Designer Bags and Designing Me: An Exploration of the Role of Micro-Influencers within the Luxury Brand Management Strategy

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Abstract

Whilst the role of influencers in luxury brand marketing has been extensively explored, lesser attention has been paid to the value of micro-influencers as a digital marketing strategy, particularly within the luxury industry. With the luxury market awakening to the power of influencer marketing, Dior has been unique in its use of micro-influencers for its strategy. This research builds on a growing body of research considering the affordances of Instagram within the luxury strategy and adds the lesser explored research concerning video marketing and spreading brand information. Through a digital ethnography and computational network analysis approach, this study holistically depicts micro-influencers as intermediaries between the consumer and the organization by defining their position within the luxury brand management strategy as brand extensions and brand advocates with impacts on consumer purchase intention, consumer-brand relationships and product consumption experience. This study also examines how micro-influencers internalize and interpret the brand logic within their content production and how this affects their position within digital communities through a consumer-centric and platform-embedded perspective. Additionally, this study provides an understanding of the influencer's self-brand as an entrepreneurial subject, manifesting the potential of user-generated content whilst inserting the individual within the market logic. Finally, the value of micro-influencers is contextualized within a broader technological and digital culture landscape in accordance with particular platform affordances. The multidimensional approach of this study uniquely captures how micro-influencers exist within, communicate and perpetuate the myths of the aspirational economy. Overall, micro-influencers are depicted as uniquely powerful tools of digital storytelling and relational monitoring within the luxury brand management strategy, aiding the prestige and creativity positioning of luxury brands whilst emulating the "ideal luxury consumer" to sustain brand interest beyond seasonal product launches.

Keywords

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Table of Contents

Part I: Research Framework

1. Introduction

Social media platforms provide opportunities for brands to engage directly with a large market of consumers and have been particularly helpful for fashion brands (Belanche et al., 2021). Influencers play a significant role in enhancing this relationship between consumers and brands by providing a credible route by which consumers can affiliate with a brand (Belanche et al., 2021). This study will help conceptualize influencers as manifestations of a participatory digital culture that is shifting the definition of a consumer today and reconceptualizing how social capital enacts itself through the structures of cyberspace (Kaur-gill & Dutta, 2017). Regarding the management strategy, this study examines how influencers internalize the brand logic within content production and how this affects their position within digital communities (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Although a growing body of research has considered the affordances of Instagram within the luxury strategy (Bishop, 2021; Chong & Gottipati, 2020), less research has considered the recent development within this arena in video marketing and spreading brand information (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). To better examine how influencers disseminate messages to consumers, it is crucial to understand the networks within which influencers are embedded.

Harnessing influencers within brand management strategies works particularly well given the nature of social media platforms (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Despite the implied authenticity of user-generated content, the integration of influencers into the branding strategy and their dependence on social media platforms shape the influencer's content production and their relationship with followers (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). This study will explore how influencers respond to the differential expectations arising out of their interaction with followers, brands and the platform itself (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Academically, this study provides an understanding of the influencer's self-brand as an entrepreneurial subject (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020), crafting a new cultural zeitgeist and manifesting the potential of user-generated content. However, this also means an internalization of ideas designed for marketing commodities (Khamis et al., 2017) thereby inserting the individual within the market logic. Furthermore, this study builds upon a small but significant body of research regarding the

growing precarity of influencer culture based on performing authenticity and aesthetic labor simultaneously (Duffy and Pooley, 2017) by studying micro-influencers who are more so perceived as credible, niche experts compared to macro-influencers and celebrities where advertising intent is more salient (Marques et al, 2021). This study also adds to the extended scholarship which draws attention to the strategies through which influencers construct and maintain their authenticity by examining their embeddedness within broader communities to demonstrate their role within the brand advocacy framework.

Therefore, conducting an ethnographic study of Instagram micro-influencers within the luxury industry, this study poses the following research question: *What is the value of micro-influencers within the luxury brand management strategy?* Three sub-questions are used to complement this central research question. For the foundation of this research, a digital ethnography approach will be used to answer the question: *In what ways do fashion influencers use digital storytelling about brands to strengthen brand affinity on Instagram and Youtube?* To enhance knowledge of the mechanisms of self-branding performances and their role in maintaining a profitable parasocial relationship, in-depth interviews will be used to answer the question: *How do luxury influencers on Instagram and Youtube perform authenticity work to act as brand advocates and strengthen brand perceptions through parasocial relationships with consumers?* Finally, to examine the influence of subjects within particular online communities, computational network analysis will be used to answer the question: *Who are the most popular influencers producing luxury fashion videos on Youtube?*

Essentially, this research aims to more comprehensively understand influencers as intermediaries between the consumer and the organization by defining their position within the brand management strategy. Whilst this study adds to the well-developed discourse regarding influencers particularly on Instagram, this research is unique in its use of digital ethnography with computational network analysis to conceptualize the role of influencers through a multidimensional lens. Through these methods, the role of influencers is understood both qualitatively through their contributions to the brand story and structurally through their influence and embeddedness within particular social networks.

2. Conceptual framework

Bastien and Kapferer (2009) identify two models of brand strategies within the luxury industry - one based on prestige and heritage and another based on creativity and experimentation for value transmission. With the latter, the brand is bolstered by storytelling with one of the most important strategies being "brand extension" which exploits brand identity by creating more visibility within the market resulting in more value (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). The combination of these strategies with digital marketing facilitates a fertile theater for storytelling, knowledge transmission and purchasing motivations (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). eWOM platforms such as Instagram and Youtube act as facilitators of community formations and aesthetic demonstrations (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017) critical to the aforementioned luxury strategy. Therefore, an influencers' Instagram feed is transformed into a theater for storytelling and knowledge transmission with the subliminal goal of increasing purchase motivations, with the influencers as primary actors as well as directors combining brand stories within their own personal stylized narratives.

2.1 Influencers as Mediators of Brand Stories and Brand Advocacy

In accordance with Veblen's notion of "conspicuous consumption" luxury goods provide a "high culture" iconography which allows their owners to engage in social displays of superiority (Berkowitz et al., 1992). Influencers represent this potential social capital by photographing themselves with these goods. However, Tynan et al., (2010) disputes this reductionist approach with a consumer-centralized approach wherein consumers co-construct brand meanings by ascribing high levels of symbolic and emotional/hedonic values to products through the stories they construct with each other. As such, successful brand stories provide consumers with a cultural resource for group affirmation, identity construction and value-idealization (Roper et al., 2013). Consumer communities consist of systems of cultural meanings that strengthen the value of luxury products beyond prestige points into transformational experiences through identity confirmation. Influencers result in a centralization of particular consumer communities alongside their personal brands which can be harnessed to funnel brand stories and increase value transmission.

Fashion influencers then act as powerful intermediaries in the cultural construction of a brand with powerful impacts on purchasing intention and levels of trust (Parrott et al., 2015) by presenting stimulus for consumer co-constructive processes by manufacturing digital stories that integrate high-culture iconography. Within consumer communities, brand advocates facilitate a link between consumer and producer by facilitating social bonds and offering guidance within the community (Parrott et al., 2015). Some research has considered the role of parasocial relationships within communities in strengthening brand loyalty, therefore establishing brand advocacy as a key component of the loyalty ladder framework and distinguishing levels of brand advocacy along a spectrum (Parrott et al., 2015). Following this paradigm, influencers exist at the highest level of brand advocacy possibly modulating their influential effects within communities. Parrott et al (2015) established the interlinks between brand advocacy constructs and how influencers exist at the center of these constructs thereby enhancing consumer-brand relationships through shared consumption experiences.

2.2 Performing Aspirational Labor and the Cultivation of Parasocial Relationships

Through their role as brand advocates, the integration of commercial content within the social content utilized by influencers to enhance parasocial interactions makes influencers valuable marketing tools. Social penetration theory denotes how voluntary self-disclosure fosters the development of human relationships (Kim and Song, 2016). Persuasive narratives created through personal and professional self-disclosure enhance product recommendations by inviting the consumer to envy or identify with the influencer's lifestyle (Escalas, 2007). Benign envy refers to desire to acquire the possessions of others with no hostile feelings (Jin et al., 2019) enhancing consumer attitude and desire toward the envied product manifesting in a motivation to emulate the source. Therefore envy acts as a mediator between social comparison and behavioral motivation when the source is perceived to be similar to one-self. This concerns self-discrepancy theory which is activated through identification with the source wherein the discrepancy with the idealized and real self moderates affective change and purchase intention towards the product/brand (Jin et al., 2019). The effect is strongest through upward social comparisons and

influencers exploit this margin (Jin et al., 2019). Through these concepts activated by sharing consumption experiences, influencers provide an avenue for vicarious self-indulgence and interactive escapism (Jin et al., 2019). Lawry (2021) names these interactions as the mediating effects of self-gifting which allow consumers to experience the hedonic consumption of luxury whilst also providing the sensory immersion of luxury experience through digital shopping experiences in place of the sensoriality of luxury experience traditionally provided by mono brand flagship stores. Lawry (2021) describes these processes as critical to the burgeoning of Luxury 4.0 characterized by a digitally savvy, younger consumer base and their phygital (blended physical and digital) shopping practices.

2.2.1 The Importance of Influencer-Brand Congruence

To create transformational effects within digital shopping experiences, influencers activate narrative transportation theory which refers to an immersive, pleasurable experience for the consumer (Green & Brock, 2003) . Some research has been done on the role of narrative advertising in inducing identification processes and positive affect within the viewer (Escalas, 2007; Chong & Gottipatti, 2020) especially in conjunction with the match-up hypothesis. The match-up hypothesis suggests that the effectiveness of product endorsement depends on the congruence level between an endorser and the brand/product (Kamins, 1990). Therefore influencer congruence enhances the effectiveness of narrative advertisements by activating the consumers' self-concept affirmation processes (Parrott et al., 2015) through symbolic interactionism of the performative presentation of themselves online (Jacobson & Harrison, 2021). Influencers therefore solutionize imperative challenges to luxury brands by formulating intangible brand associations and deep connections with consumers (Kim, 2019).

Parasocial relationships facilitated by opinion leaders also have effects on the co-construction of authenticity of brands. The match-up hypothesis therefore strengthens the influencers perceived expertise and prestige within the community and by extension, trust in the brand prestige (Kamins, 1990). As authenticity workers, influencers perform a staged authenticity (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021) as a continual narrative legitimizing all other content. Influencers therefore engage in a type of emotional and aesthetic labor through their authenticity

work and role as cultural intermediaries (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021). Aesthetic labor demands a certain type of worker to embody the values of the organization (McFarlane & Samisoe, 2020) and arose from Hoschild's (1938) ideas of emotional labor as the management of publicly observable facial and bodily displays. Building on the idea of influencers as the central activator of brand advocacy constructs (Parrott et al., 2015), Bordieu's (1984) ideas of cultural intermediaries position influencers as both the "perfect consumer" as well as consumption amplifiers through their work with the immaterial and symbolic significance of luxury goods and cultural processes. As manufacturers of symbolic association, influencers must ensure a faith in themselves, and by extension the brands, through the cultivation of the authenticity narrative which is enacted by the authenticity aesthetic (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021). Trust and reciprocity reduce the need for relational monitoring, forming an alternative to brand relationship management and monitoring mechanisms by enacting a concept of regulated reciprocity through influencer parasocial relationships (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021). Therefore, influencers act as part of an omnichannel strategy (Jacobson & Harrison, 2021) of enacting the meaning transfer model for brands.

2.3 The Role of Credibility Within Authenticity Performances

However, the outsourcing of narrative construction to influencers also underlines a threat to the brand safety and prestige position of luxury brands. One model to assess endorsement effectiveness within an omnichannel strategy is the source credibility model which depends on the depth of the influencer's personal brand (Jin et al., 2019). In conjunction with the match-up hypothesis (Kammis, 1990) influencers are perceived to be more authentic when their appearance and lifestyle are symbolically aligned with the brand. Studying the performance of aesthetic labor underlines the skills influencers possess in translating and integrating brand stories within their own self-branding practices to manufacture authenticity and positive brand effect. Bishop (2021) builds on these ideas by examining the precarity of authenticity performances and influencers to diagnose the styles of authenticities that coincide with inequalities in growing creative online economies. McFarlane & Samsioe (2020) build on these ideas of inequalities through their consideration of aesthetic digital labor within the frameworks

of glamor labor. As such, overlapping ideas within this research highlights a gap in a holistic understanding of differential inequalities pertaining to performing influencer work within the broader landscape of the digital and attention economy.

Based on the discussed perspectives and concepts, this research explores the visual and narrative strategies utilized by micro-influencers in their personal self-branding practices and how these practices are harnessed by and integrated within commercial content produced in collaboration with luxury brands. These particular perspectives were chosen because of their consumer-centric deconstruction of the role and value of micro-influencers within the luxury brand management strategy. Primarily, this research explores how micro-influencers act as brand extensions within the framework of aesthetic labor to enable the cultural construction of a brand and how they act as brand advocates within the framework of authenticity labor to strengthen brand affinity through parasocial relationships. Therefore, this study seeks to confirm and build upon previous research by embedding the discussion of these strategies within the broader context of the influencer industry in conjunction with a changing technological landscape and particular platform affordances. Additionally, this research places importance in highlighting the distinctive value of micro-influencers in response to the branding challenges of luxury marketing.

3. Methodology

Digital ethnography is a method situated under an interpretivist paradigm (Kaur-gill & Dutta, 2017). The objective of ethnography is to depict cohesively the cultural membership in a community and because its primary contribution is the understanding of culture (Kaur-gill & Dutta, 2017), this method enables a qualitative understanding of how influencers exist within and influence digital community cultures and in turn, purchase intention. As Kaur-gill and Dutta (2017) state, when conducting digital ethnography, self-identities, social relations and the structure of cyberspace are all relevant areas of study. This study explores these concepts through participant interviews, participant observation and social network analysis respectively. Additionally, ethnography enables a nuanced, exploratory take on a lesser known phenomena as opposed to making broad generalizations (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). Most importantly, the goal of digital ethnography is to holistically depict cultural membership in a community as well as changing self-identities within changing digital realities (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). Therefore, given the cultural contribution of an influencer occurs online along with their parasocial interactions, digital ethnography is the method best suited for exploring this phenomenon.

3.1 Mixed Method Research

The qualitative methods of participant observation and interviews will be blended with each other to inform and support the data collection mutually. Multi-method research has proved useful in capturing the diversity and richness of the online world as a mirror of the real world (Fenton & Procter, 2019). Therefore, this blended approach implies triangulation since the computational network analysis complements the qualitative data collection. This design provides deeper insight into the study as the results from the computational network analysis will be contextualized by the findings of the qualitative method.

3.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Digital ethnography is an adaptation of ethnography. It is the study of people online through participant observation and interaction at the core of its research model (Fenton & Procter, 2019). Due to the non-Cartesian properties of the Web wherein influencers disseminate brand stories, digital ethnography lends a unique understanding of how individuals give meaning to and interact within social spaces that are simultaneously real and imaginary (Burrell, 2009). Insightful digital ethnographies require mental immersion and engagement with the imagination (Burrell, 2009). This study benefits from an established knowledge of the subject matter and social media channels involved thereby enhancing the participatory and interactive efforts with the groups under study.

Digital ethnography is flexible compared to ethnography regarding the researcher's role within the community. This study took on the role of the researcher as somewhere between participant as observer and observer as participant thereby complying to the "virtual verisimilitude" necessary within digital ethnography to both observe and engage with the affordances of the platform of online interaction within these communities (Kozinets, 2015).

The fieldsite defines the spatial characteristics where the social processes under study take place (Burrell, 2009) to define the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for the study. Definitive field sites encapsulating particular communities and opinion leaders (influencers) within the fashion sphere were highlighted through a "follow the object" and "follow the person" configuration respectively (Burrell, 2009). Recently, Dior adopted a market saturation strategy for a product launches and promoted product increasingly through global influencers usually indicated by the hashtags #SuppliedbyDior, #GiftedbyDior, #InCollaborationwithDior and #DiorLoveChain (Gush, 2018; Manoff, 2018). By following these hashtags, a final sample of four influencers were chosen through non-probability sampling (Boeije, 2009) for participant observation.

Figure 1: Demographic information of observation participants

Instagram handle	Follower Count	Location	Sponsored Item
@cherifaakili	17.3K	Hamburg	Bag
@milanpyramid	27.8K	Italy	Bag
@loisopoku	12.3K	Berlin	Bag
@ps.shadesofmylife	67.6K	Netherlands & Germany	Bag

This sample of influencers all have between 1000 to <100,000 followers according to the categorization of a micro-influencer (Isyanto et al., 2020) and are based in Europe for consistent comparability in deriving subject themes. Final participants for the interview process were determined by participants who consented after contacting 200 individuals from the population sample.

Figure 2: Demographic information of interview participants

Participant Label	Follower Count	Location
Participant A	12.3K	Berlin
Participant B	1,961	Montreal
Participant C	3,531	Netherlands
Participant D	3,531	Netherlands
Participant E/Amber Valentine	250K	London and Warsaw

Communities were defined as followers who commented under and liked the sampled influencer's posts. Additionally, this process utilized snowball sampling in using generated algorithmic suggestions for influencers and communities from Instagram lending to deeper insight into the affordances of the platform and connectivity of communities (Boeije, 2009). This also formed an entry point into the community which illustrated pathways within the community (Burrell, 2009). The netnography was determined as cohesive when meaning saturation was reached as this approach does not rely on spatial boundaries to define the research end-point (Burrell, 2009). By defining the fieldsite as a network, the digital fieldsite more closely tracks the social phenomenon being studied as the site is constructed in terms of how such this phenomenon is perceived and acted on by participants (Burrell, 2009). This converges with the emic ideal of ethnography lending to empirical insight (Burrell, 2009).

3.2.1 Participant Observation

To study how the parasocial relationships within online communities strengthen brand loyalty and the effects of influencer narratives upon communities, I conducted participant observation on Instagram. The participant observation online took place over two weeks from February 15th to March 1st 2022. To document the digital practices of fashion influencers on these digital platforms, 15 observation records of about 500 words were compiled and screenshots of relevant content were collected. An example can be found in Appendix B. This enabled an immersion within the day-to-day occurrences within a community thus enabling the study of the meaning-making processes constructed through the behavior, language and interaction within members of the group (Fenton & Procter, 2019). Due to the asynchronous and text-based nature of digital participant observation, the advantage of this method is that it enables more efficient and accurate data collection and the ability to observe interactions that were logged without the researcher's presence (Ruppel, 2017). The Instagram posts of four micro influencers sponsoring luxury fashion brands and the comments under these posts were

inductively analyzed with a grounded theory basis for the participant observation portion of this research (Boeije, 2009). Theoretical sensitivity in qualitatively analyzing narratives portrayed on Instagram posts and audience response to these narratives provided a credible basis for interpretivist practice (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004). Using the method of constant comparison, overarching themes portrayed by the influencers were deduced (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004).

The method of comprehensive note-taking was used to encapsulate data within this portion of the digital ethnography over a period of two weeks. The observation protocols will provide evidence for research question 1 and 2.

Qualitative Data analysis

Qualitative techniques were used to analyze the data with specific attention to grounded theory concepts. In interpreting this digital ethnography, this study utilized a strategy of analytic bracketing by first interpreting the discourses being practiced and then interpreting the discursive practice (Broad & Joos, 2004). This approach attends to the interplay between the circumstantial and constitutive components of the interpretive practice and has been previously adopted to understand the production of online public selves through netnography (Broad & Joos, 2004). This interplay between ethnography and narrative analysis is well-suited to the blended methods in this study and in analyzing the construction and effects of immersive narratives created by influencers as brand extension strategies.

3.2.2 In-depth Interviews

To understand how influencers act as intermediaries in the cultural construction of a brand, five influencers were interviewed through a structured interview process in order to determine and compare how influencers relate to and understand their role in relationship with the luxury brand (Boeije, 2009). For interviews, an interview schema was created through an inductive "grounded theory" approach (Boeije, 2009). Participants were given a consent form

with information about the study (Boeije, 2009). For examining public behavior, considerations of informed consent are less salient because participants know their behavior might be observed (Ruppel, 2017).

