World Journal of Information Systems 1(3) 56-70
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17013/wjis.v1i3.19

Article

Maximizing Fashion Influence on Instagram

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(Article history: Received June 17, 2024; Received in revised form July 28, 2024; Accepted August 22, 2024; Available online September 15, 2024)

Abstract: Influencer marketing, particularly on Instagram within the fashion industry, has emerged as a pivotal communication tool offering diverse advantages to companies operating in this sector. The employment of influencers encompasses a range of objectives, spanning from enhancing brand perception and evaluation to inciting purchases among influenced consumers. This study delves into the distinctions between macro and micro influencers by conducting fashion consumer survey and in-depth interviews with influencers and fashion professionals. Additionally, it explores the circumstances under which fashion brands opt for either category, depending on the specific communication campaign objectives executed on the Instagram social network.

Keywords: influencer marketing, micro influencer, macro influencer, fashion, Instagram.

1. Introduction

Social networks have emerged as prominent information sources during consumers' purchasing processes [1] The key advantage lies in their ability to provide free and instantaneous access to information, along with facilitating two-way communications and diverse interactions (involving brands, consumers, or experts). As a result, fashion consumers prioritize social networks over other media. Fashion, being an identity and cultural element, undergoes continuous evolution [2], necessitating immediate and interactive communication, which, in turn, requires the adoption of new technologies [3], especially social networks.

In the context of the fashion sector, the social network Instagram exhibits ongoing growth due to its audio-visual characteristics, transforming it into a democratized platform with social shopping options. In 2021, four out of the five most mentioned brands on Instagram were fashion brands: Zara, Shein, H&M, and Nike [4]. These fashion brands employ influencer marketing, which involves a collaborative strategy between a fashion company/brand and influencers or relevant individuals ([5] who cater to specific segments of the brand's target market, benefiting both parties through their actions. Influencers are akin to the modern version of opinion leaders, possessing credibility, presence, and influence,

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which enable them to endorse products and brands [6]). However, the internet environment and social networks have exponentially increased the efficacy of this communication strategy, offering enhanced possibilities for micro-segmentation, direct communication, and personalized actions.

The evolution of influencer marketing has led to the categorization of influencers as either macro or micro, based on their number of followers and the level of influence and prescription they wield. Deciding when, how, and why to utilize either category becomes a crucial determination in enhancing the effectiveness of fashion brand communications, forming a pivotal aspect of the planning process for various marketing and communication actions of fashion companies.

2. Influencer marketing in Fashion

2.1. Social media, Fashion Communication and Instagram

The modern consumer no longer merely receives communication actions from brands passively; instead, they actively participate in the communication process. In the realm of social networks, consumers adopt a new role known as "prosumer" [7] where they not only receive but also produce information through various interactive possibilities offered by multiple platforms or social networks (e.g., text, audio, and video).

This brand-consumer interaction reaches its peak in the fashion sector, which necessitates a more personalized, direct, and rapid approach to connect with customers, given the accelerating pace of tastes, trends, and collections [8] Concurrently, consumers express their needs, desires, perceptions, and changes more explicitly through these platforms, where they can conveniently make purchases.

In 2021, 85% of Spanish internet users aged 16 to 70 were using social networks, comprising 31.4 million individuals. Over half of this group (51%) falls within the 25 to 40-year-old age bracket, characterized by medium-high education, rising professional careers, and a preference for Instagram and WhatsApp[1]. These social networks are utilized for entertainment (81%), interaction with others and brands (72%), information gathering (66%), seeking inspiration (37%), and following trends (29%) [5]

Given these statistics, social networks have become the most relevant channel for fashion communication. Studies reveal that 48% of social network users follow influencers, especially on Instagram, while over a third follow brand profiles and actively interact with them. Furthermore, 45% of users have been influenced in their purchase decisions by information obtained on social networks, 37% leave comments that influence other consumers, and 31% desire to receive communications or advertising from their favourite brands.

