DIGITAL FASHION COMMUNICATION: CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE CAMPAIGNS AND INFLUENCER IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the digital environment in shaping communication between fashion brands and consumers, with a particular focus on digital marketing campaigns and influencer impact. The study explores respondents' attitudes toward fashion brands' digital presence, the frequency and patterns of following brand activities on digital platforms, and the perceived effectiveness of online campaigns. Special attention is given to the role of influencers in shaping consumer attitudes, purchase decisions, and overall behavior. The findings indicate that digital platforms represent a crucial communication channel for fashion brands, while influencer marketing significantly contributes to consumer engagement and trust. The paper highlights key trends relevant for both academic research and marketing practice in the fashion industry.

Keywords: Digital marketing communication, Fashion brands, Influencer marketing, Consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed fashion consumption patterns, with online channels becoming an increasingly important part of the consumer decision-making process. According to statistical data, global revenue in the fashion e-commerce market continues to grow, driven by increased smartphone adoption, social media influence, and changing consumer preferences toward convenient digital shopping experiences [1]. Furthermore, social media platforms have become critical sources of fashion inspiration and product discovery, with a substantial proportion of consumers reporting that they use social networks to explore trends, evaluate brands, and inform purchase decisions [2]. This high level of connectivity has made digital marketing campaigns central to brand visibility, allowing fashion

companies to deliver personalized, cost-effective, and timely messaging [3]. As a growing share of consumer touchpoints move online, understanding how audiences perceive and respond to these digital communication strategies has become essential for both academic inquiry and industry practice in various fields [4], [5].

Within this evolving digital landscape, social media influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries between fashion brands and consumers, particularly on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube [6]. These influencers function as contemporary opinion leaders who shape trends, build brand attitudes, and guide purchasing decisions [7]. Research suggests that consumer trust in an influencer's credibility, expertise, and authenticity strongly affects how favorably a brand or campaign is perceived [8]. Similarly, the characteristics of digital influencers, including relatability, perceived expertise, and content usefulness, have been shown to meaningfully influence purchase intention toward fashion products [9]. Despite this expanding body of research, questions remain about how consumers process and evaluate online campaigns compared to traditional advertising, and about the specific mechanisms through which influencer-driven content translates into brand engagement and purchase behavior [10].

This growing reliance on influencer-mediated communication raises important questions about consumer trust, authenticity, and the broader effectiveness of digital fashion campaigns. While earlier studies established the general importance of digital channels and social media influencers in shaping public perception [11], more recent research has examined how factors such as perceived credibility and trustworthiness of digital sources and online engagement interact to shape consumer attitudes toward fashion brands specifically [12], [13], [14]. However, a systematic understanding of how these dynamics combine digital campaign design, influencer credibility, and consumer perception, within the fashion sector in developing countries remains limited. This paper therefore aims to examine consumer perceptions of digital fashion communication, with particular attention to how online campaigns and influencer marketing jointly shape brand attitudes and purchasing behavior in the contemporary digital marketplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital fashion communication and consumer engagement

The transformation of the fashion industry through digital technologies has fundamentally changed the way brands communicate with consumers, build relationships, and influence purchasing decisions [15]. Unlike traditional fashion communication, which relied predominantly on mass media, fashion shows, print advertising, and celebrity endorsements, contemporary digital fashion communication is characterized by continuous interaction, personalized content, and multi-directional communication across digital platforms. Social media networks, brand websites, mobile applications, and influencer-generated content have become essential components of fashion brands' communication strategies, enabling companies to engage consumers throughout the entire customer journey, from awareness and information search to purchase and post-purchase evaluation [16].

Research on digital fashion communication draws primarily on several theoretical perspectives that explain how consumers process, evaluate, and respond to digital brand messages. One of the most influential frameworks is source credibility theory, originally developed by Ohanian [17], which suggests that the effectiveness of persuasive communication depends largely on three perceived characteristics of the communicator: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Within the context of fashion marketing, this framework has been widely applied to explain why consumers respond differently to recommendations from influencers, celebrities, and other digital opinion leaders [18], [19]. Influencers who are perceived as knowledgeable about fashion trends, authentic in their communication style, and personally trustworthy are more likely to shape consumers' attitudes toward brands and products.