3.3 Digital Methods

Rogers (2019) conceptualizes digital discovery as a digital forensics approach for journalistic mining and exposure wherein the covert coding of websites and "covert political work being undertaken" is acknowledged publicly using data derived from these websites. API as a tool for data gathering has been rarely used in qualitative research, lending this study a greater depth within its findings (Lomberg & Bechmann, 2014). Digital ethnography can be significantly enhanced by the use of digital methods (Born & Haworth 2016; Ritter 2021). YouTube and its younger relative, TikTok are complicated platforms due to their functions as both a "top down" platform for the distribution of popular culture and a "bottom-up" platform for vernacular creativity (Burgess & Green, 2018). The growing platformization of cultural production also means that institutional structures are embedded in the lived social lives of producers and consumers within specific contexts (Duffy et al, 2019) providing insight into the grander schema modulating an influencer's reach and influence with a social network.

3.3.1 Computational Network Analysis

To better examine how influencers disseminate messages to consumers, it is crucial to understand the networks within which influencers are embedded. Thus, computational network analysis (CNA) was used to supplement the qualitative insight within this digital ethnography with regards to Youtube which will enable the identification of significant individuals and patterns of cultural transmission (Burgess & Green, 2018). This method encompasses descriptive and structural analysis (Sapountzi & Psannis, 2018) as it involves a set of nodes connected by a type of relations or interactions (Yang et al., 2017).

Computational network analysis applies the field of network science to the study of human relationships (Hansen et al., 2011). Collections of individual social media contributions create large, complex social institutions which necessitates an examination of individual behaviors while acknowledging the collective properties of social media contributions (Hansen et al., 2011). Conceptualizing the social media landscape through influencer locations can lead to better applications of the brand management strategy according to social media priorities (Hansen et al., 2011). In the interest of cultivating particular communities, social media activity can be mapped to compare individual social media efforts (Hansen et al., 2011). CNA complements methods that are focused on individuals whilst adding a crucial dimension that captures their interdependencies within societies (Hansen et al., 2011) thereby making this method well-suited to this study. CNA posits that the success or failures of organizations are defined by the structure of relationships that limit or provide opportunities for interaction (Hansen et al., 2011). Therefore, positions within networks are a significant factor within CNA (Hansen et al., 2011).

Examining centrality characteristics within an influence analysis enables an understanding of the position and influence of opinion leaders within the fashion sphere and the links between different communities or individuals (Yang et al., 2017; Sapountzi & Psannis, 2018). Firstly, Between-ness centrality describes the distance between people who are not neighbors through the number of neighbor connections from one to another (Hansen et al., 2011). Secondly, closeness centrality captures the average distance between a vertex and other vertices within the network (Hansen et al., 2011). Lastly, eigenvector centrality displays influence scores for strategy connected people thereby formulating a more complex idea of centrality (Hansen et al., 2011). Through these measures, densely connected sets of vertices form clusters that may reflect the recognition of these groups or their connections to each other (Hansen et al., 2011). As stated, recent research describes community detection algorithms that identify these clusters based on network structures (Hansen et al., 2011). These types of formulations are pertinent especially regarding the Youtube platform whose algorithms formulate niche community

clusters. Social network data was retrieved from the Application Programming Interface of YouTube. The data set was assembled with the search query "outfit ideas". The YouTube networks evolve during the post-video discussions (Shapiro & Park, 2018). While the nodes of the network represent YouTube channels, the edges relate to the platform practice of commenting. Using the layout algorithm ForceAtlas 2 in Gephi, this study establishes clusters within the comment network. Such research as search will provide insights into hubs, connected communities, and gatekeepers within the network of YouTubers who publish content on luxury fashion.

CNA also has the advantage of addressing multi level phenomena by combining micro level behavior with macro-level environments making it suitable for this study (Yang et al., 2017). This provides particular insight into why global luxury brands like Dior might opt to work with micro-influencers with smaller followings than celebrities ambassadors or macro. Gephi will be used for this research as it studies the correlation of node properties and network structure through visual representation and conforms to classic data mining algorithms of CNA (Sapountzi & Psannis, 2018)

3.4 Data Analysis and Research Ethics

The digital space remains an ethical gray area due its transient typology as both a public and a private space (Robins, 2015). Consent and contextual integrity draws this boundary clearer in several ways (Robins, 2015). First, through the maintained separation of data sets (Robins, 2015). Second, when studying social media, ethical boundaries can be drawn along the lines of the Terms and Conditions agreed to when signing up to use the site (Robins, 2015). Then, under established protocols the data can be regarded as public domain (Robins, 2015). These formal agreements can also be considered an additional form of consent (Robins, 2015) in addition to the informed consent taken before interviews. During interviews, consent to record the interviews was taken and precautions were taken to comply with any requests to keep certain information off the record (Jurkiewicz, 2018). Quotes will also not be assigned to specific

people but retained within an outline in general discussion threads to be covered (Jurkiewicz, 2018).

Anonymity is thought of as key to qualitative research but because social network data is typically based on relationships between people, data cannot be collected in anonymous form and requires additional steps (Robins, 2015). One procedure was to code interview participants with an ID alphabet to be entered into the data set with the guarantee that these names will be destroyed once the data are entered (Robins, 2015). However, since anonymizing participants is not possible when identifying key players within a social network or exemplifying digital observation, participants' online names will be used in lieu of their given names in order to preserve their offline privacy whilst retaining their online figurative status (Jurkiewicz, 2018).

As a data collection method, grounded theory ethnography aims to capture the process instead of describing settings like other forms of ethnography (Flick, 2018). Another feature of using ethnography in grounded theory research utilizes the "coding-in-collecting' approach which compares data with each other and with emerging categories during data collection (Flick, 2018). Overall, grounded theory ethnography is thought to be best applied when capturing a phenomena which makes it well suited to this research (Flick, 2018). Additionally, in accordance with the grounded theory ethnography techniques, Charmaz (2014) suggests intensive interviewing based on interview guides which captures the experience of an individual highly involved in the phenomena being studied. As such, utilizing grounded theory legitimizes the abstract concepts being explored through this digital ethnography (Flick, 2018). In terms of ethical considerations, limitations could be psychological distress from questions asked in interviews although this is unlikely (Potrata, 2010).

Part II: Digital Ethnography

4. Results

4.1 Participant Observation

Taking the role of somewhere between observant and participant, I immersed myself in the field site by following and liking chosen participants' posts. However, I took the position of a "lurker" in the comment section conversation by logging and observing conversation but refraining from commenting. In this way, I was able to observe the micro-influencers' methods of interacting with their community and crafting digital narratives in accordance with platform affordances in practice. Based on grounded theory, special attention was paid to narrative themes and aesthetic strategies utilized by influencers in personal and sponsored content; their use of IGTV or Reels within a product experience framework; content exploration in terms of constructing authenticity with popular digital narratives and audience reactions to personal and sponsored content. An example of these fieldnotes can be seen in Appendix B. This information was useful in gaining an understanding of the conventions of luxury influencer marketing behaviors and the way their content is consumed from a consumers' point of view before deconstructing this process in the interviews.

4.2 In-depth Interviews

The in-depth interview functioned as a pathway into the inner workings of a micro-influencer in terms of their perceptions of their role, the construction of their individual public personas, occupational ideology, lived experience as well as information about the industry from the perspective of an influencer. The flexibility of this method enabled me to personalize the interview to each influencer which was useful considering their variability within Dior's hierarchy of brand alignment and their differential level of experience in the industry. Five influencers were interviewed, two of whom ran a joint Instagram account since they are twin sisters. All of them were between the ages of 20 and 40 and none of the influencers were full-time influencers as all of them also had jobs or were students. All participants were contacted through Instagram Direct messages. The interviews took place on Zoom (version

5.4.7) between May 25th and May 2nd and lasted an average of 40 minutes to an hour. It should be recognized that the medium chosen for the interviews may have affected the data collection and subsequent analysis therefore potentially reducing the effectiveness of the interviews. However internet-based mediated interviews provided a flexibility to schedule and interview global micro-influencers. All interviews were conducted without a problem. The data was transcribed and re-read before being open-coded to provide an overview of the data. Codes were then grouped into axial codes to refine thematic concepts in conjunction with theory. Finally, interviews were re-read and results were interpreted to structure codes into three major themes that captured micro-influencers' strategies of aesthetic and authenticity labor within their experiences as micro-influencers in response to shifting industry and platform landscapes. This can be seen in the coding tree in Appendix E.

5. Background into the Evolution of Dior's Influencer Strategy

In recent years, the luxury market has finally awakened to the power of influencer marketing with 73 percent of luxury brands utilizing the strategy (Manoff, 2017). Each brand, resistant towards letting go of their powerful aspirational symbolism, has adopted a different interpretation of the method. Since their first highly successful campaign, Dior has primarily utilized micro-influencers who theoretically drive more engagement due to their niche audience subscription (Manoff, 2017).

For a launch under Parfums Christian Dior, the company utilized an influencer marketing platform to collaborate with selected influencers with under 500,000 followers in addition to more common celebrity ambassadors. (Manoff, 2017). The selected influencers corresponded with the particular audience Dior aimed to target. Centered around the #DiorLoveChain hashtag, the campaign provided detailed briefs yet permitted creative flexibility for the influencer's content creation (Manoff, 2017).

This formula has been replicated in several product launches since, including the re-launch of the brand's iconographic Dior Saddle Bag. In order to elevate the brand's proven influencer strategy in lieu of relaunching a vintage product, this campaign was a notable attempt

to flood the market (Williams, 2018). On the same day, several global influencers posted images modeling the luxury bag coinciding with the launch of Dior's own marketing campaign (Williams, 2018). This campaign relied on the hashtag #SuppliedByDior. With the increasing saturation of commercial fashion images online, Dior chose to flood the public's digital newsfeed so the bag and the brand were virtually inescapable.

Re-issuing a beloved discontinued product plays on the nostalgia and heritage mechanisms of luxury brands like Dior whilst creating instant cache for influencers featuring the bag online, along with fodder for inventive digital content. Resultantly, web searches for the bags went up 1000 percent on Lyst and generated immense store traffic, cementing the effectiveness of influencers within a brand management strategy (Williams, 2018). However, overexposing a brand or product could result in a dilution of the brand's value especially if the campaign appears inauthentic or generated for commercial appeal (Klein, 2018).

As a seasonal, special edition item, the Saddle bag qualifies as an ephemeral luxury item. Ephemeral luxury items, compared to iconic items sold year-round, indicate higher social status because this type of consumption signals higher creativity (Carcano et al., 2011). By showcasing these ephemeral purchases that also aligned with the current fashion trends online, influencers were able to strengthen brand awareness and perceptions by translating their own status and public persona through images with the bag. The exceptional and diverse images generated by influencers within this campaign reigned in any overexposure effects that might have diluted Dior's brand value.

The Love chain and Saddle Bag campaigns demonstrate the dynamic of operating between brand overexposure and brand awareness through influencer campaigns. This is indicative of a grander challenge of balancing the economic and symbolic values of luxury brands, which are now facing higher competition and the democratization of the luxury market at a time with profitable growth remains a key indicator of their success (Carcano et al., 2011). This is because symbolic value is communicated through craft, historical patrimony, complexity of manufacturing, heritage and most importantly, rarity and exclusivity (Carcano et al., 2011). This value is constructed through product cues as well as intangible resources (Carcano et al., 2011). Harnessed as brand extensions and through their position at the highest level within the brand

advocacy framework, micro-influencers mediate the pursuit of intangible and product-related symbolic values in order to sustain, if not bolster, economic value.

6. Setting the Scene: Instagram as a Digital Marketplace and Storytelling Platform

Digital narratives are embedded in a new media environment that closely influences the structure and understanding of a modern society (Sanchez-Lopez et al, 2020). They are propelled on platforms that enhance interactivity, hypermedia, transmedia, virtuality and connectivity (Sanchez-Lopez et al, 2020). Arguably, connectivity is the biggest influencer of how digital narratives are consumed as connectivity alters the role of the user, the process of reception and the use of the stories (Sanchez-Lopez et al, 2020).

Importantly, digital markets are extremely fluid and characterized by dynamic shifts in communication power and market transformation through networking (Castells, 2013). Digital spaces that are able to expand their fluidity and interactivity can shape and alter actual markets, such as the fashion market, through networked activities (Schops et al, 2019). This is because in an age of constant media disruption, digital storytelling is defined by a vibrancy, variety of stimuli and content accessibility for all audiences (Sanchez-Lopez et al, 2020). This results in a continuous reshaping of identity and collective expression in tandem with technological disruption, and this is exemplified by exploring how digital personas navigate new forms of storytelling.

6.1 Micro-influencer's Motivations for Choosing Instagram as a Personal Platform

During the earliest days of Web 2.0, blogs were the primary platform for digital self-presentation. Amber Valentine (pseudonym), now considered a macro-influencer with around 250,000 followers, was one of the global creators chosen to join Dior's initial micro-influencer campaign. She is one of the unique individuals who began her journey before Instagram's influencer boom by starting a blog in 2000.

"So I started blogging after watching Susie Bubble blog, you know, the all first generation. Yeah, Brian boys, Roomie Neely etc. So these were the first generation and I was sort of like the second wave of bloggers back then. Blogging wasn't really like a phenomenon. When we started, it was stuff that people did almost like an extension of Live Journal, if you remember Live Journal. Yeah, people just used to be online on forums and things. And we just moved to our own place on spaces (Amber Valentine, 2022, p.1)."

Other influencers similarly described following the lead of their internet contemporaries in beginning their journey of sharing their passions online. In time, as Amber captures, there came an individual diversion from widely used social networks towards more personalized digital spaces.

Then in 2010, Instagram emerged as a platform that combined the social-media aspects of Facebook with a visual culture and a user-friendly template that launched it into instant success (Blystone, 2022). Participant A, who also found her start blogging, describes how Instagram's convenience and visual format functioned to create what she describes as a "behind-the scenes" platform where she was able to connect with audiences more intimately by posting multiple times a day:

"I just feel like Instagram is also much quicker because the blog is more like - it used to be like, almost like an article where you would write a whole lot of stuff. And people would actually also take the time to read the whole article. And Instagrams just like, hey, I'm on the run. This is my outfit and like, quick, quick, quick. It's very, very quick."

These sentiments convey the casualty of Instagram in its early days as a method of instant, authentic personal expression with the goal of allowing audiences to peek behind the curtain of a finished digital image. In the same vein, Amber characterizes Instagram as a continuation of what people were already doing online (Amber, 2022, p.1). Indeed, all of the micro-influencers described their primary motivations for joining Instagram as investing in a creative outlet, regardless of when they joined Instagram. As Participant B, who began her page

during the COVID-19 pandemic, muses:

> "So I just wanted to have cottage core photos on the feed and like, just have the really nice looking and things like that. So that's just how it started. I didn't really have in mind to work with brands, it was just for fun."

The concurrent increase in digital technology developments and increasing use of social media for circulating personal content culminates in what is recognized as the age of the "DIY, Celebrity" (Abidin, 2018). With the ability to generate and circulate content outside the bounds of traditional media industries through social media, the celebrity became democratized. Abidin (2018) describes this template as digestible and approachable for those with little technical knowledge about fame because they simply had to emulate the modes of celebrity production via social media images. The platform affordances of Instagram were effective in pursuit of this type of celebrity with all of the influencers citing the app's convergence with a growing public preference for taking photos and its' speed of content production. These named benefits of the app continue to be motivators for creators choosing it as their medium of choice today.

The visuality of Instagram situates its impact in developing and fostering certain visual genres as well as facilitating social connectivity due to its photo-sharing mechanisms, which imbue the shared images with a lived experience and personae (Leaver et al., 2020). This platform template of visual connectivity undoubtedly had immense power over popular culture in accordance with the propellers of digital connectivity (Sanchez-Lopez et al, 2020). Combined with the intrinsic motivations of its creators, this template provides a fertile theater for aesthetic demonstrations centered around community building.

6.2 The rise of the (Micro)-Influencer: Motivations for Engaging in Self-entrepreneurship

Facebook's purchase of Instagram in 2012 was a turning point for the platform. This acquisition led to changes in the application program interface (API), the rise in third-party apps, the algorithmic timeline and tempering of community guidelines, and the development of Stickers and Stories to compete with Snapchat (Leaver et al., 2020). Notably, the app came under fire in 2012 after updating its terms of service to effectively grant Instagram the right to sell users' photos to third parties without notification or compensation (Blystone, 2022). The controversy indicated the platform's implicit commercialization potential that was quickly harnessed and bolstered under the helm of Facebook, now Meta (Blystone, 2022).

Now, Instagram has become an increasingly important digital fashion marketplace where a multitude of market actors exert influence through posting pictures, interaction and communication with consumers and launching products or brands (Schops et al., 2019). Personal images were now more than captured memories, they were aesthetic presentations for self-branding. For the platform's content creators, this shift in the platform provided the triad of creativity, opportunity and value creation that links the creative industries to entrepreneurship (Schulte-Holthaus, 2017 as cited in Innerhofer et al., 2018). Social media influencers (SMI) embody the myth of the freedom and agency afforded by networked platforms, transforming user-generated content into business acumen (van Driel & Dumetrica, 2020). This convergence in roles of media producers, advertisers and consumers culminates in a rhetoric of empowerment (van Driel & Dumetrica, 2020). Through this perspective, UGC became an expression of pleasure rather than work, a form of creativity and an ethos of collaboration wherein all content can be reinterpreted to deliver new outcomes (van Driel & Dumetrica, 2020). Therefore, influencers internalize a craft conceptualization of their work that prioritizes human engagement over machine control (Kroezen et al, 2021).

"So the nuance with influencer marketing is understanding the craft that people go, these people just have behind their persona. For instance, I am a photographer and an art director at the back okay, so what I do is I give that treatment into my public facing persona. Some people might be like, I'm an interior designer. I'm a biologist I'm whatever so they have that kind of craft of how they apply it onto their personal profile (Amber Valentine, 2022, p.5)

Within this conceptualization, being an influencer falls under the creative craft conceptualization that has the aim of personal expression and utilizes technology as a supporting tool in striving for an aesthetic outcome in accordance with market mechanisms of coordination, despite a reduced reliance on formal organization (Kroezen et al., 2021). Amber's sentiments express the disembodiment of an individual and re-embodiment of an avatar through strategic identity construction which results in a unique monetizable narrative. Through continued strategic self-representation, individuals gain fame by sharing valuable and engaging content to their specific audiences. For the influencers who started out as bloggers, the commercialization of Instagram provided a clear avenue for adapting their content to a more profitable platform.

Based on the theorization of Bordieu, the outcome of artistic work is differentiated into symbolic value and economic value (Schulte-Holthaus, 2017 as cited in Innerhofer et al., 2018). For brands, utilizing user images on Instagram enables the co-option of artistic images to extract economic value. Illustratively, Participant B's personal affinity for "cottage core" which is a fashion and visual aesthetic currently trending on social media, quickly attracted brands who recognized the aesthetic and commercial relevancy of her personal stylized self-presentation. Dior was also one of these brands.

"I think in August of 2021, that's when brands started asking if I wanted to work with them. And that's when I found out that Oh, I can make this, I can make money out of this. And then I started in August and until now I still work with brands."

Even with rising competition from new platforms such as TikTok, Participant B affirms that Instagram provides the highest financial compensation for working with brands (Jael, 2022, p.3). Given the artistic self-conceptualizations of the creators and the required integration of market values within digital identity construction and presentation, a return on investment for this labor functions as the primary guideline for shifts between platforms such as the shift from blogging to Instagram.

7. Acting as Brand Extensions: Digital Storytelling on Instagram

Participant observation enabled a consumer-centric evaluation of the ways in which fashion influencers used digital storytelling about brands to strengthen brand affinity on Instagram and Youtube, especially when these strategies were contextualized through insights from interviewed influencers. Essentially, micro-influencers appeared to assume the role of brand extensions within digital storytelling to enhance the aspirational value and artistic perceptions of the brand as well as improve customer relationships on behalf of the brand.