In summary, traditional media, especially in the fashion market, have lost their significance due to the array of options enabled by this new communication paradigm [9]

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The fashion industry faces a global marketplace with more informed and demanding consumers, accompanied by unprecedented levels of competition. Consequently, fashion brands must leverage the affordability, accessibility, and proximity of social networks to achieve effective communication and impactful engagement with their target audiences, who seek the opinions, references, and experiences of other consumers about the brands [10]

Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has been the fastest-growing social network [11] and has amassed the highest number of influencer followers, transforming it into a marketplace for attention and commerce [12]). In fact, 4 out of 5 influencer campaigns are conducted on this platform owing to its effectiveness in content delivery [13]

Fashion brands favour Instagram for content publication due to its ability to foster community, enhance loyalty, build and reinforce brand image, increase visibility, gather customer feedback, and promote events [14] Additionally, Instagram provides multiple metrics that enable fashion companies to gain comprehensive insights into their campaigns, encompassing traffic, trends, views, clicks, purchases, and more.

2.2. Influencer Marketing

The Cambridge English Dictionary (2022) defines influence as the "ability to cause change in how something or someone develops, behaves, or thinks; it is the power to have an effect on persons or things, or a thing or person that is capable of doing so."

From the aforementioned definition, it can be deduced that influencer marketing is a form of communication in which brands utilize individuals capable of influencing other people's purchasing decision processes or their perception of a product or brand (influencers). Originating from the concept of celebrity endorsement [15]), influencer marketing has evolved into a communication approach centred on the collaboration between brands and influencers. As a result, the content generated by influencers has a more organic, authentic, and direct impact on their followers than traditional advertising methods [16]

Thus, influencer marketing involves identifying opinion leaders based on their number of followers, likes on their posts, comments on their publications, or a combination of these factors, who can assist the brand in establishing a natural, spontaneous, and non-intrusive connection with their target audience [17]

The primary objectives of influencer marketing include enhancing brand awareness, increasing the number of brand mentions, reaching larger target audiences, and ultimately boosting sales. Consequently, 9 out of 10 marketers affirm that the ROI (Return on Investment) of influencer marketing campaigns surpasses other digital marketing approaches, with a return ranging from $5.20 to $6.50 per dollar invested, as 8 out of 10 consumers make purchases following a product or brand recommendation from an online influencer [13] Additionally, influencer marketing has proven to generate higher engagement levels, characterized by continuous interaction between the company/influencer and the consumer/follower, compared to other communication options.

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2.3. The Influencer

Influencers are individuals with a substantial number of followers within a specific segment or niche, through whom they exert influence by sharing content on social networks [16] They play the role of opinion leaders, capable of influencing consumer attitudes and behaviours, and on social media platforms, they engage with their audience in a more intimate and personal manner compared to traditional celebrities [18]. This close connection allows influencers to establish relationships with their followers while sharing aspects of their daily lives, knowledge, activities, and more.

Within the fashion sector, influencers hold the power to boost brand visibility, stimulate the desire to purchase the garments they recommend, wear, or showcase on their profiles, and foster brand loyalty through their communication efforts [10] As a result, this translates into increased sales for the brands they promote.

When selecting influencers, brands consider several key factors, including the influencer's credibility among their followers, the authenticity and engagement they generate, their reputation, the quality of their audience (in terms of alignment with the brand's target audience), their professionalism, commitment to their work, and the expected cost-benefit ratio [3].

Once influencers are chosen, the type of collaboration must be determined, such as brand or product recommendations, sponsored posts, participation in events, sharing of discount codes, and more. Influencers support brands by creating unique and personalized content, including narratives about their experiences with the brand and its products, which they share with their followers and consumers [19].