A complementary perspective is provided by parasocial interaction theory, which explains the development of perceived interpersonal relationships between audiences and media personalities despite the absence of direct reciprocal interaction. In digital environments, influencers frequently

share personal experiences, lifestyle content, and everyday activities, creating a sense of familiarity and closeness among followers. This perceived relationship can strengthen the persuasive power of influencer recommendations, as consumers may interpret such recommendations as advice from a trusted social connection rather than as conventional advertising content [20], [21], [22]. In the fashion context, where identity expression, lifestyle association, and symbolic meanings play an important role in consumption, parasocial relationships can significantly contribute to consumers' emotional attachment to brands promoted by influencers.

Social media platforms and influencer-based fashion communication

Social media platforms represent one of the most influential channels through which fashion brands communicate with contemporary consumers. Platforms characterized by visual content, such as Instagram and TikTok, have become particularly relevant for fashion marketing because they allow brands and influencers to present products through storytelling, lifestyle imagery, short-form videos, and interactive formats [23], [24], [25]. Through these platforms, consumers are no longer passive recipients of promotional messages but active participants who can comment, share, review, and co-create brand-related content.

As influencer marketing has become increasingly integrated into fashion communication strategies, researchers have devoted growing attention to the challenge of maintaining authenticity in commercial collaborations. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing relies heavily on the perception that recommendations represent genuine opinions and personal experiences. However, the increasing commercialization of influencer activities creates potential tension between commercial objectives and audience expectations of authenticity [26]. A substantial body of research has examined how influencer characteristics affect the effectiveness of digital fashion campaigns. For example, De Veirman et al. [8] demonstrated that a larger follower base does not necessarily guarantee greater advertising effectiveness, as follower numbers interact with other factors, including perceived product fit and audience perceptions of authenticity. Consequently, research has increasingly focused on micro- and nano-influencers, who often have smaller but more engaged communities. Their perceived accessibility and relatability may enhance trust and strengthen consumers' willingness to consider their recommendations [27], [28].

This issue is particularly relevant in fashion marketing, where purchasing decisions are frequently influenced by symbolic and emotional factors rather than purely functional product attributes. While macro-influencers may provide greater visibility and brand awareness, smaller influencers may generate stronger engagement due to their perceived similarity with followers. However, the relationship between reach and credibility remains complex. Some studies indicate that expertise and perceived authority are particularly important in higher-involvement purchase situations, whereas relatability and emotional connection may have stronger effects on everyday fashion consumption decisions [29], [30], [31].

Audrezet et al. [26] argue that influencers continuously negotiate between self-brand construction and maintaining audience trust, particularly as sponsored partnerships become more visible. The disclosure of paid collaborations may increase transparency but can also reduce perceived spontaneity if consumers interpret the content as primarily motivated by financial incentives. Similarly, research examining Instagram-based endorsements indicates that audiences are highly sensitive to authenticity signals and may respond negatively when influencer content appears excessively promotional or inconsistent with the influencer's established identity [32].

These findings expand traditional credibility-based approaches by suggesting that trust should not be understood as a stable characteristic of influencers. Instead, trust represents a dynamic consumer evaluation that changes depending on the context of the campaign, perceived alignment between influencer and brand, transparency of communication, and the consistency of the influencer's online identity. In the fashion industry, where brand image and personal identity are closely interconnected, authenticity represents a particularly important determinant of communication effectiveness.

Perceived risk and consumer decision-making in digital fashion environments

Another important research stream examines the role of perceived risk in consumers' responses to digital fashion communication. Online fashion purchases involve uncertainty related to product quality, fit, appearance, and brand reliability [33], [34]. Therefore, digital communication strategies that reduce uncertainty and increase consumer confidence may significantly influence purchase intentions.