Brand identity consists of brand values and personality (Bastien & Kapefrer, 2009) whilst brand strategies aim to create brand equity and create consumer safety (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). For luxury brands like Dior who are extremely recognizable to the public and whose brand strategies rely on a cult of heritage, brand extensions enable an opportunity to exploit their brand identity to the maximum (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). This enables greater market visibility which in turn, contributes to more value (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017).

Digital marketing comprises strategies that help build brand awareness, consumer interaction and buying motivations (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). Storytelling is one of the primary strategies in digital marketing and is a key component of enticing consumers to join a brand journey (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). Mediums of storytelling also create parallel communication with consumers which integrates them within a broader communication strategy to prompt viral marketing and make consumers a part of the brand world (Gonzalez Romo et al., 2017). Luxury brands outsource narrative construction to micro-influencers who act as brand

extensions by performing as characters in brand narratives to enhance the interpersonal effects of luxury value perceptions including conspicuousness, uniqueness and status (Sumbly & Siraj, 2019).

7.1 Constructing the Aspirational Value of a Luxury Brand

When asked if she believes her content and brand collaborations are accessible to her audience, Amber Valentine ponders for a moment before responding:

"Yeah on Instagram not really. I think I tried to put in, like, a slightly more aspirational vibe. That's what it is. Like, it's if you put out a little bit more quality than an iPhone 11 or whatever (Amber Valentine, 2022, p.13)."

"Aspirational" is a key term here, indicating the importance of constructing benign envy as a purchase motivator (Jin et al., 2019). Benign envy functions as a result of upward social comparison mediating effects on behavioral intention, especially when the source is perceived to be similar to one-self (Jin et al., 2019). Many micro-influencers are perceived more as "real people" than celebrities and have a more intimate relationship with their audiences meaning these audiences are likely to be more envious and more motivated to attain products featured by influencers, since the portrayed physical outlook seems more feasible and attainable (Jin et al., 2019). This translates into a stronger perceived desirability of the brand (Jin et al., 2019). Additionally, when the envy-motivation link is strong and when achievements seem feasible, the luxury myth is upheld more than when the disparity between envy and achievements is too large (Jin et al., 2019). According to the influencers interviewed, aspirational content is constructed through high-quality images, particular narrative codes and an overall illusion of influencer status.

7.1.1 Constructing Influencer Status

Kapferer and Bastien (2009) positis that the role of communication for a luxury brand is not necessarily to sell but to refuel the dream, as the essence of luxury is maintaining exclusivity and status. The primary effect of consuming aspirational content is gaining an enviable appreciation for the influencer's implied access to luxury symbols of exclusivity and status. Describing the process of constructing a sponsored post, Participant A explains:

> "So what I also do is like, I would also pull samples, if I know I have, like a shooting where I want to do some styling, I will reach out to them and be like, Hey, I'm going to shoot, I don't know, four or five looks for spring summer. And I'd love to style the bag. And then they just send it to me so that I can use it for styling, and then the bag actually goes back to them. Okay, the same bag that the magazine would also use is the same sample that goes around."

This sentiment captures the illusion of multiplicity communicated in digital campaigns wherein one product is circulated amongst many influencers' sponsored posts as well as brand campaigns which increases brand exposure by implying the popularity of the item. Simultaneously, through the perspective of consumer co-construction of brand meanings (Tynan et al., 2010), the confluence between the influencer and the product in an image enables the internalization of the artistic and commercial value of the item which manifests in actual product visibility in the market.

This confluence acts as a powerful purchase motivator when combined with the strategic authenticity intentionally or unintentionally concocted by micro-influencers. To illustrate, influencers often used photos that portrayed the aspirational nature of luxury codes by emulating or posting paparazzi photos which played up the "celebrity" element of their persona whilst displaying street-style outfits. These would usually be balanced with captions that embodied a relatability through self-directed humor. This is exemplified in one micro-influencers' "paparazzi" photo at Copenhagen Fashion Week (Appendix A.1).

Resultantly, these images are seen as both authentic and aspirational since consumers decipher the product and the lifestyle associated with it as attainable yet just out of reach. Therefore, micro-influencers mediate the construction of the aspirational value of an item by establishing the sponsored item as a status symbol and increasing brand awareness.

7.1.2 Need for High-Quality Images

Interestingly, Amber Valentine describes an "aspirational vibe" as synonymous with a certain level of camera quality, indicating the primary visual marker of aspiration. Her Instagram feed is indeed an artfully constructed collage of crisp, high-resolution images. Reminiscing on the cyclical personalization and commercialization of content on social media, Amber describes the effectiveness of personal images that are imbued with characteristics of editorial images for luxury digital marketing:

"So in the beginning when bloggers used to start, it used to be like a picture in front of their mirror, this is a look-book done and knew that it was in that kind of style. Kind of like Tik-Tok outfits. You know, it's funny that we kind of do a cyclical thing as well. I started there. And I got sick of that. And I'm a photographer. So I made my photos look like editorials. So that's, that's where I gave all the brand partnerships, that kind of treatment…But it was like a full on like, it looked like a magazine treatment, etc. And that kind of started the trend of bloggers like Chriselle Lim and Chiara Ferragni in that category" (Amber, 2022, p.11).

Amber's statement highlights the role of influencers in constructing aspirational value by emulating the canonical high-culture iconography of editorial fashion magazines. In accordance with Veblen's notion of high-culture iconography, these types of images allow consumers to perform social displays of superiority (Berkowitz et al., 1992) which in turn perpetuates benign envy as a purchase motivator. Perpetuating the high-culture iconography of a brand also means

influencers' images act as extensions of quality assurance. The impact of a brand name on consumer evaluations and choice depends to a large extent on the strength of predictive associations between brand names and performance (Janiszewski & Osselaer, 2000). Within this perspective, high-quality images function as a "cue" of predictive value as a consequence of being present during consumer acquisition of product performance information (Janiszewski & Osselaer, 2017) from a sponsored post.

High quality imagery was also repeatedly underlined as a part of the pre-selection criteria when choosing influencers for a collaboration and as part of the guidelines for constructing a sponsored post.

"They made sure to tell us that they want a very high quality post. They even made it like, "if you make it high quality enough, we're gonna repost it on our story" (Participant B).

By reposting their images, brands like Dior officially inaugurate influencers within their brand world through public acknowledgement of their relationship with the influencer, which highly boosts the influencer's profile. Participant B's statement represents the value of micro-influencers as sub-branding and ingredient-branding strategies that protect brands from dilution (Janiszewski & Osselaer, 2017) by demonstrating how harnessing user-generated content adds creative value to the brand. For consumers who also aspire to be a part of this exclusive brand world, this reciprocity of the brand towards the influencers heightens the feelings of benign envy gleaned in response to the particular influencer's post. Within the perspective of consumer co-construction of brand stories (Tynan et al., 2010), high quality images serve as more than simply a visual characteristic of implied high status, they are a "cue" to the predictive value of an item and by extension the brand itself, which is in turn validated by the brand's reciprocity towards the generator of this "cue" or the influencer. Requiring "high-quality" in the images of its influencers therefore reinforces consistency within the brand extension strategy.

7.1.3 High-Culture Narrative Codes

Another indicator of Dior's preference for featuring products in an aspirational manner is the particular narrative codes that must be encapsulated within all sponsored posts. Participant B describes how these codes enabled some amount of creative freedom for the influencers -

"I think they wanted people to make it very classy, classic, timeless, yeah, you know very French at the same time…They didn't really specify - Honestly, they didn't really specify what they wanted, besides the colors and everything like that…"

According to Vintean's notion of language and meaning in advertising, words are an integral component of manufacturing not just the literal, but also the emotional connotations to the products or brands being advertised (Vintean, 2010). Participant B uses the word "French" to describe Dior's narrative codes which evokes the widespread commercialization and capitalization of "French" iconography within the fashion industry. Meanwhile, the descriptions ``classy, classic and timeless" connote a distinctive image of effortless luxury due to their ubiquity within fashion discourse. The universality of these codes means they are easily translated into visuals. By retaining these stipulations, these descriptions communicated through images can also be used as "cues" of the predictive value of the product, imbuing the wearer with a similar description (Janiszewski & Osselaer, 2017). For example, Participant B's sponsored post for a Dior featured her putting on Dior's lipstick at the edge of a fountain with a marble statue, dressed in neutral colors and edited to look soft and golden. The easy interpretability and predictability of these codes to be integrated by all influencers within their campaigns lends to immediate symbolic associations to enhance the co-construction of brand meanings by consumers. This type of sub-branding within the extension strategy is particularly useful within a mass influencer campaign such as the Dior Saddle bag campaign. Utilizing these codes enables creative freedom for influencers whilst retaining the narrative consistency of the brand story.

Participant A describes how she perceived the process:

> "So I didn't actually work on the Dior campaign with the Saddlebag but just what I saw is that they picked a bunch of influencers. I think it was also worldwide…. And then, like I said, they all posted at the same time. So the feed was flooded with the Dior Saddlebag. And I think there was really a storyline to it, because that's what I still liked about it. Even though I saw the bag like 100 times that day. Everybody had their own image with it…But really everybody adapted it to their own style."

Resultantly, sub-branding through influencers is carried out through the propagation of particular narrative codes that connote a desirable high-culture iconography whilst enabling creative flexibility within sponsored posts, thereby resulting in greater brand exposure for Dior whilst retaining and capitalizing on the brand identity. This formula also pertains to enhancing benign envy through an upward social comparison lens prompting the consumer to purchase the product in the hopes of also embodying the qualities displayed by the influencer wearing the featured product. Resultantly, this formula of narrative codes also acts as a forum for value idealization (Roper et al., 2013) within Tynan et al., (2010) model of consumer co-construction of brand meanings. Overall, brands exert some control over influencers as brand extensions by stipulating the integration of particular narrative codes that ensure consistency within the brand story and encourage value idealization to act as a purchase motivator.

7.2 Improving the Artistic Value Perception of Luxury Brands

Mediatization refers to the transformative power of media as conveyors of meaning or mediation (Rocamora, 2016). Hearn (2008) proposes the mediatized self as "self-branding" which involves the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of the self through the use of cultural meanings and images from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries. Aesthetics are a crucial component of branding and comprise a

series of principles pertaining to proportion, symmetry, harmony, composition, use of colors etc (Manovich, 2017). Luxury micro-influencers engage in self-branding digital storytelling. This form of storytelling is harnessed by luxury brands as a brand extension strategy to increase brand affinity and awareness.

7.2.1 The Need for Shareable Content

All of the micro-influencers interviewed seemed to understand their position within the influencer industry as image manufacturers rather than product pushers. They emphasized Dior's need for shareable, provocative content as a prerequisite for generating audience engagement and perceptions of high quality. Manovich (2020) also points to the structuration of Instagram and the rise of "themes" which involve a combination of subjects, particular color palette and a certain contrast choice. Cultivating a theme is crucial since a key feature of Instagram is the search engine function which enables users to find content through keywords or themes (Mattern, 2017). Apart from aesthetic elements, "shareable" content production consists of the digital act of posting small fragments of one's mediatized life to generate an interactive form of dialogue (von Wachenfeldt, 2019). Micro-influencers combined these aspects to create shareable content embedded in authenticity narratives which appealed to luxury brand and consumer sensibilities.

Color branding is an integral component in the hedonic value of luxury brands as it holds the power of communicating specific information to consumers and triggering particular memories and perceptions in response (Gobe, 2009). Influencers seemed to have an inherent understanding of color branding as in most posts careful attention was paid to matching backgrounds with outfits. An interesting temporal rhythm concerning composition of photos in a feed was also considered an indicator of high-quality content. Burchett (2001) proposes color harmony as a trigger for a satisfying affective response. Color harmony is also a key factor in the many aspects that collide within the instinctive assessment of photo quality (Nishiyama et al., 2011). Resultantly, micro-influencers stressed that brands, particularly Dior, often stipulated the colors that could or could not be used in particular campaigns.

Illustratively, Participant B believes she was chosen to be a part of Dior Beauty's Christmas campaign because of her particular "cottage-core" aesthetic which is one of the distinctive visual trends popularized on Instagram. The compatibility between the neutrals and pastels in her "theme" and her particular "cottage-core" aesthetic made Participant B a well-suited candidate to outsource a narrative that elucidated a cozy, Christmas elegance for the Dior Beauty campaign. The insights she provided into the conceptualization of her own sponsored post indicate a moderate amount of creative control retained by the brand in terms of color choices and lighting whilst also allowing certain creative flexibility in terms of composing the narrative. This appearance of relinquishing control to creators in order to transform them into active brand ambassadors by seamlessly integrating fashion imagery within their personalized feeds proppels an undercurrent of authenticity to sponsored posts (Rees-Roberts, 2020). In this way, brands are able to co-opt popular visual trends utilized by influencers in their own mediatizing practice.

7.2.2 Types of Digital Narratives

Rocamora (2011) proposes that consuming a personal fashion blog means personal stories are narrated in support of the practice of fashion as a technique of the self. Therefore, the luxury fashion brands that are a recurrent theme within an influencers feed become an integrated part of the self identity or the branded self-identity (von Wachenfeldt, 2019). In order to enhance narrative immersion effects, influencers and brands paid close attention to consistency and congruence in digital narratives regarding influencer-brand fit and the types of digital narratives portrayed.

Transformation narratives

Particularly with Dior Beauty products, transition based narratives in the form of makeup tutorials were a popular digital storytelling narrative. This type of narrative involves transition-oriented stories wherein influencers display a change or evolution (Drenten, 2020). The shift from a bare face to an aestheticized face cloaked in Dior beauty products mobilizes audiences to internalize the transformative power of these products. These types of Reels utilize

multisensory and experiential displays to capture the luxury myth through product experience for the audience. Audiences are called to recreate this experience by purchasing the branded products.

Self-expression based narratives

Self-expression based narratives involve identity-oriented displays of uniqueness in which influencers promote their own viewpoints and perspectives in relation to the brand (Drenten, 2020). For example, @milanpyramid discusses a "modest" collection by MaxMara as aligned with her values of modesty which is exemplified in her personal style. Her image functions as a powerful form of self-expression based storytelling for the brand because it combines the influencers values as a muslim woman with explicit product promotion that demonstrates its wearbility to a niche market (See Appendix A.2). This type of call to action also enhances brand affinity within particular communities as the brand is made to feel more accessible to these communities through the consumer co-construction of brand meanings from the influencer's image. As a street-style photo and because the caption fits the influencers personal brand, this narrative was seen as more authentic by the audience whilst displaying MaxMara in a positive light (Appendix A.2). As such, brand stories are told in conjunction with a developed personal brand to enhance consumer-brand connections through identification with the influencer.

7.2.3 Hashtags

Within digital storytelling, hashtags provide insight into the narrative role played by influencers in their digital stories (Chong & Gottipati, 2020). Hashtags help influencers identify themself as characters that make audiences more likely to be transported into commercial stories (Chong & Gottipati, 2020). They also provide a focal point for the collation of particular aesthetics, narratives or rhetorics in digital markets (Schops et al., 2019).

 Hashtags such as #hijabvogue and #hijab_bloggers used by @milanpyramid reveal more about the narrative role being enacted by the influencer within her sponsored post for MaxMara. Hashtags such as #themodestymovement situate the influencers' narrative within a wider

community discourse thereby enhancing brand awareness within this particular digital community. Demonstratively, micro-influencers paid close attention to an alignment between hashtags used and their personal brands, with many of them utilizing certain hashtags often to repeatedly associate themselves with particular presentations. Some influencers also took to creating personalized hashtags for particular events or content series to further differentiate their own content from homogenized fashion imagery on Instagram. For example:

#lisforloisBERLINALE

#lisforloisEATS

#lisforloiscph

Additionally, micro-influencers often hijacked branded hashtags when attempting to gain the attention of a brand or exhibit brand affinity. For example, @milanpyramid used the hashtag #diorbeautylovers in an unsponsored reel (Appendix A.3). This effectively enables influencers' content to infiltrate branded visual, textual and hashtagged rhetorics, thereby enhancing brand visibility and adding to branded digital discourse. Therefore utilizing influencers as brand extensions for constructing brand stories exemplifies the individualization, emotionalism and democratization which are the thriving forces restoring contemporary luxury culture (von Wachenfeldt, 2019).

7.3 Consumer Relationship Management

According to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), exclusive services are a sine qua non part of luxury management and the personalized customer relationship management (CRM) is a distinguishing feature of luxury brands compared to commercial brands. As brand extensions, influencers also use digital storytelling to enhance the relationship between brands and consumers to intensify brand affinity.

Micro-influencers inherently benefit from a more intimate relationship with their followers with many of them highlighting how they actually enjoy responding to messages and reply faster than influencers with more followers. This means they are powerful tools in imitating personalized CRM in digital shopping experiences. Additionally, these interactions act as powerful purchase motivators as they are underlined with authenticity. According to Peterson (2005), authenticity is presented as a process initiated on the production side. Indeed, Participant B describes how conducting relationship investment is a part of the production process of a sponsored post due to Instagram's algorithmic template:

"And even like, let's say I'm posting something tomorrow, I have to get ready for the night before I have to wake up early so that I can engage with other people. So one way to help your post get out there is to engage with other people's posts. So when you do that 30 minutes before posting and 30 minutes after it actually helps your engagement or like when you reply to comments, and then post it on your story - it helps."

Since most micro-influencers take on and see creating engagement as their responsibility, luxury brands benefit from increased brand awareness and affinity as a result. Therefore, influencers are a form of relationship marketing as they are part of an integrated effort at identifying, maintaining and building a relationship with individual customers through direct communication and interactive contacts (Shani & Chalasani, 1992). This type of relationship marketing relies on consumer engagement and is effective in combination with strong trust and reciprocity in buyer/seller relationships (Shani & Chalasani, 1992). Micro-influencers' positive attitude and relationship with their audiences is co-opted to increase brand messaging as followers trust a brand narrative more when it utilizes their favorite influencer (Bughin et al., 2010). This is in line with narrative transportation theory that dictates that identification with the protagonist in digital stories enhances the vicarious experiences for consumers and means they are more likely to be transported into commercial stories (Chong & Gottipati, 2020) which n turns enhances purchase intention (Bughin et al., 2010). Therefore, micro-influencers provide the type of bespoke customer relationship luxury brands pride themselves on, by acting as a relational keystone between producers and consumers by performing a work of mediation (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021).

Luxury brands also enhance the effectiveness of this type of relationship marketing in their selection of influencers, ensuring compatibility between the target audience for a product, an influencers' following and the influencer's personal brand. By ensuring this type of congruence between brand and influencer, brands are able to utilize micro-influencers to enhance brand affinity within particular groups. For example, Amber Valentine describes Dior's hierarchy of creating matches between products and influencers:

> "Let's say Dior wants to sell their brand to someone, then you need to reach out to someone who sells makeup products, perfume products, sunglasses, products, all these entry level products. But you have to go to the people who have a demographic of 13 to 21 year olds, whatever, yes, younger kids, but then you want to sell a leather good, or a bag or an experience, then you go to the select slightly older bloggers or older influencers with much less influence in terms of numbers. But all these very small numbers have very high income. So it does even out."

As a result of her personal branding and her level as a macro-influencer Amber's audience is made up of CEOs and brand directors. Unsurprisingly, the products endorsed on her page are bags and accessories and ready-to-wear collections because her audience possesses the buying power to emulate her purchases. However, Amber notes how the evolution of Instagram to a digital marketplace means that relationship marketing conducted to enhance the effectiveness of sponsored content has to happen over multiple platforms, requiring a further fragmentation of the mediatized persona of the influencer.

> "So but if I - if I got to Instagram and I thought okay, then I love her and follow her for her like, career like, growth and who she works with and I want to, I want to celebrate her. And then I want to go to Tik Tok and be more personable. I want to know that if I ask a question I'll get a response. And I'll be like, excited but then if she had like a Patreon, or a podcast, I'd be like, Okay, so this is where she shares her insight, feelings about her anxiety and stuff like that. So, but that doesn't go into the whole Instagram persona or Tik Tok persona, because it's, you know, like, I feel like every platform has its own merit.

That's how you kind of have a rich experience as an influencer and the following. Otherwise, you're just recycling content throughout? Yeah."