3. Fashion Influencer marketing on Instagram in Spain: Macro and Micro Influencers

Influencers are presently categorized into three main groups [20]:

a. Mega influencers: These individuals have over 1 million followers and are typically celebrities or well-known personalities who collaborate with large companies/brands. However, their influence on consumer behaviour is often limited.

b. Macro influencers: Falling within the range of 100,000 to 1 million followers, macro influencers are personalities known for generating high-quality content. They collaborate with various brands and may also serve as brand ambassadors.

c. Micro influencers: With follower counts ranging from 1,000 to 100,000, micro influencers publish content focused on their own interests and provide recommendations based on personal experiences with brands or products, lending credibility to their endorsements.

The objective of this research is to ascertain the most appropriate type of influencer based on the communication goals of fashion brands employing influencer marketing as a fundamental tool. To achieve this, qualitative research is conducted through in-depth

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interviews with experts in the fashion and digital marketing sectors, along with relevant influencers.

3.1. Results Obtained through in-Depth Interviews with Experts

The research involved conducting in-depth interviews with four professionals in the marketing and fashion domain, comprising two heads of marketing and/or communication agencies specializing in the sector and two heads of marketing departments in fashion companies. The key findings from these interviews are as follows:

a. Influencer marketing has emerged as a principal communication tool in the fashion industry due to its significant impact on consumer decision-making.

b. The widespread adoption of social networks has led to the digitalization of the fashion consumer's daily life. Among these platforms, Instagram holds the most substantial impact, closely followed by TikTok, in the fashion sector.

c. Influencer marketing in the fashion industry effectively communicates, influences, and can even prompt convenient purchases directly on social media.

d. The trust-based relationship between influencers and fashion consumers prevents brand communications from being perceived as intrusive.

e. Consequently, to achieve maximum effectiveness, the selection of influencers must align with the target audience of the fashion brand and enjoy high levels of trust among them.

f. When designing communication campaigns utilizing influencer marketing, macro influencer profiles are employed for branding actions, whereas micro influencer profiles are utilized for campaigns intended to encourage consumer actions (such as making a purchase or visiting an online/offline store). This choice is based on the higher engagement and interaction rates observed between micro influencers and their smaller number of followers.

g. There is an increasing trend towards utilizing micro-influencers in campaigns, as they possess specialized expertise and focus on fashion-oriented micro-segments. This specificity and specialization enhance their ability to influence and mobilize consumers towards action.

3.2. Results Obtained through in-Depth Interviews with Fashion Influencers

In-depth interviews were conducted with three micro influencers and one macro influencer operating in the fashion sector, with Instagram being their primary platform. The key findings from these interviews are as follows:

a. The essential characteristics of a "good" fashion influencer include naturalness, transparency, consistency, humility, and the ability to generate high-quality content for their followers. These traits foster trust among followers, enable interaction, and thereby, grant the influencer the potential to exert influence.

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b. Instagram, being a highly visual platform, is considered ideal for disseminating fashion-related content.

c. When collaborating with influencers, fashion companies place significant value on specific metrics, including the reach of posts, return on investment (ROI) or interaction of followers, number of views, and number of comments.

d. Fashion companies often seek the recommendation of micro influencers to their followers, providing them with samples, gifts, invitations to brand events, etc. However, collaborating with macro influencers typically involves financial remuneration for their services.

e. Looking ahead, interviewees pointed out several trends in this type of marketing. These include the increasing growth and relevance of TikTok, the rising prominence of micro influencers (as they offer a higher cost-effectiveness ratio in terms of sales), and the significance of promotional events as compelling content for fashion consumers.

3.3. Results Obtained from the Fashion Consumer Survey

For this study, a comprehensive questionnaire comprising five sections (introduction, analysis of fashion brands' presence on social networks, impact of fashion influencers, credibility and loyalty towards fashion influencers, and questions for segmentation or classification of the respondents) was designed, totalling 27 questions.

