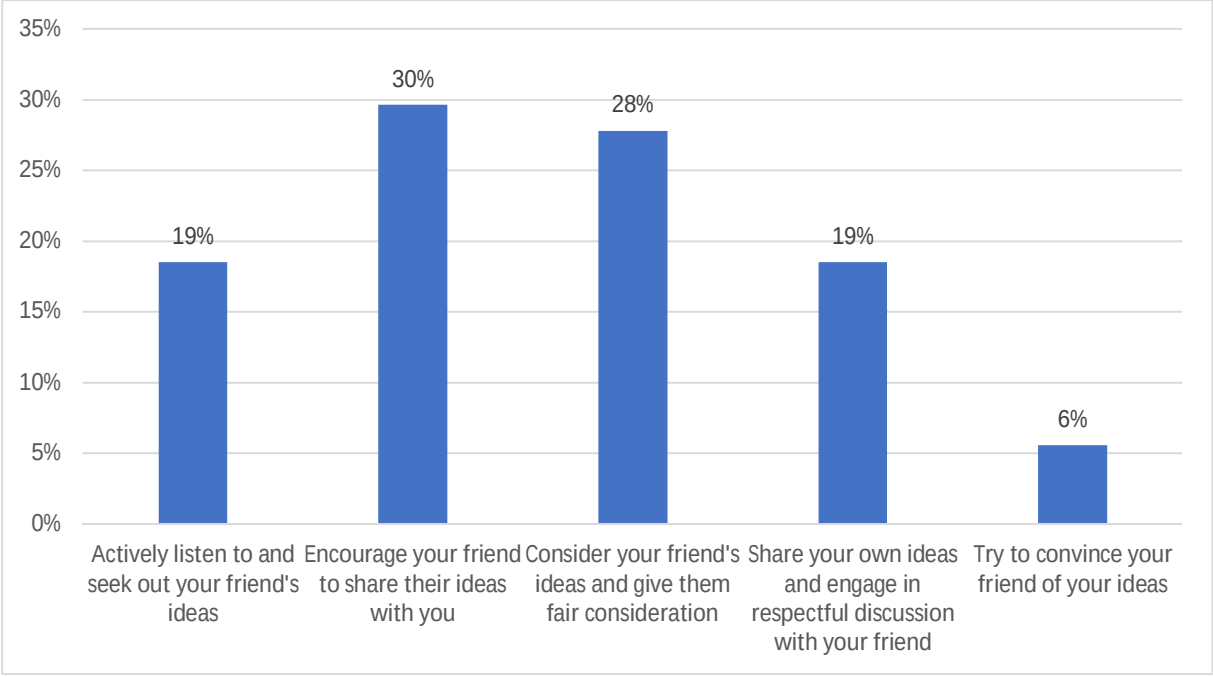
Fig.4 Probability of discussion on Fashion among Peers and friends



E. Engagement in Fashion and Trends

While 19% Actively listen to and seek out their friend's ideas,30% encourage friends to share their ideas and 28% consider friend's ideas and give them fair consideration while 19% share own ideas and engage in respectful discussion with Community. 6%try to convince friend on their ideas.

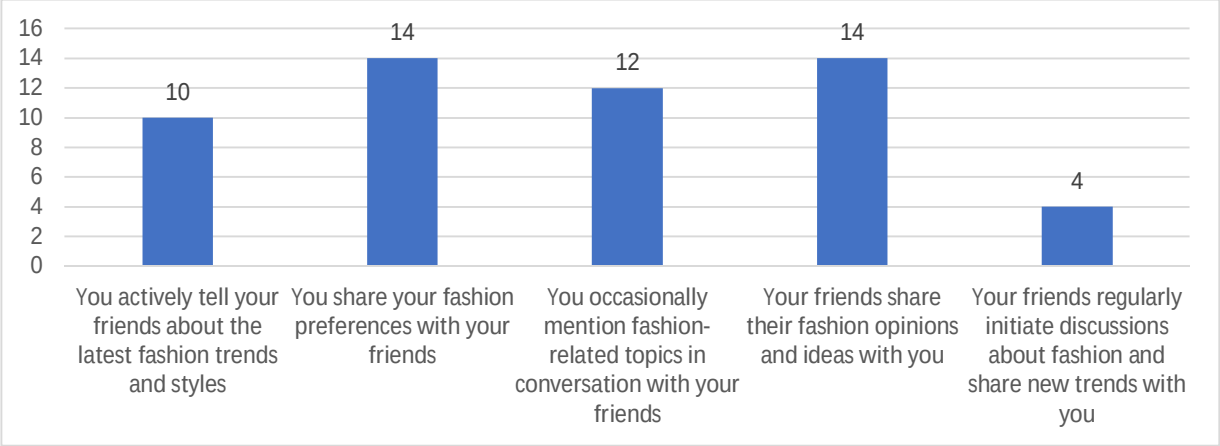
Fig.5 Engagement in fashion and Trends



F. Nature of Discussion on Fashion that Transpires within the Student Community

It is inferred from the results of research survey 19% of the student community actively tell their friends about the latest fashion trends and styles while 26% share your fashion preferences with their friends.22% occasionally mention fashion-related topics in conversation with their friends and 26% stated friends shared their fashion opinions and ideas with them.7% of the community surveyed where of the opinion that friends regularly initiate discussions about fashion and shared new trends with them.