Therefore, platform digital disruption has necessitated a pluralization of narrative acts, leading to an exponential multiplication of projects, formats and meta-media (Sanchez-Lopez et al., 2020). Resultantly, influencers must create a differentiation of a personal brand across platforms to accentuate authenticity and increase the profitability of their personal brand for luxury brands. Brand affinity is therefore implicitly strengthened through the personalization and multiplicity of types of relational monitoring conducted by influencers through the production of these digital narratives. With this in mind, understanding the multidisciplinary content offered by digital storytelling highlights the multidisciplinary skills that are offered and mastered by content creators.

8. Crafting Authenticity Performances and Becoming the "Ideal" Consumer

Conducting interviews with micro-influencers enabled an understanding of the ways in which luxury fashion influencers performed authenticity work to act as brand advocates and strengthen brand perceptions through parasocial relationships with consumers. Bughin et al., (2010) found that luxury brand consumers tend to seek greater levels of information and word-of-mouth recommendations from trusted sources accounted for 20 to 50 percent of purchasing decisions. However, within these digital communities, consumers prioritize entertainment and meaningful social relationships (Parrott et al., 2015). As such, micro-influencers perform authenticity work as an act of mediating the relationship between producer and consumer by acting as brand advocates to increase brand affinity within a specific community (Parrott et al., 2015). Brand advocacy is constructed through brand love, brand loyalty and commitment, brand engagement and brand involvement (Parrott et al., 2015). Brand loyalty is indicated by repeat purchasing of high involvement products whilst engagement was demonstrated by an emotional connection with particular objects and brands in specific contexts

(Parrott et al., 2015). Constructing brand loyalty and displaying brand engagement appeared to be the primary methods utilized by influencers in emulating the "ideal consumer" and performing brand advocacy to strengthen brand affinity within their respective digital communities. Within these advocacy performances, authenticity is displayed as micro-influencers appear to utilize co-creation opportunities to increase brand awareness and as well as increase brand value.

8.1 Brand Advocacy: Increasing Brand Loyalty

Understanding brand advocacy as the highest level of the loyalty ladder framework necessitates brand allegiance (Parrott et al., 2015). Micro-influencers invest in and nurture their presentation of a consumer-brand relationship online to establish their level of brand advocacy (Parrott et al., 2015). This presentation enables consumers to follow a micro-influencers brand journey through vicarious consumption. Participant A describes how establishing interest in a brand prior to a collaboration induces congruency between perception of the brand and perception of the influencer:

> "Yeah, I think if they can go through your feed and be like, Oh, okay, you actually use our product so you actually have a genuine interest in the product and they can also see okay, what does this person look like with our product so I think that helps a lot."

Since she is already a repeat luxury purchaser, one of the techniques Participant A used to establish high engagement was to repeatedly post with the same Ferragamo bag which identified an emotional connection between her and the bag, which ultimately led to a sponsorship collaboration with the brand. Luxury fashion accessories are strongly related to self-concept and result in amplified brand loyalty when there is a perceived fit between consumer's self-identity

and their perception of the brand's identity (Parrott et al., 2015). Consumers therefore integrate these symbols into their self-concept to manufacture the identities they seek (Parrott et al., 2015). Influencers visually represent the potential identity consumers could inhabit by emulating the influencers' purchases. Thus the advertised product acts as a link between the actual self and the ideal self (Belanche et al., 2021). These potential identities were also distinguished by identity markers such as referring to oneself as a "prada girl" (See Appendix A.4) which serve as textual connections between manufactured identities that integrate brand constructs and the emotional affect generated (Parrott et al., 2015).

Balance theory posits that individuals seek cognitive consistency in the form of psychological balance (Belanache et al., 2021). This type of congruence between influencer and brand ensures reduced cognitive dissonance when the reference points (influencers) are paired with a new stimulus (Belanche et al., 2021) such as a sponsored product in a campaign. Therefore, for micro influencers, establishing brand interest over time ensures greater trust and less critical processing of sponsored content. Additionally, this type of genuine brand involvement is compatible with luxury brands' preference for long-term relationships with influencers to establish continuity (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021). Amber Valentine underlines the importance of exhibited brand allegiance in formulating long term relationships with luxury brands when acting as a brand advocate:

"And I think with Dior, my relationship with Dior definitely has been long term. Oh, she was a photographer and now she's doing this. She's an editor of the book and she's storytelling etc. So they send products for my book as well as myself. So it's like a multifaceted but layers of working together. And it's not as simple as "sell a bag for us". It's more like Dior says you're accepted into our little tight circle. But we want to work with you in longevity so that you give us influence for decades. That's why when you partner up with Dior, you kind of un-partner with Chanel. You partner with Bentley, you kind of un-partner with Rolls Royce. I mean, like there's this like, unspoken, gentlemanly

agreement. When you see girls that wear Dior, and then a couple of posts down, they wear Chanel, that's where the integrity kind of goes like, so are you like, like, Are you a journalist? Okay, if you're a journalist, and that's fine. Like if you're, you're telling the fashion if you're like journaling, reporting on the fashion scene. Yeah, if you're a personal-like influencer, you might definitely need to kind of like, side."

Brands and influencers also seemed to be aware of constructing brand allegiance through digital storytelling. For example, Participant B notes how Dior specified that no other logos could be featured in the sponsored post she constructed for them and how the product had to be the focal point of the post. These seemed to also be widely understood rules of branded posting, with many of influencers' content focalizing the product in terms of visual composition or photographic angles and there was often a visual that prominently centered the brand logo.

Overall, exhibiting brand allegiance appeared to be a key responsibility of performing the role of a brand advocate. Constructing displays of high brand engagement and involvement was a significant part of developing and maintaining a long-term relationship with a brand. Therefore, influencer congruence with a brand was established and nurtured in order to function as brand loyalty amplifiers within a community and enhance the effectiveness of digital narrative advertisements by activating the consumers' self-concept affirmation processes (Parrott et al., 2015) and reducing critical processing of sponsored digital content (Belanche et al., 2021).

8.2 Brand Advocacy: Increasing Brand Awareness

Another key function of being a brand advocate is raising brand awareness through a continuous stream of content. Co-creation opportunities have been suggested as identifiers of brand loyalists, setting them apart from merely brand aware consumers (Parrott et al., 2015). Hashtags are closely related to co-creation opportunities as brands and micro-influencers use specific hashtags around which micro-communities are built to localize audiences and

micro-interests.

Utilizing branded hashtags within user-generated content helped increase brand awareness whilst allowing users to develop their own creative content. Participant B notes how using specific hashtags was a stipulation of her sponsored post with Dior for example, #DreaminDior and #DiorHoliday. As such, these hashtags helped connect the brand and influencer's content within broader narrative themes being propagated for the Dior Christmas campaign which Participant B was a part of.

Branded hashtags are also a pathway for influencers to share their authentic self-expression whilst indirectly promoting the brand (Parrott et al., 2015). For example, @milanpyramid created a unsponsored makeup tutorial using Dior products with the hashtags #diorbeautylovers and #diormakeup which are branded hashtags often used with sponsored content. Creative user-generated content does not just increase brand awareness, it is also used to attract the attention of brands and leverage the influencer into an official brand advocate position. Participant B highlights methods of using hashtags in accumulating brand's attention as well as expanding audience reach whilst retaining authenticity perceptions in Instagram story ontent:

"Also you can put hashtags in a story and hide it…So we we do that sometimes where we'll put a hashtag, and then we'll like, drag it down. But brands will be able to see it. So that helps as well. And when you post, even every time I post a photo, you're always gonna see a lot of tags on it, because just to get their brands attention also to get more audience on the photo, and yeah, so it helps for sure."

Hiding hashtags means content created by micro-influencers helps enhance brand awareness whilst retaining authenticity. Additionally, micro-influencers use of hashtags to expand their audience reach such as #outfittoday or #reelsviral are broad-based groupings that help expand awareness for brands featured in their personal content beyond target product markets. This is vital for luxury brands who must build brand and worth awareness beyond their target group to ensure the highest possible valuation (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Additionally, micro-influencers help enhance brand awareness within particular communities due to their demographics or numbers of their followings. For status luxury brands, value is built through different facts of the brand that appeal to different levels of consumer income (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Similarly, Amber notes how Dior stratified influencers and product collaborations into layers according to their following and demographic with far more influencers being approached for perfume or beauty collaborations than for clothing or accessory collaborations. Participant A builds on this idea by acknowledging how she was chosen to work with Dior accessories despite her small following because she is well-known within her local community and provides a diverse representation in high fashion as a woman of color. Therefore, micro-influencers act as brand advocates to increase brand awareness both within and outside of official sponsorship positions as they are harnessed within a brand management strategy as channels of consumer market differentiation and targeted advertising. Additionally, micro-influencers engage in mutually beneficial processes of branded content co-creation to exhibit themselves as brand loyalists and leverage this perception into sponsorship opportunities due to the perceived authenticity of their brand love performances within their respective digital communities. This in turn, improves brand perceptions and increases brand affinity within these spaces.

8.3 Brand Advocacy: Product Experience Framework

Yi and Gong (2013) conceptialized consumer value co-creation behavior as multi-dimensional, composed of customer participation and customer citizenship behavior. Customer participation comprises information seeking and sharing, responsible behavior and personal interaction. Customer citizenship consists of feedback, advocacy, helping and tolerance. Building on this thread, Tynan et al., (2010) highlighted the importance of customer-customer interaction in enhancing brand value co-construction. Resultantly, as brand advocates,

micro-influencers operate as mediators of consumer value co-creation behavior by performing both customer participation and customer citizenship processes.

An important method of conducting co-creative processes for micro-influencers is product knowledge dissemination. Sometimes, providing product knowledge is part of raising engagement for a sponsored post. For example, when promoting a Dior lipstick, Participant A used a follower's comment to highlight the unique selling point of the product and enhance the product value organically (See Appendix A.5). However, sometimes product knowledge was disseminated as a result of micro-influencers' user-generated content. For example, @curlsallover described the benefits of a product in an unsponsored post that revealed her favorite beauty products (See Appendix A.6).

Sometimes, product knowledge is disseminated simply as a result of the intimate relationship between a micro-influencer and their audience. When asked if she responds to questions asking how to use a personally owned, unsponsored products or its benefits, Participant A responds:

"Oh, definitely. I don't think I've even thought about it that way that I'm still promoting it. To be honest, you're right. But the thing is, like, because Instagram started off as this thing you do between the blog posts and blog posts, obviously, were also very personal. So for me, it's the most natural thing to like, answer questions, and DMS, and yeah, that's all sort of fun where you could interact with the people."

Both commercially driven and personally driven product knowledge dissemination enhances the functional and financial luxury value assessments of a product's design (Sener-Pedgley et al., 2016) and the financial value dimensions of a brand's luxury value framework (Sumbly & Siraj, 2019). High prices which sustain luxury brands positioning of exclusivity and unattainability are justified through the micro-influencers' claims of excellent quality. This then results in higher purchase intention since these value co-constructions are the result of a trusted (Bughin et al., 2010) consumer-to-consumer word of mouth interaction (Tynan

et al., 2010).

A popular method by which product knowledge is disseminated, and brand advocacy is performed through customer participation and customer citizenship behavior is video content. Online image-sharing culture has embedded fashion within the entertainment industries for which video accounts for ever-increasing online traffic (Rees-Roberts, 2020). The fashion film which was traditionally the result of a triangulation between brand, media and retail interests, is now an integral component of "spreadable" networked media content produced primarily but not exclusively, to promote fashion in motion (Rees-Roberts, 2020). Video content initiates the construction of personal effects of the luxury value framework, that being the enhancement of hedonistic experiences and display of quality (Sumbly & Siraj, 2019). As such, video content is an important factor in enhancing experiential marketing effects which elevates a product to a luxury in conjunction with subjective, internal consumer responses generated by brand related stimuli which is part of a brand's design and identity, and in brand marketing environments offline or online (Sumbly & Siraj, 2019). As video content, IGTV and Reels function to enhance experiential marketing effects by providing insight into consumption experience, product experience or shopping experience (Sumbly & Siraj, 2019).

This is especially evident in unboxing videos which promote the tactical component of product knowledge dissemination as well as a digital shopping experience. Theoretically, digital shopping experiences could dilute the Midas touch of luxury flagship stores but self-gifting practices reduce these consequences by enhancing escapism and self-indulgence or the hedonic effects of digital shopping experiences (Lawry, 2021). Luxury brands stoke this sensitivity to stimuli and emotional gratification through narrative transportation (Lawry, 2021) in the form of unboxing videos performed by influencers.

"I think people really like the sensory feeling of like, Oh, I'm opening it with you. Yeah, you're looking at. Like, every time I post an unboxing video, I get tons of DMS. I mean,

everyone wants to know, where I got it. What I like, what did I do to get it? Yeah, I think unboxing videos, they really do very well. The Dior one did very, very well, like very fast too. I didn't realize, I didn't think it was going to do that. Well, because I had never done an unboxing video before that. And then when I posted it, I was shocked because everyone was just commenting, sending and then posting it and yeah, so I think that people liked the idea of like "i'm opening it also with you" at the same time. You get to see like, oh, what the packaging looks like and yeah, so I think it's - I think people enjoy that more than just like a normal photo" (Participant B).

Despite being sponsored content, unboxing videos emulate the self-gifting shopping and consumption behavior, offering the audience unprecedented levels of intimacy and expression (Lawry, 2021) as demonstrated by Participant B's comments. Resultantly, these videos act as powerful purchase motivators by prompting audiences to indulge in self-gratification especially when combined with the product knowledge dissemination executed by influencers in the comment sections.

Other popular video narratives harnessed by micro-influencers include "Get Ready With Me" or "Outfit of the Day." These videos can be sponsored or unsponsored and function to similarly enhance experiential marketing effects by providing intimate insights into the product consumption experience. Influencers engaged in tagging brands to label items worn in OOTD or GRWM content so these narratives also enhance the symbolic value associations for consumers by presenting finished images as a desirable persona for individuals to identify with and emulate through luxury consumption. Overall, with regards to brand advocacy and value co-creative processes, video content enhances the experiential and symbolic value of a product by providing a channel for vicarious product consumption and hedonic pleasure.

Another reason for the increased importance of video content is also because of changing Instagram algorithms that prioritized video content to compete with TikTok. Participant A explains how platform affordances interact with changing consumer digital preferences to

increase the effectiveness of video content in digital marketing campaigns:

> "So I work a lot with pictures, but I've noticed that it's becoming much much more relevant to actually work with video content, especially now that you have to Tiktok as well. And I don't know, a few few years ago, we still had like Vine, which was before Instagram stories and reels came. Yeah. That was actually really fun. And then platforms. Yeah. At least. Yeah. Yeah, video content is becoming much, much more important, especially because also Instagram pushes video content more. And it just keeps people's attention better than just having the picture that you see once, you like it. And then you scroll."

Working with changing digital trends means higher engagement and viewership which results in higher brand awareness as well as in a greater reach for the micro-influencers, thereby enabling them to perform brand advocacy more effectively.

Overall, micro-influencers perform brand advocacy by displaying brand loyalty and engagement within their own self-branding practices as well as increasing brand awareness through utilizing co-creation opportunities. Through product knowledge dissemination and video content, micro-influencers enhance consumer value co-constructive processes through consumer citizenship and consumer participation behavior and experiential marketing respectively. The consequence of these techniques and parasocial interactions conducted by influencers is increased brand affinity through increased customer acquisition, positive word of mouth exchanges and reduced marketing costs (Sumbly & Siraj, 2019). Since these techniques imitate some of the effects of physical shopping experiences in luxury flagship stores, positive brand experiences also develop the credibility of luxury brand prestige (Sumbly & Siraj, 2019). By performing at the highest level of the brand advocacy framework, influencers emblematize the ideal luxury consumer and invite their audiences to emulate their brand journey and induction into the exclusive brand community as signaled through an official brand sponsorship. This perspective is especially significant given that much of performing brand advocacy is a

prerequisite of acquiring a collaboration with a brand which therefore maximizes the authenticity effects of influencers content on purchasing intention, as well as serves to increase brand value perceptions before and after the influencer is actually compensated. Resultantly, the reliance of brand advocacy performances on user-generated content as well as digital trends is highlighted, which in turn illuminates the inequalities exacted through the demands of performing authenticity work as an influencer.

9. Authenticity Performances

Performativity theory dictates that social reality, in this case luxury, is constructed through repetitive performances by micro-influencers on behalf of brands (Schops et al., 2017). These performances entail acting as brand advocates and conducting digital storytelling to perform an aspirational lifestyle that explicitly models the symbolic associations of the brand whilst legitimizing product prestige claims. Authenticity underscores these narratives enabling micro-influencers to monetize their influence. Despite being the driving force behind the commercial value of influencers (Hund, 2019), there appears to be a tension between the demands for realness and intrinsic motivations of micro-influencers and the promotional logic of influence practice (Colucci & Pedroni, 2021). Resultantly, influencers seek to proactively balance the perceived expectations of their followers with those of the brands they work with (van Driel & Dumetrica, 2020) through authenticity performances. Authenticity performances for micro-influencers consist of calibrated aspirational realness, emotional performance, relatability as well as cultivating and perpetuating the myths of authenticity labor.

9.1 Constructing "Aspirational Realness"

The overall identity communicated by the authenticity performances of micro-influencers

is one of "aspirational realness" which creates the illusion of the everyday through carefully constructed discursive and aesthetic strategies (Findlay, 2019). Bishop (2021) positis that this particular performance of authenticity has many conjunctions with brand safety; meaning that it is consistent, virtuous and glamorous whilst interspersed with "porous" peeks into the acceptable chaos of everyday life. This type of authenticity performance is a product of subjectivities and practices related to the cultivation of a public persona and aimed at constructing affective relationships with audiences in order to present brands in the most "natural" manner possible (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021).

Due to the heavy reliance of influencers on their personae, personifying aspirational realness necessitates that audiences feel that they can relate to the content (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). Whilst many influencers expressed that they believed their audiences could relate to them due to their demographic, they also utilized techniques to ensure their content appealed to broad audiences. For example, Participant A describes her strategy in putting together outfit of the day content:

> "But I still try to mix it with like, if I have like one expensive handbag, I'll still have like an affordable outfit, or I'll have one expensive piece. And then I don't know if the rest is affordable, affordable. So I think it's the mix that makes it easier for people from different kinds of rangesto still identify with me. Because if I wouldn't be wearing designer from head to toe? I don't think anybody could identify with it or the group would be very, very small."

This exemplifies the visual construction of "aspirational realness" as it translates into the creation of fashion content by an influencer. Influencers also attempted to visually underline their authenticity by balancing the ratio of sponsored and personal posts on their feed and attempted to consistently disclose sponsored content. Additionally, micro-influencers were also compelled to express passion (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017) for their respective niches within the homogenized fashion space through journalistic confessions and repeated usage of certain hashtags in order to

cement the authority of their opinion. These behaviors were closely tied with a preference for congruence between their own self-branding and brand collaborations as this enhanced the effectiveness of their authenticity performances.

However, this type of authenticity performance which commingles brand promotion with self-branding strategies results in a necessitated aesthetic entrepreneurialism which is the feminized endeavor of styling and transforming oneself into a self-inventing and self-regulating entrepreneurial subject (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). Participant B describes the process of manufacturing "aspirational realness" through the aesthetic entrepreneurialism of the self:

"It takes longer than it should? Getting ready? When you know, you have to get ready to take the photos, do your hair, do your makeup, choose an outfit? And then you go take the photo? Sometimes it doesn't even end up the way you want it? Yeah. So you have to redo it, you have to re-start another day. It happens a lot. So some influencers literally just take an hour and they're like, I'm done. I'm good. Some of us take a long time. And it depends. So honestly, it also depends on the day. Sometimes you're like randomly at the park and you're like, I'll take the photo and use it. So you never know. It's never I try not to plan too much. Because if I do then I get really irritated. If it doesn't end up the way I want it."

Illustratively, the aesthetic entrepreneurialism of the self is endemic to performances of glamor labor and is highly speculative and demanding through the necessary meshing of the object of the image and its painter - the influencer (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). This results in an internalization of socially constructed beauty ideals and an acute awareness of the risks of the visibility labor they perform (Findlay, 2019). For example, some micro-influencers reported the pressure of maintaining a commercially friendly role model persona.