The survey was conducted between May and June 2022, targeting a young audience with specific characteristics: individuals who are fashion students or graduates and frequent users of social networks. This targeted profile was deemed highly suitable for the research objectives, as it represents a reliable and representative approximation of the current fashion consumer—well-informed, discerning, and socially engaged. A total of 113 methodologically valid questionnaires were collected, and the interviewees' characteristics align with the research requirements and objectives as follows: (Table 1)

Table 1. Profile of interviewees. Source: Own Elaboration.

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		Frequency	
Gender	Man	29	25,66%
	W oman	82	72,57%
	Prefer not to say	2	1,77%
Age	<18	4	3,54%
	18-25	92	81,42%
	26-35	15	13,27%
	>35	2	1,77%
Education Level	Primary	0	0,00%
	Secondary	40	35,00%
	Proffesional Form.	9	8,00%
	University Degree	52	46,00%
	Postgraduate/PhD	12	11,00%

The interviewees showed a strong preference for using social networks as their primary source of information in general and, specifically, for fashion-related content. An overwhelming majority (98.2%) reported being users of social networks, with over 45% of them indicating social networks as their top choice for obtaining information. Brand websites also emerged as a significant source, with 22% of the respondents selecting them as their first preference. (Figure 1)

In contrast, traditional media channels like TV, radio, and magazines are experiencing a decline in prominence among the interviewees. The use of print media, in particular, was found to be the least popular among the respondents for accessing information in the fashion domain. This shift in preferences highlights the increasing significance of social media platforms and brand websites as the primary outlets for obtaining information, signalling the evolving media consumption habits of the fashion-conscious audience.

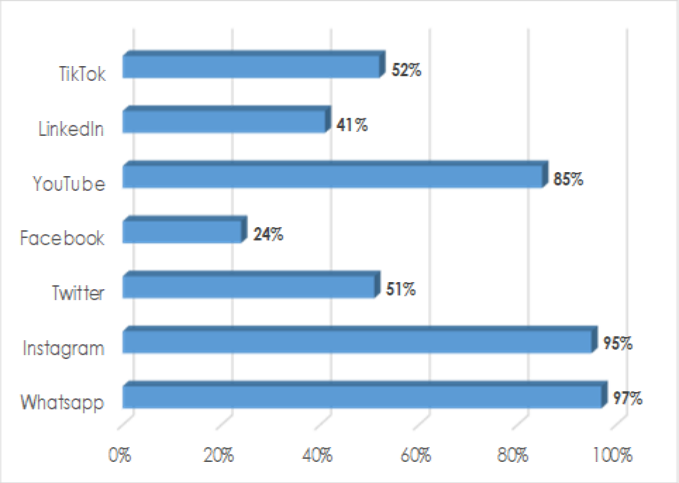

Figure 1. Most Frequently Used Social Networks. Source: Own Elaboration.

Respondents extensively utilize social networks for various purposes, including staying connected with family and friends (96%), following individuals they find interesting,

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particularly influencers (74.2%), and seeking information (73%). Furthermore, a notable proportion (22.1%) engage in direct purchasing from social networks, while others use them for socializing (15.9%) and sharing opinions and comments (12.4%).

Regarding the specific content sought on social networks, respondents predominantly seek news, followed closely by fashion and beauty-related information. To access such content, they rely on influencers and also refer to brands' websites and social media platforms. These findings highlight the significant role of social networks in facilitating not only personal connections but also information gathering, shopping, and engagement with fashion-related content, making them integral platforms for the fashion consumer (Figures 2 and 3).