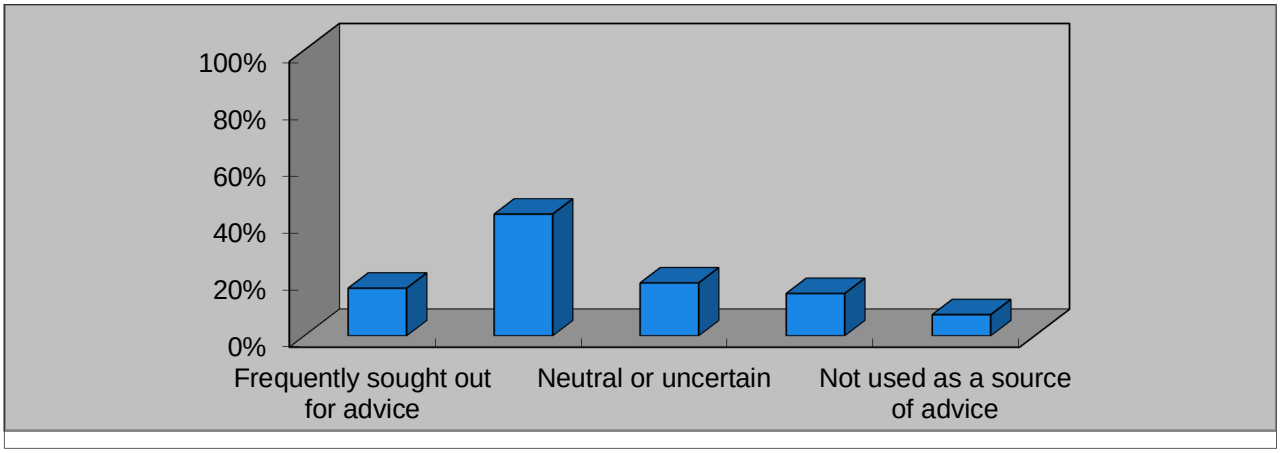
Fig.6 Nature of Discussion on Fashion that transpires within the student community



G. Advice Seekers Among the Students on Fashion

Students who frequently sought out for advice were 17%, Occasionally asked for advice were 43%, While Neutral or uncertain were19%. Results infer rarely consulted for advice were only 15% and those who were never used as a source of advice were 7%.

Fig.7 Advice seekers among the students on Fashion



VI. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A. Findings

1) *Informal Consultation on Fashion:* A significant 28 percent of students frequently engage in informal discussions about fashion and trends with their friends and peers. This indicates that fashion is a prominent topic of conversation within the student community. Only 11 percent of students never partake in these discussions, suggesting that a large majority are actively involved in conversations about fashion. An interesting observation is that 20 percent of students serve as influential opinion leaders by advocating for and actively discussing fashion and trends with their peers.
2) *Scale of Information Shared:* A substantial 41 percent of students share a noteworthy amount of information regarding fashion. This includes 17 percent who provide a great deal of information and 24 percent who give a lot of information. This highlights a robust exchange of fashion-related information within the community. Additionally, 33 percent offer some authentic information, indicating that most discussions are substantive. A mere 6 percent share minimal information, suggesting that the majority of conversations about fashion are rich in content.

3) *Quantum of Information Shared:* An impressive 33 percent of students shared information on fashion within the last six months, emphasizing a dynamic and active engagement with the subject. Only 11 percent never shared any information, reinforcing the idea that students are keen on disseminating their knowledge of fashion.
4) *Probability of Discussion:* The data reveals that 37 percent of students are confident in their belief that discussions on fashion and trends will occur with their peers and friends. This demonstrates a high likelihood of fashion-related conversations taking place. Conversely, only 11 percent consider it unlikely to be asked for such discussions, underlining a prevailing enthusiasm for fashion discourse.
5) *Engagement in Fashion and Trends:* A substantial portion of students actively engage with their friends' fashion ideas, with 19 percent actively listening and seeking out their ideas. 30 percent encourage friends to share their ideas, and 28 percent consider their friends' ideas and give them fair consideration. This indicates a receptive and open approach to discussing fashion among peers.
6) *Nature of Fashion Discussions:* 19 percent of students actively inform their friends about the latest fashion trends and styles, whereas 26 percent openly share their fashion preferences. A noteworthy 22 percent occasionally mention fashion-related topics in conversations with their friends. Additionally, 26 percent have friends who actively share their fashion opinions and ideas, and 7 percent of the community surveyed find that friends regularly initiate discussions about fashion and share new trends with them.
7) *Advice Seekers on Fashion:* A significant proportion of students, 60 percent (17% frequently and 43% occasionally), seek advice on fashion. Only 15 percent rarely consult for advice, and a mere 7 percent are never used as a source of advice.