"Um, I mean, I think I'm the same online as I am in real life, but I definitely feel a

pressure like, I definitely feel a bit of a one to be - because a lot of my followers are also young teenage girls, I can see the demographic on my insights. So I have a lot of young girls following me that I know personally. So I tried my best to be a good role model in general and just be like a kind, genuine person. Also, just to be authentic and be myself and not try to be somebody else. But there's definitely a pressure to almost be perfect, but nobody's perfect. Pressure to be at your best all the time, but not but it's, it comes with the territory to try your best." (Participant B)

Participant B's sentiments express how the enmeshment between the private and public persona of an influencer results in a pressure to maintain the profitability of their influence by pandering to the role demanded of them by their audiences and brands. For some influencers, this public enactment of the self also resulted in a self-imposed policing of language and an internalized responsibility towards audiences and towards a broader society as a result of their platform:

"So yeah, for the most part, I tried to be kind, caring, considerate, and also being responsible of who I'm working with when I'm working with what I'm saying. Especially when there's like a, you know, big thing like what happened with Russia and Ukraine, for example? Yeah, make sure I acknowledge it and to make sure that people know that I care. And, you know, it's- it's a serious thing that we should all talk about. I definitely feel a responsibility" (Participant B).

With the rise of cancel culture, cultivating a profitable persona of "aspirational realness" necessitates the management of the self as concurrently commercially viable, aesthetically appealing, individually relatable and socially involved. Resultantly, micro-influencers enhance brand affinity through their authenticity performances by providing a symbol of an ideal

consumer that consumers can identify with and aspire to emulate through purchases.

9.2 Constructing Parasocial Relationships

For micro-influencers, the ratio between engagement and following modulates the influencers' appeal to brands and their digital influence. Therefore investing in audience management is crucial with influencers aiming to build a perceived interconnectedness with their followers in order to maintain their loyalty (van Driel & Dumetrica, 2020). An intimate relationship with audiences is cultivated through appreciating followers, responding to comments and voluntary self-disclosure.

Crafting engagement appeared necessary not only to cultivate a closer relationship with audiences but also to pander to the algorithmic culture of Instagram since engaging with followers resulted in influencers' content being boosted by the algorithm and expanding their reach. All of the influencers appeared to exchange what Bishop (2021) calls algorithmic gossip, which is strategic knowledge circulated by influencers about how platforms' algorithms work, revealing how perceptions of algorithms inform the construction of a public persona and relationship with audiences. This demonstrates how the "ideal" of authenticity that is harnessed for commodification by brands ironically requires a lot of hidden work (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021).

This type of calibrated intimacy with audiences is also enhanced through voluntary self-disclosure. Social penetration theory states that relationships evolve through the revelation of different levels of the self from peripheral to central states (Kim & Song, 2016). Whilst many micro-influencers engaged in peripheral self-disclosure about their fashion or interests, some engaged in more personal self-disclosure, thereby engaging in a type of emotional labor endemic to the creative industries.

"Yeah, so I do though, sometimes, like, especially the q&a is people ask sometimes weird personal questions. Yeah, it's fun. Yeah. But, um, yeah, I'll try to be as honest as I can be. And always to be nice, because I see influencers. Just get offended by everything. There's so at least that you know, feel failed, answer back meanly, or whatever I try my best to, even if it's a mean, comment, even if it's a mean, mean feedback, I'll try to be as respectful and calming as I can" (Participant B).

Creating this type of content exemplifies the emotional performance of authenticity where authenticity is achieved through displaying the vulnerable self to be evaluated and validated by a relevant audience (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). Perceived interconnectedness demands an intimate style of accessible communication between influencers and their audiences (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021) demonstrated by Participant B's statements of needing to justify a lack of posting or feeling compelled to provide personal information through "Q&A" content series.

As such, despite their genuine desire to be authentic online, micro-influencers utilized "realness" and "authenticity" as impression management tools due to their acute awareness of their reliance on their image for maintaining their influence and a profitable parasocial relationship. Constructing "aspirational realness" through a combination of self-presentation and audience management techniques results in affective investment and audience loyalty (Findlay, 2019).

9.3 Dimensions of Aspirational and Creative Labor

As illustrated, there exists an inherent tension between the intrinsic motivations of influencers to appear genuine and share their passions and the commercial demands of their role. This tension encapsulates the multiple mythologies of digital creative labor which promises a career with the co-existence of labor and leisure (Duffy, 2015). In an effort to reconcile this

tension, micro-influencers appear to have constructed what Arriagada and Bishop (2021) refer to as "imaginaries" that justify their authenticity performances in highly marketized contexts. For example, Participant A describes her strategy in choosing brand collaborations:

"Yeah, definitely. I think the easiest way to choose my partners is like, what I pay money to buy this product myself. Like if I wasn't paid? Would I spend one euro on it? If I wouldn't spend a euro on it, then I'm not doing it."

The "imaginary" constructed in Participant A's case displays how influencers position themselves as individuals who feel compelled to circulate their experiences as a resource for consumers to make more informed decisions since they occupy an authoritative space in promoting consumption naturally (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). A responsibility to disclose sponsored content was a sentiment echoed by all of the influencers as a key strategy in upholding this "imaginary". Thus, influencers negotiate these imperatives in the form of commercial networks and these imaginaries enable content creators to justify moving between the tangential aspects of commericality and authenticity (Arrigada & Bishop, 2021). This imaginary allows influencers to enact self-branding practices to reproduce themselves as brand extensions whilst allowing them to maintain a separation between their authentic selves and public self-presentation.

Another way this imaginary is sustained is through a differentiation between the private self and the public persona. For example, Participant A explains how her public persona justifies her sponsorships in relation to the parasocial connection with her audiences:

"I would say it's very easy going. Because I also don't really post a lot of like, personal things. I just really like using my Instagram for my fashion side, because I actually study business and IT which is completely different. Yeah, but yeah, I just use it for my- it's just like my creative outlet for fashion. And I feel like people that come to my page, just

really enjoy having to see colorful outfits, bit of inspiration. And it's not that deep. It's just really not that it's just Yes. And I feel like that's how they also are."

Maintaining these types of authenticity performances and a loyal following conspires to create aspirational labor which Duffy (2015) describes as a productive myth that enables aspirational laborers to work outside the margins of traditional industrial profession whilst downplaying their existing social and economic capital. This is because the visible display of one's personal style, fashion blogs center on clothing, accessories and beauty products that necessitate participation in the consumer marketplace (Duffy, 2015). For example, many influencers had access to continuous streams of income such as working in the corporate world. Participant A describes her journey as an influencer with regards to her income level:

"So like I said, Because I started very early, I used to obviously, when I was younger, I couldn't afford Dior back. And even if I think about it today, it's like, that's actually insane that I'm spending so much money on a handbag. Amazing. Yeah, I think that my audience grew with me. Yeah. So like, the girls didn't see me or to similar age, I can also see it in my insights, that they're almost a similar age. And it gets once you get older, you obviously have a job, then you have more access to more money that you can also spend, and I feel they're in the similar range."

As Duffy (2015) observed in her own research and is echoed in these findings, these widespread appeals to ordinariness are tempered by evidence that many fashion bloggers have certain attributes, skills or forms of capital that open a unique access to the cultural circuit. This could also include technological equipment like cameras, internet access etc (Duffy, 2015) to construct high-quality posts. Resultantly, despite the mythological enfranchisement of aspirational workers from the constrictions of traditional labor, aspirational labor constructs individualized pathways for success that does not explicitly sidestep structural inequalities (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). For example, many influencers displayed varying amounts of business acumen by demanding compensation for the previously unacknowledged glamor work

entailed in aspirational labor or by constructing gifting agreements that protected them from the vulnerabilities of tax laws.

> "So this is, I don't think a majority of influencers, I don't think have this gifting policy. But I know well enough that there will be someone who gets audited and is going to be a scandal, like, sometime in the future it will be somewhere. Some governmental body will be like, hey, wait a minute, you get this gifted, but did you pay tax on that? And they'll be like, no, none of us pay tax. But if you don't have this document, you're gonna have to pay tax on every single gift that you get" (Amber Valentine).

Amber's sentiments underline the broader precarity of labor performed by micro-influencers within this industry. Tracing micro-influencers' authenticity performances of brand advocacy and the narratives constructed as brand extensions demonstrates the speculative nature of aspirational labor. In fact, many influencers underlined a learning curve to the industry, highlighting how it takes years to cultivate a personal brand and learn to efficiently produce content and how coordinating audience management and constructing a network of brands and collaborators were aspects of their job that required constant attention. Additionally, all of the informants highlighted how the mythologies of aspirational labor resulted in an influencer boom which meant the industry and platform was saturated with similar types of content, therefore reducing the efficacies of the labor enacted by individual actors in an attention economy. Much of the work required in constructing a self-brand also required postponing remuneration in the hopes of future benefits, especially when trying to attract the attention of a particular brand. Duffy (2015) refers to this as hope labor. This was particularly true in the case of Dior, as the main compensation offered to influencers was brand exposure presumably to be leveraged into more opportunities.

> "Yeah, so they gift it, but they don't pay anyone. They don't pay a single person to carry this bag. But the thing is, by working with Chanel, by working with Dior, for free, I get the Pradas. Yeah, who pay? Because your level goes up, your kind of alignment goes up"

(Amber Valentine).

Many influencers appeared to accept this dynamic as a facet of the industry and appeared to be keenly aware of their potential to be exploited by brands as well as peripheral actors who have entered the industry such as agencies. This resulted in a frustration on behalf of the influencers as they perceived brands to have a lack of understanding of the complexity of their work and their conceptualization of it as a craft. For example, many influencers highlighted the construction of influencer hierarchies by brands which were dependent on follower counts and engagement ratios. Resultantly, micro-influencers had to be self-enterprising and knowledgeable to protect their interests independently. One form of enacting this agency was accumulating knowledge of various metrics of influence which most effectively captured their value to a brand.

"So I find that whenever a post gets I don't want to be too like numbers, you know, but whenever it goes to 700 and above, it's usually very good for a brand to see that because that means that a lot of people saw it. Yeah. So um, yeah, it did fairly well. I think it got views wise as well. It does. It did well, because I did it for real. Okay. 8000 or 10,000. Whenever that's the number when it's high enough, it usually does very well. Right. Especially because you look The ratio between how many followers I have, and how much engagement it is. It's quite good" (Participant B).

As such, despite their genuine motivations, micro-influencers essentially quantify and commodify their authenticity performances by perceiving metrics as assets and adjusting their personal presentations accordingly (Hund, 2019). Aspirational labor thus appeared to reify gendered social hierarchies, reproducing structural inequalities that leave gendered work unrecognized and under-compensated and exploited under feminized sites of commodity capitalism (Duffy, 2015).

Moreover, despite presenting themselves as multi-skilled actors which suggests

independence from the platform to which their brand persona is hitched, many influencers highlighted their frustrations of constantly falling to the whims of platforms. According to the informants, as Instagram began to face growing competition from Tiktok, the app shifted its priorities towards retaining audiences rather than enabling the interests of platform creators. Changing algorithms were a particular point of contention as Instagram's unpredictable algorithms variably impacted the engagement and reach of influencers posts, effectively threatening their most valuable commodity which is their close relationship with their audiences. Another point of concern was Instagrams' prioritization of video content to compete with TikTok which did not play to the cultivated skills and strengths of the micro-influencers. Resultantly, despite the promises of being a self-enterprising actor in an aspirational industry, micro-influencers are compelled to respond to the trends of current and emerging platforms. They are therefore compelled to accept and even enjoy the unpredictability of a career within the independent economy because their identity as a creative branded personae depends on it (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017).

Many influencers seemed already aware of shifting audience preferences in terms of the content and the platform and attempted to reclaim control by trying to shift towards video content. Amber Valentine who went through a self-described aversion to Instagram, exemplifies this necessary flexibility in enacting self-entrepreneurship:

"TikTok is that raw, up and coming like all your inner feelings and all that kind of relatability and I rather I personally rather spend more time on TikTok, and then kind of conclude that on Instagram as like a portfolio, but that- that's what Instagram has kind of grown into, it's become a search engine" (Amber Valentine).

The high investment efforts and precarity of their labor also meant that seeing returns on their investment was important for micro-influencers. Shifts between platforms were informed by the knowledge of this precarity and the alienating templates of Instagram and motivated by

the genuine passion for their craft.

"So I started posting 35 days ago, 36 days ago, this commitment, like this commitment to say, Okay, I'm just gonna be real. I'm gonna give less shits, because I've been giving too much shits. And this process the past five years has been me dropping all the fucks, like honestly. I did a 30 day challenge. And I gained 10k followers" (Amber Valentine).

Shifting between platforms thus functions as an act of agency on the part of influencers, many of whom noted the adverse mental health effects of performing aspirational labor and authenticity work. Another method of maintaining their agency within a precarious industry was to create long-term relationships with brands.

"It's more to have allies in business in many different businesses. Yes, as I already said, Instagram is slowly fizzling out. So you have to find other ways to stay involved in the fashion industry. And not only rely on Instagram solely, because if that's gone, you have to either go to another platform or already have connections in the industry to keep going and keep doing what you want to do. Soyeah, yeah, it's more building relationships with brands" (Participant C).

As demonstrated by Participant C, cultivating these sorts of relationships enabled influencers to bypass shifting platform popularities and frameworks of influencer hierarchies. Many influencers noted the inherent value of cultivating personal relationships with brands as they acknowledge their position within an inherently social industry. However, Amber Valentine best demonstrates these benefits as her cultivation of long term relationships led her to working directly with luxury brands to provide art direction services, social media content and red carpet coverage. She highlights how these types of relationships elevated her career significantly and fast. The culmination of her skills and long-term relationships is her own digital magazine emulating the concept of Instagram by featuring product content from various high-end brands

integrated into editorial photo narratives accompanied by short, journalistic texts which imitates the Instagram post and caption schema. Exemplifying her position on the highest possible level of the brand advocacy framework, the content in her magazine similarly acts as a brand extension strategy constructing the symbolic and financial value perceptions of a luxury brand through product placement in digital narratives. The comment sections of these posts demonstrate the effects of these skills through explicit exclamations of increased brand affinity and are filled with authentic interactions between Amber and her audience. Therefore, her journey represents the full potential of utilizing influencers within an omnichannel brand management strategy.

Overall, micro-influencers craft authenticity performances through a combination of calculated aspirational realness, emotional disclosure, relatability as well as sustaining the myths of authenticity labor. Examining the authenticity performances of micro-influencers highlights how authenticity work and aspirational labor is distinctly gendered due to its encapsulation of emotional, glamor and visibility labor work (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). These have distinct consequences with women suffering the risks of visibility labor (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021) because of the deepening callousness of cancel culture and industry politicization. Additionally, as self-enterprising actors within an aspirational industry, micro-influencers utilize authenticity performances to proactively maintain the profitability of their position in accordance with platform templates and brand demands. Through the visual, emotional and relational dimensions of authenticity invoked alongside micro-influencers' brand advocacy performances, all of the influencers content is imbued with credibility. Therefore, authenticity work underscores the strengthening of brand affinity as a result of brand advocacy, due to the modulation of consumer agency propelled by powerful parasocial interaction.

Part III: Computational Network Analysis

10. Computational Network Analysis

As discussed, micro-influencers are embedded within an industry propelled by changing technological landscapes and specific platform limitations. In qualitative research, APIs are typically used to harvest textual archives of communication patterns on social media for closer analysis (Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014). Network analysis based on API data has been used to visualize thematic threads in a network and to analyze the social connections within relational data sets (Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014). Therefore, API data has an in-built bias toward those types of users that are the most "active" content contributors compared to lurkers (Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014).

To examine the influence of key subjects within particular online communities, computational network analysis will be used to determine who are the most popular influencers producing Youtube videos on outfit ideas in luxury fashion. "Outfit ideas" has been established as a popular digital storytelling narrative told on Instagram within luxury fashion communities through this research thereby enhancing the online groundedness of . Isolating the most popular creators producing this type of content enables a platform-specific understanding of the broader network within which the micro-influencers studied in this research participate. Additionally, by contextualizing micro-influencers under the most popular digital culture cultivators within the luxury fashion community, the qualitative aspect of this ethnography is highlighted to provide a nuanced, consumer-centric and platform-embedded understanding of the value of a micro-influencer within the luxury brand management strategy.
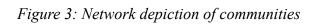
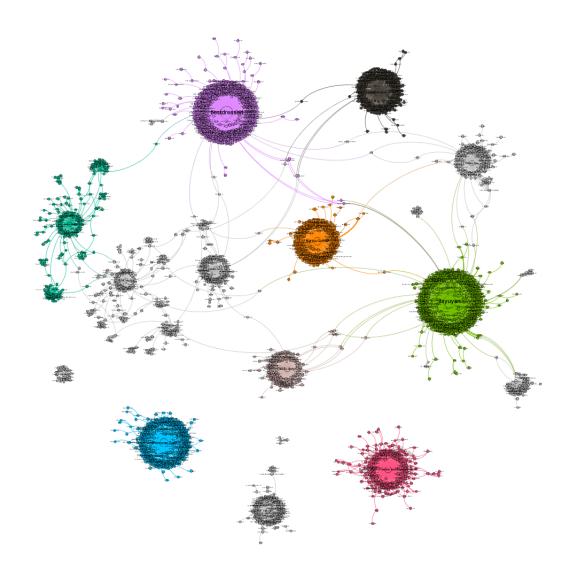### 10.1 Computational Network Analysis Results

In order to visually depict the video and channel search networks, this research uses a

combination of modularity ranking and page-rank centrality to determine specific clusters of similarity and influence potential, respectively.

10.1.1 Community Detection

After collecting network data from Youtube for the search query "outfit ideas", communities were identified through a modularity analysis. A total of 21 communities were identified and these were coloured according to clusters. The results indicated three principal communities in terms of video traffic which were pink (16.88%), green (16.39%) and blue (9.92%). The principal influences for this type of video content were identified as "bestdressed", "itsyuyan" and "Princess Tori." These users are therefore the most influential creators producing this type of content demonstrating their commitment through the continued use of the keyword and hashtag associated with this content. Using a Force-Atlas 2 configuration, node size was ranked according to in-degree centrality which detects the amount of edges coming into a node. The Betweenness Centrality measure, which detects the amount of influence a node has over the flow of information by looking at how many nodes are intercepted via a connection, was determined to be 7. The clustering coefficient was quite low (0.025) which means there was more connectivity between groups of specific areas. This can be seen in Figure 3 as the networked video traffic appears to cluster around particular minor or major community leaders."bestdressed" and "itsyuyan" were depicted as part of a connected web of smaller communities whilst "Princess Tori" was one of two isolated communities in the network. "bestdressed" and "itsyuyan" appear to be large hubs of connectivity, centralizing video traffic under the "outfit ideas" search query and are also closely connected with other minor communities. A close-up of the"bestdressed" node cluster in Figure 4 demonstrates the interconnectivity of this node as well as displays all of the users connected to this node.
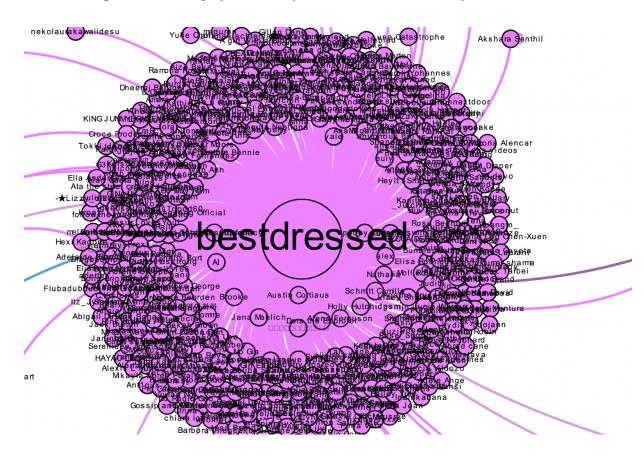
Figure 3: Network depiction of communities

Figure 4: Close-up of community around "bestdressed" influencer

10.1.2 Influence Analysis

Pagerank centrality is used to rank web content, using hyperlinks between pages as a measure of importance (Disney, 2020). PageRank accounts for link direction with each node in a network being assigned a score based on its number of incoming links or in-degree (Disney, 2020). These links are also weighted depending on the relative score of its originating node (Disney, 2020). Resultantly, nodes with many incoming links are influential and nodes to which they are connected share some of that influence. In this case, PageRank is useful in modeling search engine optimization of the keywords "outfit ideas" and link building activity (Disney, 2020).