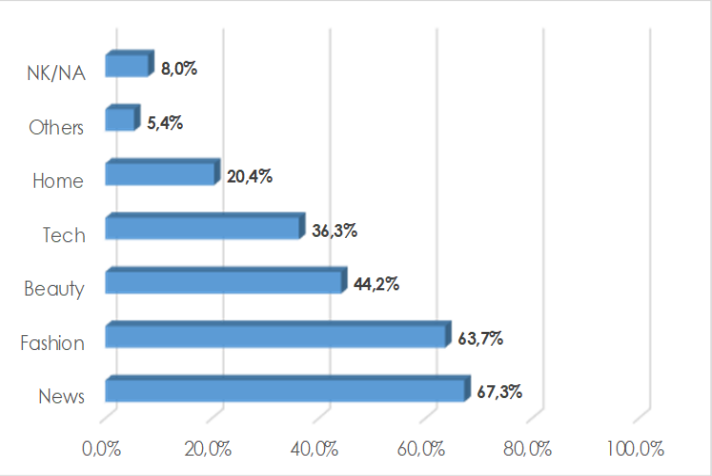

Figure 2. Most Frequently Searched Content on Social Networks Social Networks. Source: Own Elaboration.

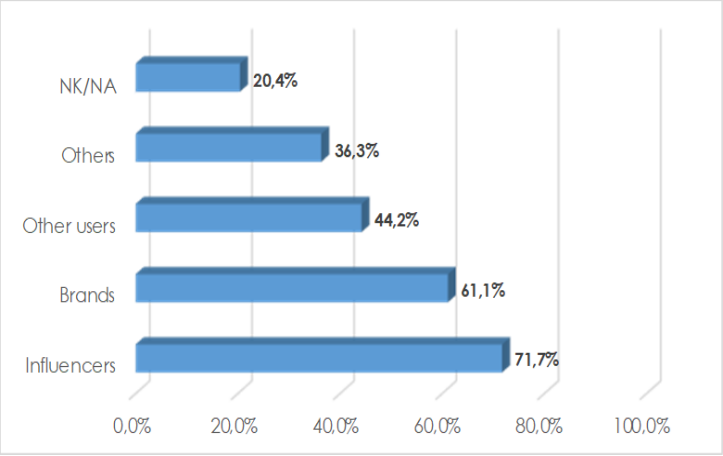

Figure 3. Source of the Most Frequently Searched Content on Social Networks. Source: Own Elaboration.

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The majority of respondents (54%) reported following 1 to 10 brands on social networks, with 70.3% of them being fashion brands and 45% related to beauty. Notably, the information and communication received from these brands on social networks significantly influences their purchasing decisions, with 59.5% stating that it has a very strong influence and 30.6% perceiving a moderate impact.

As depicted in Figure 4, a significant proportion (94.6%) of respondents follow at least one influencer on social networks. The reasons for following influencers vary, including seeking their opinions and knowledge about products, services, and topics of personal interest. Additionally, respondents follow influencers for entertainment, appreciating the influencer's style and profile (such as fashion, values, and personality), and to feel a sense of identification with the influencer. These findings underline the substantial impact and relevance of influencers as sources of information and inspiration for the fashion consumers in their decision-making processes.

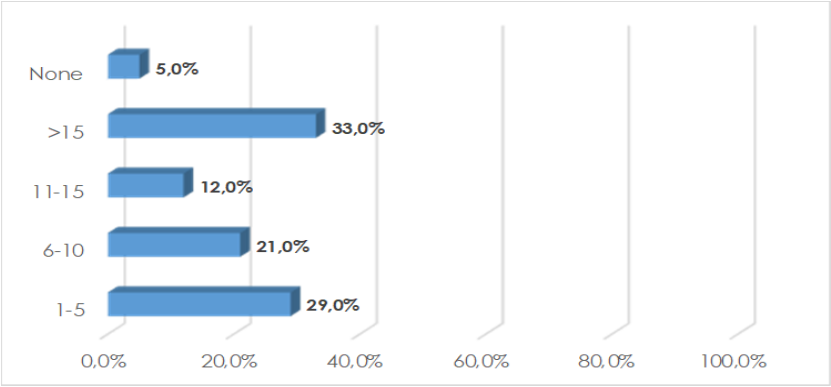

Figure 4. Number of Influencers Followed on Social Networks. Source: Own Elaboration.