B. Conclusion

The data reveals a deeply rooted and pervasive interest in fashion and trends within the student community. Conversations about fashion are not only common but also characterized by the active exchange of information, ideas, and preferences. A considerable number of students actively seek and offer fashion advice, reflecting the significance of this subject in their lives.

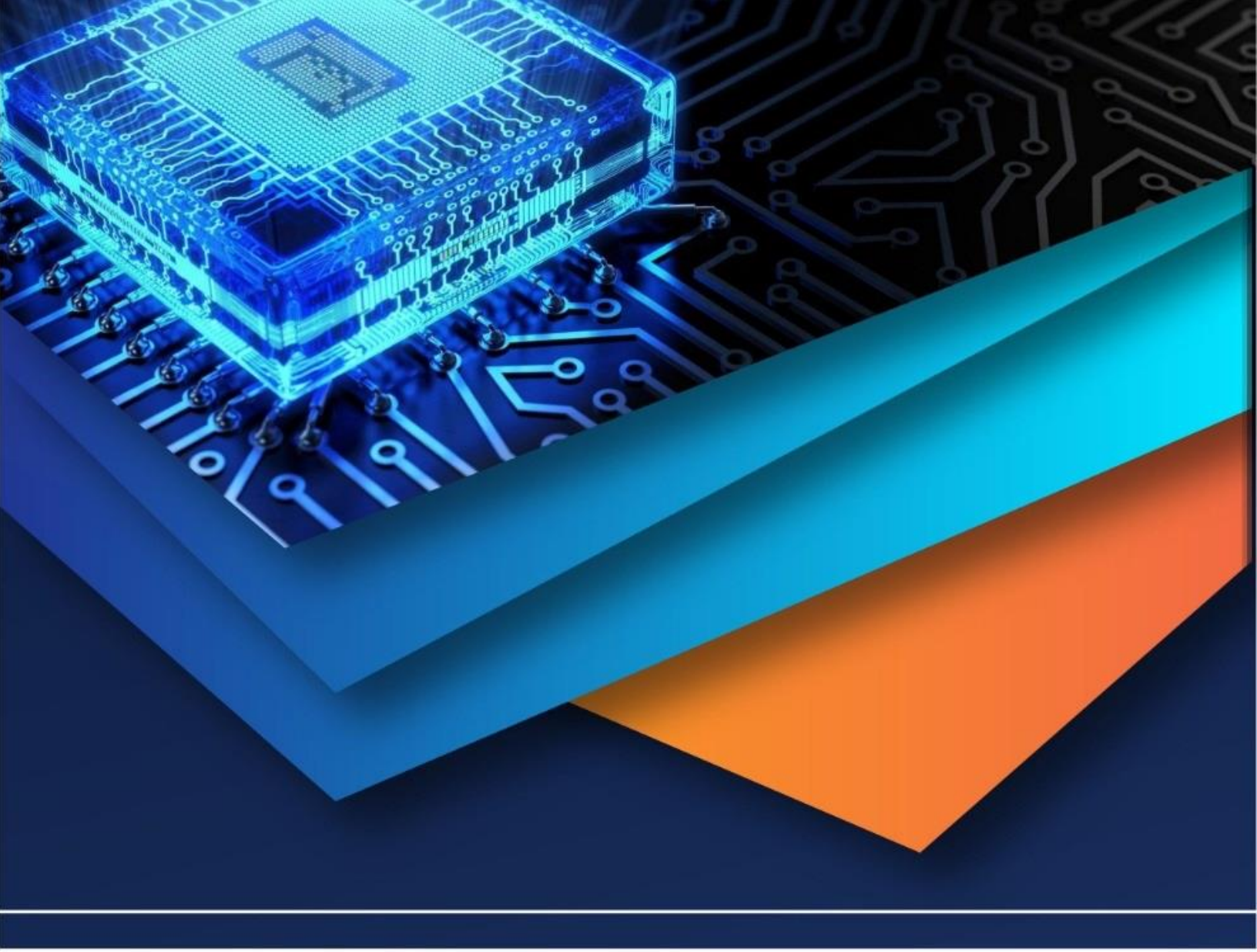
Furthermore, the data emphasizes the presence of influential opinion leaders within the student population, with 20 percent advocating and actively discussing fashion trends. This community's receptivity to fashion discussions, coupled with a high likelihood of such discussions occurring, suggests an environment where students actively shape and influence fashion trends.

In essence, the student community's dynamic engagement in fashion discussions underscores the pivotal role they play in the fashion landscape, acting as both trendsetters and eager learners, contributing to the evolution of fashion trends and preferences.

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