The higher the PageRank of a node, the more authoritative it is. The modal PageRank score was 0.000043. According to Figure 5, "itsyuyan" appears to have the highest PageRank centrality measure (0.076984) followed by Princess Tori (0.045441) and Busbee Style (0.030425) with bestdressed ranking lower in terms of PageRank centrality measure (0.021673). Additionally, this analysis also pinpoints growing influencers within the "outfit ideas" realm such as Kerina Wang whose PageRank score is similar to "bestdressed." Therefore, there is a discrepancy between the modularity class measures and PageRank analysis. However, notably, "itsyuyan" had a higher betweenness centrality score than "bestdressed." Additionally, Figure 5 displays that Busbee Style and Princess Tori had a far higher video count than "bestdressed" and also had higher betweenness centrality scores which might explain their higher PageRank scores. Another reason for this discrepancy might be that the creator "bestdressed" has not posted a new video since December 2020. In this case, the PageRank scores might be indicative of shifting patterns of influence within the community due to the top influencer's absence from the platform. Given PageRank analysis takes into account connections to other influential nodes, this adjusted ranking of the most influential creators producing content under "outfit ideas" on Youtube provides a more nuanced visualization of network. This is because through PageRank analysis, the changing pathways of video traffic for "outfit ideas" content is displayed which demonstrates the broader context of shifting digital trends and shifting authority of key figures within the Youtube fashion community.

Figure 5: Table depicting PageRank measures for "outfit ideas"

Label	Video Count	Page Rank	Betweenness Centrality
itsyuyan	206	0.076984	76310
Princess Tori	582	0.045441	16509
Busbee Style	681	0.030425	42499
bestdressed	208	0.021673	0
Kerina Wang	336	0.020622	53900
Brittany ngia	96	0.019276	8001
TikTok Treasure	76	0.01874	306
kracmarr	158	0.018358	693
Jasmine le	246	0.010684	0
Karina Gomez	195	0.010584	0

11. Computational network analysis interpretation

Social networks are subject to constant change due to frequent changes in patterns of activity and communication among members (Palla et al., 2007). Events in the life of a community include growth, contraction, merging and splitting (Palla et al., 2007). Using the search query "outfit ideas" presumably generates the broadest composition of fashion content on Youtube since this type of content is endemic to fashion content. Users interact with the Youtube platform in two ways: direct navigation to a Youtube video from another website or social media platform, or searching for a video using keywords (goal-oriented) browsing (Tang et al., 2021). In both cases, Youtube presents users with a set of recommended videos based on the user's prior viewing behaviors as well as co-visitation counts (Tang et al., 2013). Youtube as a platform enables video network analysis through its recommendation algorithm which therefore allows the visualization of the video to video path viewers can be taken on via the different levels of recommendation. Thus, I tried to determine to what extent, if any, Youtube's search and recommendation algorithms impact the content shown. Through this type of network analysis, it is displayed that although most of the video traffic under "outfit ideas" is centered around the two major creators "bestdressed" and "itsyuyan", there are also paths towards different types of fashion content within this network. Additionally, given the embedded hyper-link structure of the platform and according to PageRank measures, there appears to be a shift occurring in dominant creator communities within the Youtube fashion community, with "itsyuyan" appearing as the most influential creator and the growing influence of smaller aspirational influencers. Therefore, this research identifies influencers in terms of changing content engagement and consumption behaviors on Youtube which further helps develop a digital ethnographic mapping of influential creators within the digital fashion sphere.

Overall, when users start an "outfit ideas" keyword-based search on Youtube, they are likely to be trafficked towards one of the major communities within the network. The results displayed a connected core network with connections centered around the two major creators and

a few other smaller creators. Upon examining the network further, it was revealed that these core communities were targeted at similar audiences comprising young adults or teenagers thereby explaining the connections between the communities. According to Figure 5, "bestdressed" and "itsyuyan" had the highest amount of users being trafficked towards their content.

"Bestdressed" is a popular creator based in America who shares her love of fashion, thrifting and film on Youtube. Her dominant content utilizes cost-effective styling and colorful, aesthetically constructed videos which display lookbooks, outfit ideas, room tours etc. Meanwhile, "itsyuyan" is also based in America and posts very similar fashion and lifestyle content to "bestdressed" except her videos are more minimally constructed, emulating "vlogs" or video logs. This difference in aesthetic treatment serves to distinguish the two influencers as their content and identity as Asian-American creators render them close competition. However, "bestdressed" still retains 3.8 million subscribers despite her lack of recent videos whilst "itsyuyan" counts about 739, 000 subscribers despite posting videos weekly. However, as demonstrated by the PageRank analysis, the recommendation algorithm rewards frequent activity on the behalf of creators and this may account for "ityuyan" higher PageRank score compared to "bestdressed."

Davidson et al., (2010) explains Youtube's video recommendation system as one based on association mining to generate sets of related videos. This encourages the user to spend more time on the platform and illustrates how Youtube's recommendation system has a significant impact on the views and vitality of videos (Hussain et al, 2018). This means that the aforementioned creators were most likely to be suggested through goal-oriented searching or from fashion seed videos and also targeted and attracted similar types of users, giving rise to the perceived interconnectivity between these communities. Additionally, this understanding of Youtube's algorithmic culture also explains how and why the other smaller but influential creators such as those displayed in Figure have risen to prominence by emulating the type of content and commitment to keywords performed by the top creators. Additionally, the two

isolated communities were investigated and revealed to be a Roblox fashion account (Princess Tori) and mature adult fashion account (Busbee Style) thereby explaining their distance from the interconnected core communities within Figure despite their prominent PageRank scores. However, the rise of creators such as "kracmarr" who also creates Roblox fashion content similar to Princess Tori, demonstrates the growth of new digital communities and creators following new streams of burgeoning audience interest within the broader realm of "outfit ideas" fashion content. Overall, whilst the top most influential creators producing content for "outfit ideas" for a mainstream audience on Youtube were determined to be "bestdressed" and "itsyuyan", there appears to be other influential creators with highly interconnected communities generating fashion content for more specific communities.

12. Discussion

Through digital ethnography, this study aimed to holistically capture the value of micro-influencers within the luxury brand management strategy. In accordance with Bastien and Kapferer (2009) this research demonstrates the value of micro-influencers as brand extensions in exploiting brand identity to create more market visibility via branded co-constructive opportunities for creativity and experimentation, thereby enabling value transmission. According to this research, micro-influencers engage in brand extension strategies to enhance the aspirational and artistic value perceptions of luxury brands on Instagram. This research is unique in that it provides a detailed list of the contextual clues embedded within micro-influencers posts, which are then deconstructed by receptive audiences to enable consumer brand meaning co-construction processes (Tynan et al., 2010). Furthermore, this research builds on the positioning of influencers at the highest level of the brand advocacy framework (Parrott et al al., 2015) by contextualizing the authenticity work performed by influencers within their brand advocacy performances and demonstrating the symbiotic effect of these concurrent performances on trust and reciprocity within brand-consumer relationships, as well as in increasing brand

affinity and purchase intention levels. Resultantly, this research not only confirms but cohesively evokes an understanding of the interaction between psychological phenomena such as benign envy (Jin et al., 2019) and the marketing logic enacted by micro-influencers within their brand advocacy and brand extension practices to holistically depict the value of micro-influencers as an answer to the unique challenges of luxury brand marketing. Specifically, this study paid attention to understanding the depth of micro-influencers mediatized self-branding performances in conjunction with the requirements of digital luxury storytelling on behalf of brands. Additionally, this study is unique in capturing and situating micro-influencers' behavior within the broader influencer industry and technological landscape. Through computational network analysis, micro-influencers are situated within the influence of the top creators on Youtube and their content is understood within the context of the dominant digital trends occurring within the digital fashion space. Furthermore, the multidimensional approach of this ethnography enabled a confirmation of the inequalities existing within the performance of aspirational labor (Bishop, 2021) and provided an understanding of how micro-influencers understand, perpetuate and navigate the myths of aspirational labor (Duffy, 2015). Most importantly, this type of contextualized depiction of the role of micro-influencers provided insight into the impulses for changing social media platforms' popularity with creators. To illustrate, by tracing Amber Valentine's career within Dior's influencer strategy, this study displays how the role of an influencer has shifted along with platform changes with a consistent need for sharing intimate and authentic glimpses into creators' lives as driving factors for the shifts from blogging platforms to Instagram and now from Instagram to Tiktok. The culmination of Amber Valentines' career in the creation of her own digital magazine displays the ultimate potential of an influencer within a brand management strategy and reiterates how influencers are the modern adaptation of the visual and commercial logic of fashion magazines in the past. Through this research, the role of micro-influencers within a luxury brand management strategy is understood in a consumer-centric and platform-embedded perspective.

13. Conclusion

Conclusively, this research presents micro-influencers as powerful tools of digital storytelling and relational monitoring within the luxury brand management strategy. Since they are perceived as more authentic than macro or mega influencers, micro-influencers perform the role of the "ideal luxury consumer" in the way they perceive and translate the value of luxury brands to other consumers. Therefore, they uniquely respond to the exclusivity and prestige requirements of luxury brand marketing by building and sustaining brand interest beyond product launch campaigns.

This research has some limitations in terms of the scope and length of its research timeline which restricted the observational period. One avenue for future research would be to increase the observational periods of participant observation to provide a more detailed description of the narrative techniques used in digital storytelling on Instagram. Additionally, this research has some specific platform limitations given the network analysis method. To begin with, there are limitations of ambiguity within large data sets due to the quantity and scope of the sample data used (Teggin et al., 2021). With more resources and time it would be possible to delve deeper into the correlations between the networked nodes and the specific video content produced (Teggin et al., 2021) under the "outfit ideas" theme. Furthermore, there are platform specific limitations present within the Youtube ecosystem, pertaining to the way videos are searched and sorted within their algorithms which affect the network visualizations (Teggin et al., 2021). However, this enables an understanding of the way data is manifested and represented by Youtube which provides a useful dimension to this research. Alternatively, to engage with the dynamic nature of fast-changing platforms like Youtube (Teggin et al., 2021) this research could be extended to model changes in influential creators on Youtube over a longer period of time since this research has indicated a potential shift in influential creators within the fashion community. Additionally, computational network analysis could be conducted for other popular fashion search terms such as "lookbook" or "get ready with me" to more cohesively depict who

are the top creators creating fashion content on Youtube. Improving the scope of the research through the aforementioned avenues would add to the findings of this research by depicting in even greater detail the enmeshment of influencers within algorithmic cultures and the fashion industry as a whole.

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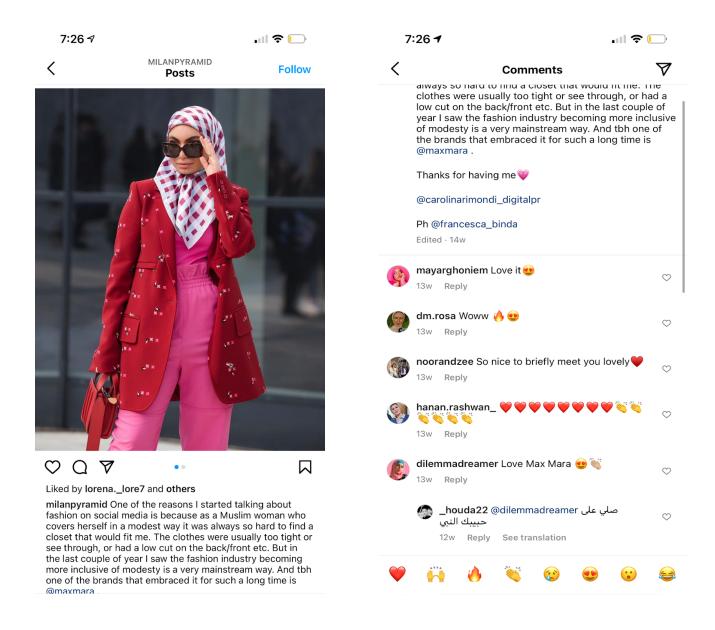
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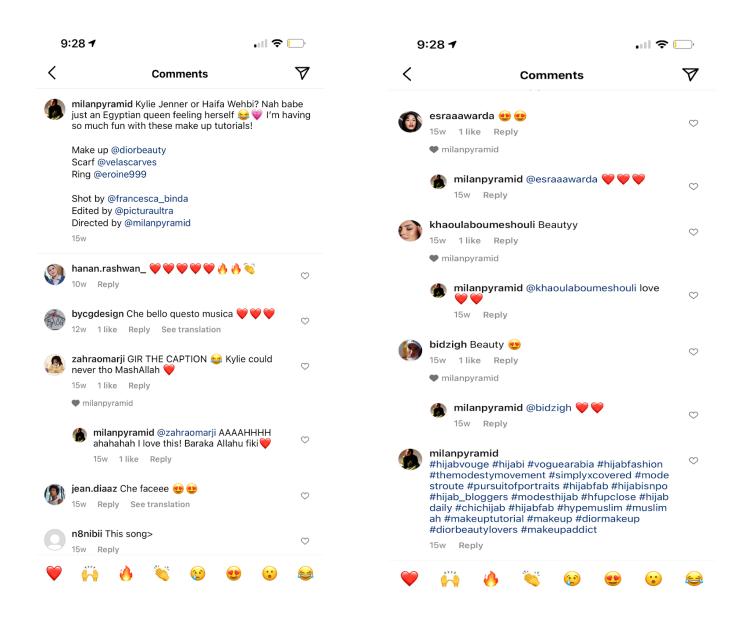Appendix A: Screenshots of Instagram Data

A.1

7:26

MILANPYRAMID
Posts

Follow

Liked by **lorena._lore7** and others

milanpyramid One of the reasons I started talking about fashion on social media is because as a Muslim woman who covers herself in a modest way it was always so hard to find a closet that would fit me. The clothes were usually too tight or see through, or had a low cut on the back/front etc. But in the last couple of year I saw the fashion industry becoming more inclusive of modesty is a very mainstream way. And tbh one of the brands that embraced it for such a long time is @maxmara .

7:26

Comments

always so hard to find a closet that would fit me. The clothes were usually too tight or see through, or had a low cut on the back/front etc. But in the last couple of year I saw the fashion industry becoming more inclusive of modesty is a very mainstream way. And tbh one of the brands that embraced it for such a long time is @maxmara .

Thanks for having me💗

@carolinarimondi_digitalpr

Ph @francesca_binda

Edited · 14w

mayarghoniem Love it😍
13w   Reply

dm.rosa Woww 🔥😍
13w   Reply

noorandzee So nice to briefly meet you lovely❤️
13w   Reply

hanan.rashwan_ ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️👏👏👏👏👏👏
13w   Reply

dilemmadreamer Love Max Mara 😍👏
13w   Reply

_houda22 @dilemmadreamer صلي على حبيبك النبي
12w   Reply   See translation

❤️ 🙌 🔥 👏 😢 😍 😮 😂

9:28

Comments

milanpyramid Kylie Jenner or Haifa Wehbi? Nah babe just an Egyptian queen feeling herself 😂 💗 I'm having so much fun with these make up tutorials!

Make up @diorbeauty
Scarf @velascarves
Ring @eroine999

Shot by @francesca_binda
Edited by @picturaultra
Directed by @milanpyramid

15w

hanan.rashwan_ ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️🔥🔥👏
10w   Reply

bycgdesign Che bello questo musica ❤️❤️❤️
12w   1 like   Reply   See translation

zahraomarji GIR THE CAPTION 😂 Kylie could never tho MashAllah ❤️
15w   1 like   Reply
🖤 milanpyramid

milanpyramid @zahraomarji AAAAHHHH ahahahah I love this! Baraka Allahu fiki❤️
15w   1 like   Reply

jean.diaaz Che faceee 😍 😍
15w   Reply   See translation

n8nibii This song>
15w   Reply

❤️ 🙌 🔥 👏 😢 😍 😮 😂

9:28

Comments

esraaawarda 😍 😍
15w   1 like   Reply
🖤 milanpyramid

milanpyramid @esraaawarda ❤️❤️❤️
15w   Reply

khaoulaboumeshouli Beautyy
15w   1 like   Reply
🖤 milanpyramid

milanpyramid @khaoulaboumeshouli love ❤️❤️
15w   Reply

bidzigh Beauty 😍
15w   1 like   Reply
🖤 milanpyramid

milanpyramid @bidzigh ❤️❤️
15w   Reply

milanpyramid
#hijabvogue #hijabi #voguearabia #hijabfashion #themodestymovement #simplyxcovered #modestroute #pursuitofportraits #hijabfab #hijabisnpo #hijab_bloggers #modesthijab #hfupclose #hijabdaily #chichijab #hijabfab #hypemuslim #muslimah #makeuptutorial #makeup #diormakeup #diorbeautylovers #makeupaddict
15w   Reply

❤️ 🙌 🔥 👏 😢 😍 😮 😂

A.4

A.5

9:12

    Comments

loisopoku Interchangeable @diorbeauty ✨ #rougedior #wewearrouge #giftedbydior Anzeige*

Edited · 3w

cherifaakili 🧡 🧡 🧡

14w   Reply

bella.emar The best🔥🔥🔥❤️❤️❤️❤️

14w   Reply

mikialamode The best ❤️

14w   1 like   Reply

🖤 loisopoku

loisopoku @mikialamode so happy with these. Obviously 999 is an iconic shade but in loving the interchangeable colours 😍

14w   Reply

Appendix B: Fieldnotes

Observations	Reflections
February 15	**February 15 Reflections**
@lois.opoku	Influencers used photos that portrayed the aspirational nature of luxury goods such as paparazzi shots such as portraying "queen" or "celebrity" energy. They simultaneously embody a relatability through self-directed humor that simultaneously portrays them as unlike the status symbols they emulate. Utilizing product specific hashtags or brand tags functions as non-sponsored brand promotions that help attract the attention of brands by demonstrating independent interest. Outfit photos are coordinated for aesthetic appeal for the product. Implicit marketing of products through outfit details
Location: Copenhagen	
Street Style photo of outfit at copenhagen fashion week	
Likes - 198	
Comments - 15	
I don't do Drama.. unless it's clothes 🙄	
#lisforloiscph #cphfw #fashionweek #streetstylemood	
#streetstyle #fashionmoment #editedgirls #furlasociety	
#jc_love	
An Outfit of the day photo except it's captured in fashion week. Expression matches the emoji and caption. Looks like a paparazzi photo. Personal hashtag for her outfits at fashion week. Hashtag for the bag and Copenhagen fashion week. Relatability factor because she is not like other influencers - drama etc. Looks like a celebrity but is relatable. Casual chic outfit. Matching background. All comments are positive and supportive and approving of the outfit.	
Brands tagged - rayban, furlaa, editedofficial,	

dorotheeschumacher, jeffrey campbell germany, thestyleograph, vcom.tpa.

2) Out with the old, in with the new✨

Decided to part ways with my Karl Lagerfeld bag in order to make space for the iconic Jacquemus Le Chicquito. I hope my bag will find a new home. You can shop it from my Zadaa Account 💕 Love the idea having a closet in circulation instead of constantly accumulating and having pieces other people can appreciate sitting at the back of your closet.

#secondhandsimplified #founditonzadaa #giveandtake #jacquemus #lechicquitomini

Likes - 175
Comments - 15

Short caption introduction followed by longer detailed caption demonstrating interest in sustainability and value for product. Mentions brand names and products and promotes websites in a subtle manner. Promotes relatability. Provides aesthetic experience of Jacquemus bag as the "new" IT bag. Most comments appreciate the outfit but three comments specifically mention the Jaquemus minibag and one comment mentions the

Lagerfeld midi bag. This demonstrates the shift in trends to mini bags. Zadaa instagram account tagged on bag.