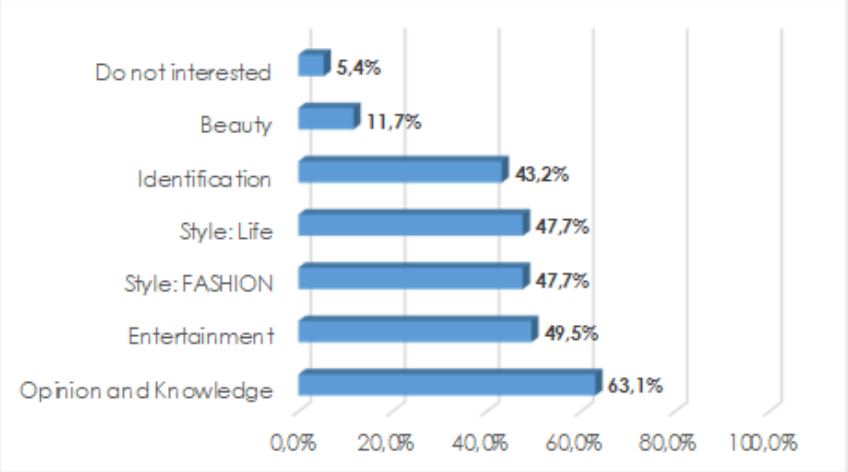

Figure 5. Reasons for Following Influencers on Social Networks. Own Elaboration.

Moreover, respondents highly value the benefits of following influencers, which include gaining fashion, beauty, and outfit ideas (52.3%), understanding influencers'

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opinions on products, services, or topics of interest (47.7%), discovering new brands (41.4%), and staying informed about the latest fashion trends and events (39.6%).

These findings reinforce the growing trend towards influencer segmentation and specialization, particularly in the realm of fashion. Followers now seek profiles of influencers who serve as opinion leaders in specific product and service categories. In fact, a significant majority (86%) of respondents expressed their inclination to purchase products and services positively recommended by influencers. Conversely, 43.2% indicated that they would not buy a product negatively rated by a trusted influencer. As part of this recommendation-influence-purchase process, fashion and beauty emerged as the category with the highest number of products purchased by respondents after interacting with influencers. This emphasizes the pivotal role of influencers in shaping consumer decisions and driving fashion and beauty-related purchases among their followers (Figure 5 & Figure 6).

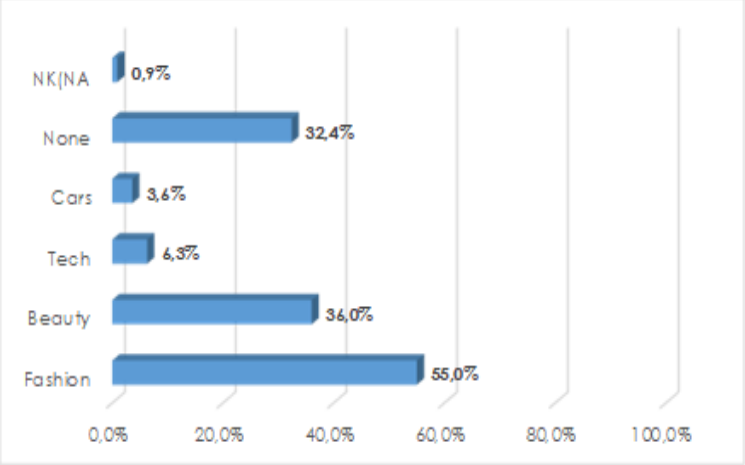

Figure 6. Types of Products Most Purchased on the Recommendation of Influencers. Source: Own Elaboration.

3.4. Analysis of Content Shared by Fashion Influencers on Instagram

Content analysis is a research technique aimed at deriving reproducible and valid inferences from data, allowing for its application within its relevant context ([21]. Initially employed in the field of communication [22]), content analysis has now been extended to social networks, including Instagram. In this study, the content analysis focused on examining the Instagram posts of four Spanish influencers in the fashion sector, encompassing both micro and macro influencers, over a period of 2.5 months. The selected influencers' profiles were as follows (Table 2 & Table 3):

Table 2. Profiles of Fashion Influencers Subjects to Content Analysis. Source: Own Elaboration.

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	Followers	Likes (average)	Engagement Rate	Interest of his/her Audience		Estimated Income per publication
Influencer 1	12.650	1.823	7,54%	Fashion: Lifestyle: Outfit:	73% 72% 69%	91,50 € to 152,50 €
Influencer 2	64.464	17.237	26,77%	Fashion: Lifestyle: Outfit:	73% 71% 64%	271,50 € to 452,50 €
Influencer 3	428.934	5.638	1,32%	Fashion: Lifestyle: Outfit:	87% 83% 81%	1.278,00 € to 2.131,00 €
Influencer 4	761.185	14.486	1,91%	Fashion: Lifestyle: Outfit:	87% 82% 793%	2.271,00 € to 3.785,00 €

Macro influencers consistently publish content on Instagram, but only 40% of their posts feature collaborations with fashion brands, often opting for posts that exclusively showcase the product. Conversely, micro influencers demonstrate a higher proportion of collaborations with fashion brands, and they always appear alongside the brand in their posts. Both macro and micro influencers use a similar mix of photos and videos in their content.

In all cases analysed, the follower-following ratio exceeds three, with the ratio increasing as the number of followers grows. Additionally, micro influencers exhibit a higher engagement ratio compared to macro influencers. Interestingly, the number of likes per post does not vary significantly between the two influencer categories, as evidenced by the case of influencer 2.

Notably, one of the key distinctions lies in the higher level of comments and likes received by macro influencers, attributed to their larger follower base. An analysis of the content of the comments made to their posts reveals the following themes: [Here, you can elaborate on the common themes observed in the comments, such as praise, product inquiries, brand mentions, etc., based on your research findings].

Table 3. Summary of DataCollection from the Influences under Study. Source: Own Elaboration.

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	MICRO		MACRO	
	Influencer 1	Influencer 2	Influencer 3	Influencer 4
Followers	12.650	64.464	428.934	761.185
Following	2.605	1.061	2.736	1.483
Follower-Following Ratio*	4,86	60,76	156,77	513,27
Total Publications	1.433	138	5.549	3.813
Likes (average)	1.823	17.237	5.638	14.486
Engagement Ratio**	7,54%	26,77%	1,32%	1,91%
Publications in Research Period	10	19	50	74
Analyzed Publications	9	14	16	34
% Posts with Brands	90%	74%	32%	46%
Comments (averga per post)	12	1258	58	60

*Follower-Following Ratio = Followers number/Following number x 100 (Yan et al., 2018). If it's value is >3, it indicates that it is a profile of public interest and that it interacts with followers.

**Engagement Ratio is a metric that tracks how actively engaged the audience is with the influencer's content. Rating: <1% Low, 1-3.49% medium, 4.5-6% high, >6% very high.

Finally, (Figure 7 Figure 8) this research highlights the differing content and engagement patterns between macro and micro influencers on Instagram within the fashion industry. Understanding these nuances is crucial for brands and marketers when strategizing influencer collaborations to optimize their impact on the target audience.