@curlsallover

1) yes i'm obsessed with my newspaper pants 💗 🏛️ 🙃 it was love at the first sight.

   Likes - 361

   Comments 129

Hashtags added within comments #ootd #jaquemusbag #blackgirlmagic #outfitinspiration #trending #styleinspiration

Brands tagged - tags herself, arketofficial, zara, jaquemus, nike.

Outfit of the day photo with matching background. Sarcasm- self-related humor. Conveys geniality and a friend-type relationship. Jacquemus mini-bag featured subtly. Photo frames bag. Influencer replies to all comments. Most comments are complementary and related to the outfit. One comment notes a jacquemus bag.

@Ps.shadesofmy life

@Milanpyramid

Makeup tutorial reel

Kylie Jenner or Haifa Wehbi? Nah babe just an Egyptian queen feeling herself 😂 💗 I'm having so much fun with these make up tutorials!

Make up @diorbeauty
Scarf @velascarves
Ring @eroine999

Shot by @francesca_binda
Edited by @picturaultra
Directed by @milanpyramid

754 likes

75 comments - Hashtags: #hijabvouge #hijabi #voguearabia #hijabfashion #themodestymovement #simplyxcovered #modestroute #pursuitofportraits #hijabfab #hijabisnpo #hijab_bloggers #modesthijab #hfupclose #hijabdaily #chichijab #hijabfab #hypemuslim #muslimah #makeuptutorial #makeup #diormakeup #diorbeautylovers #makeupaddict

Make-up tutorial set to an Egyptian song except it's not really a tutorial than a product display and final look. Matches caption because she looks regal before the brand name is displayed on the product. Humor making fun of herself whilst drawing attention to how the product makes her feel like a queen. Tagging brands even though

unsponsored in makeup reel with regards to unpaid labor. Demonstrates labor by adding credits to the project. Focus is on the product and then her applying the product including demonstrating how she uses it. Glamor labor through work done to promote appearance. Combines an emotional, aesthetic and experience of meaning through the aesthetic content, audio content and textual content. Captures the product experience for the user. Identifies two moguls who are comparable to the product experience - Kylie for the west and Haifa for the east thereby targeting both her audiences. Draws attention to her uniqueness and the accessibility of herself and the product. Influencer replies to all comments. All comments are complementary about the look with one comment about the caption. Hashtags included in the comments.	

Appendix C: Informed Consent form

Information sheet

Name of Principal Investigator*:	Cherisse Dsouza
Erasmus University Rotterdam / specific School*:	School of History, Culture and Communication
Name of Funding organisation*:	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Project Title and Version*:	Promoting Luxury Brands on Instagram and Youtube : A digital ethnography of influencers in the fashion industry

Introduction*
I am Cherisse Dsouza, a researcher working for the Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am doing research on the role of luxury influencers within the brand management strategy. I am going to provide you with information and invite you to be a part of this research. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me for explanations when anything is unclear.

Purpose of the research*
Influencers have become a huge asset to brands in terms of marketing online and sponsorships provide a great opportunity for influencers to monetize their passion into a living. However, the positions influencers hold in this industry is precarious and the work that they do is often misunderstood or under-appreciated. We want to understand who you are and how you do what you do to enable a public and academic understanding of your position and role in the social media marketing strategies employed by companies. We believe that you can help us by telling us what you know about the industry you are part of and about influencer work in general. We want to learn about your relationships with your followers, the brands you work with and the platforms you work on to manufacture content.

Type of research intervention*
This research will take place over one month in total. During that time, we will contact you to be interviewed once for an interview lasting about 45 minutes to an hour. The debriefing session following this interview will take about five minutes.

Participant selection*

You are being invited to take part in this research because we feel that your experience as an influencer and work with luxury fashion brands can contribute much to our understanding and knowledge of influencer work.

Appendix D: Interview Transcript

Tue, 5/3 2:04PM 31:02

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

influencer, photos, instagram, people, brands, content, netherlands, post, create, approachable, followers, big, sponsored content, outfit, sponsored, micro influencers, hard, future, creative, hobby

SPEAKERS

Cher D, Elvira, Safira

Cher D 00:03

Okay, so maybe we can start by you guys telling me just how you got into being an influencer and getting into fashion.

Safira 00:08

It started off I think, in 2013, Instagram was quite new. And we saw on the internet that people were creating pictures and contents uploading, uploading items that they were wearing. So we saw it as an opportunity to also download the app and try it and start also making photos of our outfits and sharing a lot of things about fashion. So yeah, I think that was our inspiration to also start Instagram because it was new. Nobody didn't know anything about getting paid on Instagram. And also, all the things that could have come in the future so it was quite interesting. Also, like really love fashion. Yeah, since we were little, like we wanted to be like, photographers.

Cher D 01:07

It was a good way for you to get into your already existing hobbies.

Safira 01: 11

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Cher D 01:13

I'm sorry. I'm just gonna, how do I address you Elvira? Saphira? Oh, yeah, I should have asked that at the start. That's your Well, that brings us into the next question. So like, how, like you have a twin account? So how is your personal style? And how do you go about it as twins?

Safira 01:36

Yeah, that's a good question. Because we have almost a similar style. So it's nothing quite drastically different from her style and my style. So we just combine everything together. And if you can tell also, with our hair and everything, we always do everything the same. So isn't that we have a big gap in our styles or something, but we just try and infuse everything together. But it isn't really that different.

Cher D 02:10

yeah. And do you think that like, does this like unique brand of being like twin influencers? And you have a shared fashion account? Do you see brands approaching you for certain reasons that way, like, do they like like this like concept? For example?

Elvira 02:25

Yeah, at first, like, people didn't know that we were like, with two people. Yeah, no, always addressing me. Yeah. And like now, for like, since last year, they have started to notice that we were like two people now. Yeah. But like, still sometimes, like they will address only me. And like, we have to say like, oh, yeah, we're like with two people. So we don't really create content without both. Yeah, it's it's quite hard to, you know, find someone who can always make photos of us together. Yeah. But in in the last year, it was more brands that were approaching us that saw that we were two people. And they addressed us also with two people like, how many editors do you want? Because we are with two people. So it's much more? And we also have to negotiate more, if you are with two people. So yeah,

Cher D 03:28

yeah. And so for example, when you're going about this, like, what's one of the brands that approached you, Dior. Because I see that you worked with Dior perfume. So how did they approach you? How did that pan out?

Safira 03:40
Yeah, it actually started from a more of an agency. It was an agency from London, and they work with brands like Dior or Hermes and all of those other brands. And they reached out to us with a question if we would like to promote a perfume. It was the first one for summer. And they gave us guidelines that we had to follow. And also asked us if we could create something that would suit the whole concept and mood boards. So that's what we did. They said have sent it back to us. We take the photos, and then we had to post it on our Instagram and they will post it on to Dior beauties instagram.

Cher D 04:24
nice.

Elvira 04:28
Yeah. Like they addressed us like as one person. Yeah. At first we were like, okay, that's okay. We'll just do it. Second time. We also did it for like, again as one person. Yeah, we had to like really tell them we are with two people like is there an option? We can both receive a product to create the content, like both. And there was like, again, one person only but yeah.

Safira 04:59
It's quite hard for brands because if they come with a offer, or they tell you to do something, it's quite hard to change or demand to do a little bit more, or give you some space to also have your opinion. So yeah, we felt a creation, it's always a must to stand your ground, and also find a common ground in which you can also work with. Yeah, it's quite Yes, still difficult now in this time, especially now, because brands don't want to, I think a lot of money or give a lot of product because they want to only receive the followers and also the numbers of you. So they don't really want to, you know, work with each other to come to a common ground. So that's great. Yeah, it's difficult.

Cher D 05:50

Yeah. And it sucks that they're not capitalizing, because like, it is kind of a unique concept. Because when I was going through your feed, it's like you individually, and then there's you together, and it's like, it's very cool. Yeah,

Safira 06:00

Which works. Yeah,

Cher D 06:01

it's more so. Yeah, but I assume like a viewer Elvira is the first one. So that's why they keep saying like, yeah,

Safira 06:07

yeah, yeah.

Cher D 06:11

Yeah. So what do you think is the role of micro influencers though, because you guys would fall into the micro influencer category category. So how do you perceive your, your influence for a luxury brand?

Safira 06:23

Our influence is quite bigger than if you have more followers? Because yeah, followers are more personal with us. We interact a lot with our followers. So if we promote something, that they they will know that it's genuine that we always use it, and also wants to use it. So as micro influencers I have a feeling that we're more approachable, we're real and not out of touch. These bigger influences are always working with you know, whereas micro-influencers, were more working with startup brands are also luxury brands, but more of a smaller on a smaller scale. So nothing big like going to fashion shows. Yeah, all the time. And that kind of thing.

Cher D 07:12

And with the post that you guys did for Dior, how did you? Like how did you see the engagement pan out from that one?

Safira 07:19

Yeah, it was really? Yeah. Yeah. But like, that comes back to the thing that also working with like selected brands you were at? Or like people would think, Oh, it's so cool you're working with Dior. Yeah, it was just amazing. Yeah. Because you're not always consistently putting it in their faces. Yeah. So they get more space to also see you grow. And when we posted the photo from Dior it was just more of people that were proud and also wanted to see the product, what the brand was all about. So yeah, that was nice.

Cher D 07:52

yeah. And why is Instagram your chosen medium? Because you said you guys started in 2013. So back then, blogging was a really big thing. And now Tiktok is a big thing. So why is Instagram your chosen medium of being a fashion influencer? Would you say?

Safira 08:07

We can connect more with people and create a skill? Yeah. And it's also much more easier. If you have a blog, you have to write everything up, edit everything, and also publish it. And you also have to engage in numbers of a blog and Instagram is more of a tweet, it combines everything in one. So yeah, create your photos, and have a beautiful layout. And you can also manage your numbers - Instagram does that for us. So yeah, you can manage your numbers. You can connect with your followers on one on one, you can directly message them, it's much more easier. And yeah, much more fun. Also, because you have a very deep connection with your followers. It's almost like texting your friends something. Yeah.

Cher D 08:57

Yeah. And are there any challenges that you've seen with Instagram? Maybe just individually with the algorithm, but also maybe working with two people? Is there like a difference in the way you push content? Or maybe if you could speak on that?

Elvira 09:11

Yeah. Yeah, with the algorithm, like a lot of people talk about it. Like, there was really a different algorithm in 2013. So yeah, as we saw ourselves that we got like more likes more engagement at the start of Instagram. And now like, it's hard. It's quite hard to see like, those same numbers as almost 10 years ago. Yes. Instagram was quite new. There wasn't a lot of competition, because right now, it is so saturated. There are a lot of influencers and content creators and everyone else. so it is quite hard to go into it and be as creative as you can be, because everyone is doing the same.

Safira 09:58

Yes, sometimes right? You have to go with the trend. Yeah. Not always your Yeah. Yeah, your fallback? Yeah. So creating content with two people is also quite hard because we both have also work. Okay. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we do that also. So it's not always that we can create content, it's, we have to manage it a little. Less if you're an individual person. And you could get a lot of friends to make pictures for you. It's much more easier. That's we're working with two people. So you have a you need to have more people to help you also. So yeah, it's quite hard. But we try to make content as Yeah, as soon as we want. And when we want and if we have time, so it's - it isn't that we want to pressure ourselves to make content every single day. That's also not what I really want out of Instagram. I wanted to be super creative, organic, and yeah, nothing. Yeah, nothing too much. Yeah. How do you view - you guys are based in the Netherlands, right? So how do you view your personal position as influencers within the Netherlands? Like, do you think that you guys are more so you tell a story? Or do you think that you are more so product promotion? How do you view your influence within this community? For ourselves, like, we really love making photos and those kinds of things and we really, like, enjoy if like brands send us products to make photos of? Because like we can be creative with it to our own favorite stories. Like, we're like, not like a big storytellers or something like we love, like giving people a little bit of ourselves. Not too much. Yeah. So it's more like, photo base for us. And just being creative. And with like, our position here in Netherlands, we feel like it could be better. Yeah. Because there's not a lot of influencers here in the Netherlands. We are far behind from places like the United States, or England also. So yeah, we have to really try to make a mark for ourselves here. Because I think that's inevitable. Where we are now that a lot of people will

remember us or recognize us, yes, or no, did they know we are in a fashion scene here. And it's quite small. It's not that big. So we talk a lot with other influencers also here in the Netherlands, also connect with them. But yeah, I think it can be much more bigger here. Yeah, as we're falling behind. And we also see that the trend of Instagram is slowly fizzling out. It won't be here for much longer being honest. So if you- if you want to reach something it is now that you have that.

Elvira 13:02

Especially also with like, being twins, you don't really have it here in Netherlands. And also like being a black woman also, it's not like a lot, like, especially not in Europe. Yeah, it's Harder. Yeah. Then in other countries, so yeah, it's if you want to achieve something, we have to do it now. Well, we still can while instagram is on trend, because in a few years, I think we have to move to another platform.

Cher D 13:34

Yeah, yeah.

Safira 13:36

Yeah, yeah. Right. hard for them. Now with Tik Tok and YouTube, the future is more personal, more lively. And Instagram is more picture based. You don't see a lot of things that go behind the scenes. And people want to be more informed with this. So yeah,

Cher D 13:54

yeah. And do you feel that there is like a dominant brand? Because there aren't a lot of influencers here. That's true. But do you also feel that there is like a dominant brand of influencer? Because in my research, I have found that there's one brand and you guys have quite a unique brand. So do you feel that a conflict between maintaining your own personal brand and trying to conform to what's commercial or what's working here?

Safira 14:16

Yeah, yeah, yeah, sometimes we do. Sometimes we just think like, should we also try to do things that others are doing to, to be closer to what people want but it is important to stay, stay doing what we love to do and stay in the lane that we want to do, because it's maybe in the future, it can be something that can be quite bigger, because I can see the we don't do usually the stuff that others are doing.

Elvira 14:45

Yeah like here theyre more like minimalist or more like minimum. For all neutrals and those kind of things because we also love mutual colors. Yeah, we want to try it and like, make it in a way that is more artistic, but also more organic. Yeah, we're real. Other influencers are more picture based. More lovey dovey. Yeah, yeah,

Cher D 15:12

I know. I know the brand that you're Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, so moving more specifically to Dior with your personal brand. How did you Okay, so did they give you a brief on what type of content or how what was your creative input in constructing the posts for the Dior sponsors?

Safira 15:30

Yeah, we got a brief about like, the explanation about the product. And then what they wanted to see. And like how many posts we had to create that but like they let us be creative ourselves. And like, think about our own concept and how we see the perfume in our own right. So they gave us a small story of the brand itself and of the perfume. because the first one we got was more based on summer - more of a sea coast blue skies. Yeah. So we had to really think through and also see what fitted our brands and also fitted their brand. So we came into the middle ground because the first photo that we made was with a sun hat, I think, yeah, yeah, it was with sunhat. At first, we wanted to go to the beach, you know, the weather here. And it was never gonna happen. So we had to make a second plan. And we did it inside because we didn't have any other option. And when we were creating the photos, the sun came out.

Cher D 16:51

Yeah, it just worked out then. Yeah. Okay. And then that was you Elvira for the Dior Perfume? Yes. Yeah. Okay. And then you had a second perfume. Was that you Safira or?

Elvira 17:06

I'm more picture based.

Safira 17:07

I am the creative direction. Yeah.

Cher D 17:13

Oh, interesting. I like that. There's that division of labor. Do you think you work well, as a team? Like, do you think it helps you to work as a team then be alone? As an influencer?

Safira 17:21

Yeah, especially Yeah, cuz we, we have are own strong points. Yeah, working ogether is pretty amazing. So yeah. We just understand each other. We don't like really have to say, Okay, we're going to do this this. Like, if we get a brief or in concept, we know what to do. Yeah.

Cher D 17:42

Okay. And how do you share your, your own experience with your followers? Like, do you do outfit of the day or get ready with me stuff like that, like any type of video content? I did see you have a few reels. But what do you mainly use reels for?

Safira 17:57

We mainly use it for contests. I think we don't really do get ready when mes or goes shopping with me. Because yeah, in the future, we would like to do that more. But for now, we just want to be more on a background. Yes, it's still, at this point, a hobby for us. So don't really take that seriously, but we want to be more approachable more creatively in the future. So with more videos, maybe more reels.

Elvira 18:28

it's possible to figure out like which way because what works best for us, maybe find a new platform. Also, like express ourselves more. .

Safira 18:42
Yeah, yeah.

Cher D 18:43
Okay. And what do you think is better? Do you think that like, for example, when you design content, and it's just the product does better? Or do you think that when you guys are involved in some way in this photo it does better?

Safira 18:57
Yeah, it does better, much more better when we are involved in this. Yeah. Because we see a lot of photos that are outfits for example, or if brands send us products like tops or trousers, people like it more if you can create with the outfit or if you're in a picture, because it's just a picture of the product itself, it won't do very well because you're not in it. People want to see you with the product, so that it's more real for them. I think they have more of an understanding that you want to wear it awesome. It's genuine,IM wearing it. It's you can wear it like this, for example.

Cher D 19:38
But I didn't notice that in a lot of your photos. It's cropped so your face is not in it and it is that intentional. Is that for privacy or what is the vision behind that?

Safira 19:47
It's intentional, because we want the product to speak more, but we also want to have ourselves involved. So most of the photos that are cropped we have, for example of blazer with a blouse. It is an outfit photo outfit so it should speak more than our faces so that people can see yourself more than be distracted of the rest of their outfit or the whole look. So yeah.

Cher D 20:16
And then when you do choose to show your faces, what are the reasons for when you do do that?

Safira 20:22

Just to be more approachable? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So Yeah. Sometimes we just want to outfit to speak more, and don't really want to evoke ourselves in the photos that much. But in the future, we really want to change that. But yeah, we're still figuring out in which way we want to go with social media. So

Cher D 20:49

yeah. Okay. That's an interesting perspective. So but at this point in time, do you are you working with monetary compensation? Or are you working more with like, just building your relationships with these brands?

Safira 21:01

I think more building relationships with brands, because in the future, it is quite, it's more to have allies in business in many different businesses. Yes, as I already said, Instagram is slowly fizzling out. So you have to find other ways to stay involved in the fashion industry. And not only rely on Instagram solely, because if that's gone, you have to either go to other platform or already have connections in the industry to keep going and keep doing what you want to do. So yeah, yeah, it's more.

Cher D 21:39

And how would you say is the demographic of your target audience at this point in time?

Safira 21:45

It's really mixed. Okay. Mostly between 15 or 25, or 25 and 30? Yeah, so more millennials and Gen Z. So it's a mix.

Cher D 22:00

And women? I'm guessing mostly, yeah.

Elvira 22:02

So little bit men.

Yeah. Okay. That's nice. Inclusion included. Okay. And then do you feel that the lifestyle that you display on your Instagram is accessible to your particular target audience?

Elvira 22:17
Yeah, like we try not to. I don't want to like, come over as like, yeah, I can do this. I have this and show too much. I just want to be approachable for everyone. And like, they can also when we like, making our photos go, like, oh, I can wear this. Or I can try to get this for my closet. Like just simple items. Like just as simple and approachable as possible. Yeah, because we don't really wear a lot of designers. Everything designer that we have is vintage. Yeah, we don't try and buy all those expensive suits, bags and all those items. We really want to keep it approachable, but it's also ourselves. We don't have any our - Yeah, yeah, we don't really like the Chanel bags, for example. I'm more of a simple person. So I would use thrift stores, art stores, those kinds of stores. So yeah. Okay, nothing that's big or extravagant.