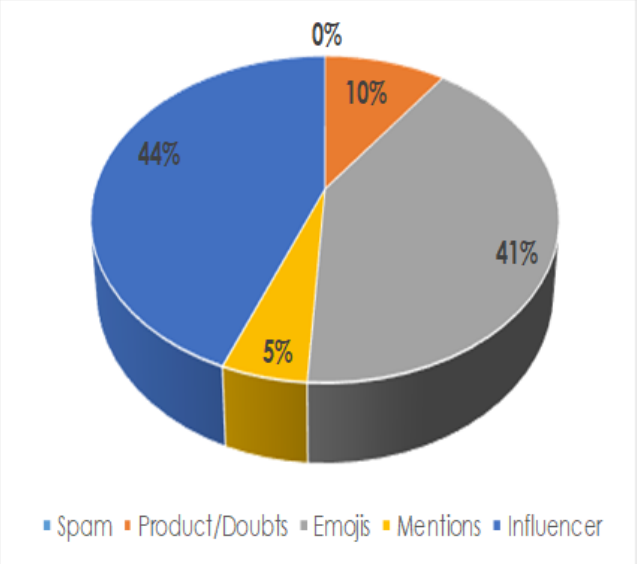

Figure 7. Subject of Comments in Fashion Publications by MICRO influencers; Source: Own Elaboration.

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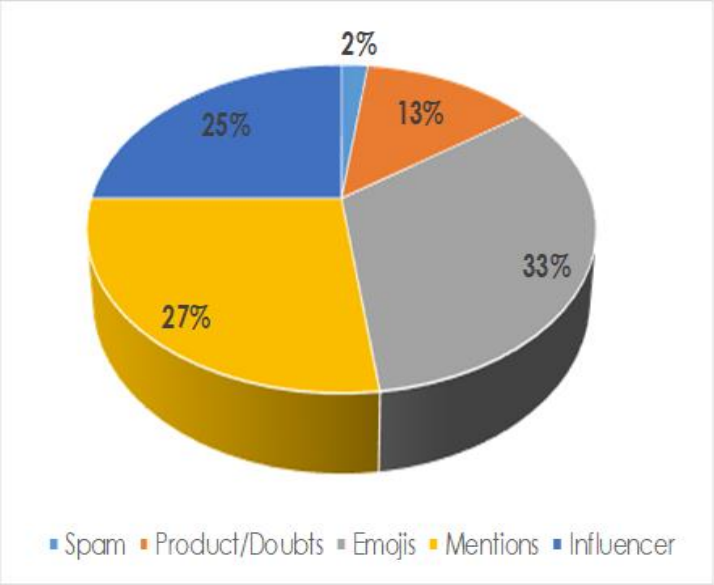

Figure 8. Subject of Comments in Fashion Publications by MACRO influencers; Source: Own Elaboration.

The primary method employed by both macro and micro influencers to associate their publications with fashion brands is through tagging, utilized by 91.30% of micro influencers and 86.79% of macro influencers. Following closely, mentioning the brand in the footer of the publication is another prevalent approach, with 66% of macro influencers and 65.22% of micro influencers adopting this method. In contrast, the use of hashtags is less prominent in both categories, with 26% of macro influencers and 60.78% of micro influencers utilizing hashtags to link their posts to fashion brands.

3. Conclusion

The conclusions derived from this research are as follows:

a. Fashion influencers exhibit a higher level of trust and influence compared to public figures, primarily due to their close connection and identification with their target audience.

b. Micro influencers carve out a niche as experts in specific product categories and cater to well-defined target audiences. This allows fashion brands to achieve greater and more precise segmentation, resulting in enhanced perceptions of authenticity and credibility.

c. In crafting influencer marketing strategies on Instagram, fashion brands opt for macro influencers when the objective is to establish, augment, or reinforce the brand image

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(branding). Conversely, the utilization of micro influencers is directed towards boosting sales or encouraging the trial of fashion products.

These conclusions underscore the significance of influencer marketing in the fashion industry and underscore the value of carefully selecting influencers based on their level of influence, target audience alignment, and specific marketing objectives. By recognizing the unique strengths of both macro and micro influencers, fashion brands can optimize their communication efforts, enhance brand loyalty, and drive successful marketing outcomes in the dynamic landscape of social media.

The study's identified limitations prompt suggestions for future research aimed at enhancing our comprehension of influencer marketing's role in the fashion industry. These suggestions highlight investigating influencer content impact, the significance of authenticity and transparency in brand partnerships, and conducting long-term analyses of influencer-brand relationships. Additionally, the proposal includes comparing social media platforms to discern optimal strategies across various digital contexts.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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