Cher D 23:21
Right? Yeah. And also because it is a hobby, how do you view your responsibility to your followers, in terms of just like sponsored content, disclosing sponsored content, like, how you view that? Yeah,

Safira 23:35
it's really important to show which which kind of posts are sponsored. For us there's a lot of posts that we make and only a few have been sponsored. So then we had to include the hashtag ad. Yeah, I think it's very important to disclose when a photo is sponsored enough, because otherwise you will create a reality where people only come to your content for sponsored content, if you do that too much. And when you don't do it, it's because - there's a middle ground

because in Instagram, a lot of influencers or content creators wants to be seen as a lot of brands come to me. I have a lot of sponsored content and I wear Hermes and all those kind of things, but at our ground or other ways, more often normal people or content creators that don't have a lot of followers want it to be more organically. So if you have a sponsor posts, of course we have to take it but we don't want to be that you're always on Instagram for sponsored content so that every post is sponsored.

Elvira 24:43

So you want us to be as evenly as possible on your feed but sometimes if we're getting bigger and bigger, of course you want some money, you want to see the money and you want to you know monetize it. Yeah, it's quite hard to find a middle ground for us because yeah, a lot of people are finding out that you can get money out of being an influencer. So yeah, it's great card. Because if you're speaking with others who don't do Instagram or other content creators, they're like, What are you doing? Where is the money? How do we get some money? And it's still complicated also here in the Netherlands because there are no rules for it. Yeah,

Cher D 25:24

it's not so set up as an industry.

Safira 25:27

States, they have rules about ads about how you get money, if you receive free clothes, if that's also money. With us we are still figuring it out. So it's quite hard to also find, find a way or also to know if a post is an ad or sponsored, or what you should write on there. In the comment section, so yeah, it's quite hard to see. Yeah, what is right or what is wrong here? So we always look at other Instagramers. Also, to see what they will set in their bio, but maybe it's not a way here that we should do it. So yeah, it's quite hard to see.

Cher D 26:07

Yeah, hard to keep a balance I can imagine. Yeah, yeah. Okay, so we're just moving into the final section. So I was just gonna ask you if do you feel like for you, guys, it's a hobby. But do you feel that because you have this hobby of pressure to maintain a public persona or pressure in terms of perceiving yourself as an influencer?

Elvira 26:28

Yeah, yeah. Especially like in 2020 remember, like, we wanted to post those photos make as much content as possible. Because we felt like oh, like, if we don't do that. We're gonna lose followers.

Cher D 26:43

With Corona?

Elvira 26:45

Yeah, especially especially. So like, we were like, We must make content. And like, last year, we realized, like, what are you doing? Like, we have to like, take our time, our time will come like, yeah, please be patient and make like content when you feed it. Don't rush it. Because if you do that, you're not going to like your content. And you will remove your photos and feel like this is not perfect. This is not good enough. So like for now, I'm just like, I'm doing life. When we want to post we do because yeah, we're now at a point with our followers, and also on Instagram that if we don't post for a while that people won't - it won't bother them. Yeah, when we come back, they're really excited. Like, oh, my god, wheres more content. How are you doing so? Yeah, yeah, we're more. Yeah, it's more like friends. Yeah, with our followers. So that's nice.

Cher D 27:46

Yeah. And And finally, how do you like how much time would you say goes into crafting? doing your makeup getting ready photographing, like, one for one post? Would you say?

Safira 27:59

Like to getting ready, it's more like 30 minutes. And content is two hours, maybe? Yeah, one and a half hours? Because yeah, also have to think of the length of the light, where you want to make

your photos. And how you want to create your photo- so with your phone or with camera, or if we want to use otter attributes like maybe interior so it's, it's quite Yeah. sometimes difficult to create. Yes, sometimes it also goes easy. Within 30 minutes, you have yourself and you're ready. But yeah,

Elvira 28:37
yeah, yeah. And

Cher D 28:40
yeah, and how much time in a week like would you spend on being influencer? Like stuff like emailing brands just keeping up with people and stuff? Like, what is your weekly budget for that? Since you're working as well?

Safira 28:54
I just think I have we really don't have that. We just just like just mix every day because Yeah. If you want to make it your job, I think it's seven days a week, just the same. So we also work at the same, but when we're at home, we're always emailing. Always answering your DMS. Yeah. Thinking of creating content writing stuff, so it's just more almost 24/7 You're always on your phone. So yeah, the opportunity you just do it. So I think it's almost just like seven days a week between tabs where you're free. So yeah, but on the weekend like less. Yeah.

Cher D 29:34
Interesting. Yeah.

Safira 29:37
Yeah, it's quite a job if you want it to be your, your job forever or just for some time, so yeah, you really have to have a lot of patience and energy to do it. Yeah.

Cher D 29:50
That's good to know. That's a lot actually. Yeah,

Safira 29:52

it's, it's not as easy as working in a supermarket or working In the office, because it's you that people want to see. So you have to be present 24/7 for them.

Elvira 30:06

So yeah, it's like a craft.

Cher D 30:10

I would say so.

Safira 30:11

They want to be the influencer or content creator but most of the people won't go any further than on weekends, because it's really hard to get into that space. Yeah. Maintaining that space. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Cher D 30:28

Well, thank you so much for your input, though. Like this is a very useful interview and I will definitely be giving you a follow now that's all ethical for me to do. I know it's so nice to learn about your like particular brand and and everything about being an influencer in the Netherlands. Yeah.

Safira 30:45

Was really nice.

Cher D 30:48

Yeah, that's good. I'm glad you enjoy.

Safira 30:52

Yeah, of course. Yes, sir. Thank you so much for your time. Yeah.

Cher D 30:56

Thank you. Yeah. Have a great day.

Appendix E: Coding Tree

Brand Allegiance 2:22 p 6, things like that. And then they wanted also again, they didn't want logos other logos so that there w… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:24 p 6, no other logo showing. They also wanted it to be kindof like focused on that on that specific thing.… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:43 p 10, es. That's why when you partner up with Dior, you kind of un-partner withChanel. You partner with Be… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:5 p 10, It feels so good to be a @prada girl in participant observation (1).pdf	**Brand Loyalty**	**Performing Brand Advocacy**
Long-Term Relationships 3:22 p 4, I think I contacted them? Because like I said, because I've been doing this for such along time. It'… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:25 p 4, d some numbers. In the end, they probably pick a few girls that have a lot of followers that have nev… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:16 p 4, kind of layers. And I've seen Dior kind of whittling it down?Yeah. You can see certain people are ta… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:42 p 10, And I think with Dior, my relationship with Dior definitely has been like a long term. Oh, she was… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:50 p 12, d. Also, from a relationship perspective. Yeah, a lot of the brands that I work with,we are relation… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:52 pp 12 – 13, Yeah if you have a great relationship, they will grow your career. And this. I also want to want to,… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Prior Brand Interest 3:23 p 4, Yeah, I think if they can go through your feed and be like, Oh, okay, you actually use our product so… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:66 p 12, I - I've definitely done like Get Ready With knees or as I call it, like outfit videos. And I do that… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:67 p 12, t. They see it of course. You would maybe get online email for example with Ferragamo. I think they… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:9 p 4, Just so in love with @guccibeauty in participant observation (1).pdf		
Product Focalization 1:33 p 9, So most of the photos that are cropped we have, for example of blazer with blouse. It is an outfit… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf		
Hashtag use # for audience reach 2:52 p 11, n also to get more audience on the photo, and yeah, so it helps for sure.Yeah in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:12 p 8, #outfittoday in participant observation (1).pdf 5:14 p 4, #reelsviral in participant observation (1).pdf # for gaining brand attention 2:51 p 11, So it does help. So I Sometimes we'll post like my outfit again of the day. Orsometimes I'll post li… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:13 p 3, #diormakeup in participant observation (1).pdf # use for brand awareness 2:20 p 6, hat they wanted. So okay, so for Dior, Iremember they had a specific hashtag, they had specific hash… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:11 p 9, #maxmara in participant observation (1).pdf	**Increasing Brand Awareness**	
Legitimization of Influencer Position 2:36 p 8, eah. I love that. I love that. It's starting to get into academia,like the whole influencing part be… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:20 p 5, I think in their minds like an image, you have to remember luxury brands are very old schoolfashion.… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Local Influence 1:19 p 5, ative. And with like, our position here in Netherlands, we feel like it couldbe better. Yeah. Becaus… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 3:5 p 2, es. But because I've been doing it so long, I kind of also have like, something likean image thing a… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Product Saturation 3:27 p 5, and models. And then, like I said, they allposted at the same time. So the feed was flooded with th in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Product influencer tiers 4:15 p 4, Yeah. And then they have the smaller bubble of people who workwith their like bags and accessories,… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Importance of video content 2:34 p 7, ry well. The Dior one did very, very well, like very fast too. Ididn't realize, I didn't think it wa… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:44 pp 7 – 8, Obviously, you can show up much, much better if you have like video content, because thenpeople can… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:45 p 8, I do think that it's much more important that that's why video works. So well. Yeah, and one ofthe r… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf	**Product Experience**	
Product Knowledge Dissemination 2:21 p 6, had to put out. Theyalso certainly wanted us to talk about a little bit about in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:23 p 6, e this brand does this. So theyjust wanted to talk us to say a little som in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:33 p 7, post an unboxing video, I get tons of DMS. Imean, everyone wants to know, where I got it. What I lik… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:48 p 8, Oh, definitely. I don't think I've even thought about it that way that I'm still promoting it. To be… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:8 p 6, @chanel.beauty no°1 de chanel serum gives the perfect glow and the my face felt sooo smooth. in participant observation (1).pdf		

Sharing product consumption experience 1:32 p 8, Yeah, it does better, much more better when we are involved in this. Yeah. Because we see alot of ph… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 2:31 p 7, metimes do reels. I do like to do unboxing videos on mystories, I don't so much. Don't do it as much… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:32 p 7, question. I think people really like the sensory feeling of like, Oh, I'm opening itwith you. Yeah,… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:15 p 6, don't know what to say! this scent is everything. wanted to try it because of the name. you know che… in participant observation (1).pdf 1:6 p 2, And they reached out to uswith a question if we would like to promote a perfume. I… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 2:37 p 8, I think they wanted people to make it very classy, classic, timeless, yeah, you know very Frenchat t… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:39 p 8, Dior beauty lovers, they have like a, they have three different accounts. So in Diorbeauty lovers, t… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf	Constructing Envy/ Prestige	Performing as Brand Extensions
Exposure Benefits 1:7 p 2, hat's what we did. They said have sentit back to us. We take the photos, and then we had to post it… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 2:40 p 9, the thing? Um, yeah. So it wasmore so about connecting with my, and also just building my brand, m in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:41 p 9, nd then you can post any you can put all the brands that you've worked with, so approachedyou, you c… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:3 p 2, Yeah. Okay. So when I started in 2008, 2009 was my first ever sort of partnership with a brandand th… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:14 p 4, So Dior itself has been in a slightly confused oscillation of influencer marketing because it usedto… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:17 p 4, When they release a brand? Okay, so this is obviously not a factual thing. And this is whathumans se… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Need for high quality content 2:18 p 6, a lot of people. So I believe the brands to see thatand they also look at, you know, overall your fe… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:38 p 8, time. So if they wanted, I'm pretty sure they wanted something. They didn't reallyspecify Honestly,… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:46 p 11, this big editorial. So in the beginning when bloggers used to start, itused to be like a picture in… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:53 p 13, Yeah on Instagram not really. I think I tried to put in like a slightly more aspirational vibe. That… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Illusion of influencer wealth 3:29 p 5, Yes. So what I also do is like, I would also pull samples, if I know I have, like a shooting where I… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Close proximity to audience 1:11 p 4, Our influence is quite bigger than if you have more followers? Because yeah, followers aremore perso… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 2:3 p 2, So micro influencers usually are much closer to their audience. So because they have not solittle, b… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:4 p 2, right away. Whereas somebody that has way more than 10k, they won'treally see your message or they w… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:5 p 2, easier to connect. So when a brandcomes to me and wants me to share a product, my my followers will… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:16 p 5, have to be careful, too. Yeah.For the most part with my audience, it's really just trying to be genu… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:35 p 7, do. I mean, most of the time, I'll reply to my DM. Yeah, I'll always reply if they ever askedabout a… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:6 p 2, ple know of me. So that's why there's also like anunderstanding that you don't actually see reflecte… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:49 p 8, also very personal. So for me, it's themost natural thing to like, answer to questions, and DMS, and… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:51 p 9, is authenticity. And that's why that's why people prefer, like,the thing is, if you have a friend re… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf	Relationship management/ community building	
Consumer market differentiation 4:10 p 2, ale. And I worked with I think, if you think about any brand off thetop of your head I will probably… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:62 p 3, And you're like, Yeah, I have 200, whatever, 50k followers, but my following is,executives, it's CEO… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Platform personal brand differentiation 1:14 p 4, one. So yeah, create your photos, and have a beautiful layout. And you can alsomanage your numbers -… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 4:24 p 6, rch engine. So they search you. And you get that kind oflike nine-nine grid gist of this person. So… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:29 p 7, It's 100% different audience. I would say I got like 200 followers from Tiktok. Because Imentioned T… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:31 p 7, What I believe also is that that each platform needs to have its own value. I wouldn't sayInstagram… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:32 p 8, think that that has to be the value for each influencer because I don't want to be followingsomeone… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:35 p 9, I'd be like, Okay, so this is where she shares her insight,feelings about her anxiety and stuff like… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:55 p 3, the same thing. And they're kind of using us a little bit.The treatment is never really good, becaus… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:63 p 13, ontent, but that's I think that's why Tik Tok was so needed forme because yeah, we're looking for th… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Positive attitude towards followers 2:14 p 5, So I mean, I think it's just really it's just about connecting with the people that are followingyou… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:21 p 5, I mean, influencer, I've had a love hate relationship with for 10 years. In the beginning, youreally… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Brand content flexibility 1:26 p 7, Yeah, we got a brief about like, the explanation about the product. And then what they wantedto see.… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 2:27 p 6, that way. Yeah. So they gave us freedom over it.But it's really sometimes it's up to you. Sometimes… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf	Storytelling	
Integrating campaign goals into visuals 2:11 p 4, and work together. So there'stimes where, and so from Dior specifically, I was approached by an agen… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:30 p 5, So it depends if it's a campaign usually they send like briefing with it, which is basically like ad… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:31 p 5, the it. So for example, I had Christmas- around Christmas time, I had acollaboration with Ferrargamo… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:33 pp 5 – 6, ry spontaneous. Unless, of course, it's like a big campaignwhere you have this briefing, and you kno… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Need for shareable provocative content 2:19 p 6, it. It has to be shareable content. You can't just post like a photo of your face. Itmight not - unl… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf		

Personal brand			
2:2 p 2, started off beca in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:29 p 7, photos. And I like, just like a photo that tells a story. It's visually inspiring,or just, you… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:53 p 9, that's what works best. And also, if youtake like an image influencer, they still have like, their v… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:41 p 10, think what they- So the nuance with influencer marketing is understanding the craft thatpeople go, t… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:2 p 5, #lisforloisBERLINALE in participant observation (1).pdf 5:4 p 9, But in the last couple of year I saw the fashion industry becoming more inclusive of modesty is a ve… in participant observation (1).pdf	Storytelling	Performing as Brand Extensions
Telling brand stories visually			
1:27 p 7, So they gave us a small story of the brand itself and of the perfume. because the first one wegot wa… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 3:7 p 2, influencer. But then again, you also have like thesethings, either you book influencer for numbers b… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:21 pp 3 – 4, bit of the appeal. So I think for luxuryLCLCLbrands, it's very hard to find the right balance betwee… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Audience identification			
2:53 p 12, My lifestyle. Kind of, like my lifestyle is definitely like, especially now because I work incorpora… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:70 p 13, So like I said, Because I started very early, I used to obviously, when I was younger, I couldn'taff… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:13 p 3, roduct. Let's say Dior wants to sell their brand to someone, then you need to reach outto someone wh… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf	Crafting a Public Persona	
Brand-fit priority			
1:29 p 7, a coast blue skies. Yeah. So we had to reallythink through and also see what fitted our brands and in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 3:28 p 5, Dior SADDLEBAG. And I think therewas really a storyline to it, because that's what I still liked abo… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:54 p 3, hole lot of stuff. And people would actually also take the timeto read the whole article. And Instag… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:57 p 10, Um, I can't think of the brand of hair. But yeah, I've definitely had moments where it's like, Oh, I… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:74 p 9, And you also get a feeling of that, you know, that person, like you would know, okay, she wouldwork… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:44 p 11, Because that only clarifies your image of me. in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
The Need to remain accessible			
1:36 p 10, Yeah, like we try not to. I don't want to like, come over as like, yeah, I can do this. I have thisa… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 3:71 p 13, But I still try to mix it with like, if I have like one expensive handbag, I'll still like like anaf… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:34 p 8, She's like, the like the Hallmark like influencer. So but if I - if I got to Instagram and I thought… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Pressure to be perfect			
2:46 p 10, Um, I mean, I think I'm the same online as I am in real life, but I definitely feel a pressure like,… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:50 p 11, what I'm saying. Especially whenthere's like a, you know, big thing like what happened with Russia a… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Unseen labor			
1:46 p 12, Like to getting ready, it's more like 30 minutes. And content is two hours, maybe? Yeah, oneand a ha… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 1:48 p 13, it's, it's not as easy as working in a supermarket or working In the office, because it's you thatpe… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 2:54 p 12, It takes longer than it should? Getting ready? When you know, you have to get ready for to takethe p… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:73 p 13, ne. But all this management would community management, like stilltalking to you and to your followe… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf		Performing authenticity work
Desire to be authentic			
1:17 p 5, Yes, sometimes right? You have to go with the trend. Yeah. Not always your Yeah. Yeah, yourfallback?… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 1:25 p 6, Yeah like here theyre more like minimalist or more like minimum. For all neutrals and thosekind of t… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 1:37 p 10, any our - Yeah, yeah, we don't really likethe Chanel bags, for example. I'm more of a simple person… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 1:38 p 10, it's really important to show which which kind of posts are sponsored. For us there's a lot ofposts… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 1:39 p 10, ome to me. I have a lot of sponsored content and I wear Hermes and allthose kind of things, but at o… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 1:44 pp 11 – 12, Yeah, especially especially. So like, we were like, We must make content. And like, last year, werea… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 2:15 p 5, more as like friends. Yeah. And I dotake it as a responsibility, you know, because I, a lot of peopl… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:42 p 9, Okay, so yeah, canceled culture is a thing. Yeah. And it's something that we shouldn't bemindful of… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:47 p 10, rson. Also, just to be authentic and be myself and not try to be somebodyelse. But there's defi… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:50 p 9, I think the most important thing in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:55 p 9, Yeah, definitely. I think the easiest way to choose my partners is like, what I pay money to buythis… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:56 p 10, So definitely, I, I always tried to be very honest about the things because that's what peoplevalue… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:59 p 11, it's Yeah, so I always try to, like I don't always try. It's important for me, because I alwayswant… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 3:60 p 11, who working with those brands, who was using their own product to their own money to buythe brand, b… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:28 p 7, Yeah, it was just like, it was the most rewarding thing ever. Yeah, I have fun with it. And I seeIns… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:48 p 3, r marketing that I'v in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf		
Differentiation of public and private persona			
1:30 p 8, We mainly use it for contests. I think we don't really do get ready when mes or goes shoppingwith me… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 1:34 p 9, Just to be more approachable? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So Yeah. Sometimes we just want to outfit tospeak mo… in Elvira and Safira_otter_ai.pdf 3:64 p 12, I would say it's very easygoing. Because I also I don't really post a lot of like, personal thi… in Lois Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:33 p 8, In a very subtle way as well, because I think it's, yeah, you know how we consume differently.We don… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf 4:57 p 14, Ah, I would say definitely have a different personality online. Okay, offline. I'm like a very, like… in Shini Interview_otter_ai.pdf	Constructing a Parasocial Relationship	
Planned practice to boost engagement			
2:57 p 12, under pay you. Yeah, we take that into account, the wholegetting ready process. And even like, let's… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 5:3 p 8, what i wore today fav part of it? in participant observation (1).pdf 5:10 p 6, influencer replies to most comments in participant observation (1).pdf		
Voluntary self-disclosure			
2:48 p 11, o be honest as well, if I'm not doing well, I'll tell them a story or something I haven't been doing… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf 2:49 p 11, Yeah, so I do though, sometimes, like, especially the q&a is people ask sometimes weird personal ques… in Jael Interview_otter_ai.pdf		