Cabeza-Ramírez et al. [35] found that uncertainty associated with influencer recommendations may reduce consumers' willingness to purchase unless supported by transparent and credible communication. This supports the argument that trust operates as a risk-reduction mechanism: when consumers perceive influencers as reliable sources of information, the perceived psychological and functional risks associated with online purchasing are reduced ([36], [37]).

Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that consumer responses cannot be explained solely by influencer credibility. Some research indicates that perceived behavioral control and consumers' own ability to evaluate digital information may represent equally important determinants of attitudes toward influencer-generated content. In other words, consumers do not simply accept recommendations based on the characteristics of the communicator; they also assess their own knowledge, confidence, and ability to make independent purchasing decisions ([14], [30]). This perspective highlights the active role of consumers in interpreting and evaluating digital fashion communication.

Consumer differences in responses to digital fashion communication

Research also indicates that the effectiveness of digital fashion communication varies across consumer segments. Demographic characteristics, particularly age and income, influence how consumers perceive and respond to online campaigns and influencer recommendations. Cabeza-Ramírez et al. [38] found differences between Generation X and Millennials regarding trust formation and product involvement, suggesting that consumers from different generations apply different criteria when evaluating digital marketing messages.

Similarly, previous studies indicate that socioeconomic characteristics, including income level, influence how consumers respond to digital marketing strategies. Higher-income consumers tend to demonstrate greater interest in symbolic, experiential, and prestige-oriented brand communication, including luxury fashion content, where brand image and exclusivity represent important sources of value [39], [40], [41]. In contrast, consumers with lower purchasing power are generally more sensitive to price-related benefits and promotional incentives, making discounts, special offers, and value-oriented messages more influential in purchase decisions. These findings emphasize the importance of segmentation and suggest that digital fashion communication strategies should be adapted to specific consumer profiles rather than developed according to a universal approach.

Despite extensive research on influencer marketing, several gaps remain. Existing studies frequently examine isolated elements of digital communication, such as influencer credibility or purchase intention, while fewer studies adopt a broader perspective that integrates consumers' perceptions of online campaigns, social media engagement, influencer influence, brand responsiveness, and digital purchasing behavior. Furthermore, research focusing on emerging markets and diverse consumer groups remains relatively limited. Therefore, examining how consumers perceive different dimensions of digital fashion communication provides valuable insights into the evolving relationship between fashion brands and consumers in digital environments.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Methodology

The survey was conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in 2025 and distributed online via e-mail and social media platforms. Respondents were recruited using convenience sampling, with participation being voluntary and anonymous. The research employed a structured questionnaire

consisting of four sections and including single-choice and Likert-scale questions designed to measure respondents' engagement with digital fashion communication, perceptions of digital marketing campaigns, interactions with fashion brand content on social media, and the perceived influence of social media influencers on purchasing decisions and brand attitudes.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to provide a comprehensive overview of the observed response patterns. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency were employed to summarize respondents' characteristics and their attitudes toward different aspects of digital fashion communication. This approach enabled the identification of prevailing trends and consumer preferences while providing insight into the role of digital communication in shaping perceptions of fashion brands.

Emphasis was placed on examining respondents' perceptions of digital marketing campaigns, the frequency and way they follow fashion brands across digital platforms, and the influence of social media influencers on consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions, and decision-making processes. The analysis also explored the extent to which digital communication channels contribute to consumer engagement and brand perception within the contemporary fashion industry.

Sample structure

A total of 100 respondents participated in the study, of whom 63% were female and 37% were male. Regarding the age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents (38%) belonged to the 31-40 age group, followed by those aged 41-50, who accounted for 29% of the sample. Respondents aged 18-30 represented 20% of the sample, while participants older than 50 years accounted for the remaining 13%.

In terms of educational attainment, the largest share of respondents (37%) had completed secondary education. Furthermore, 29% held a bachelor's degree, 22% had completed college-level or vocational higher education, and 12% possessed a master's or doctoral degree.

With respect to employment status, 44% of respondents were employed, while 42% were students. The remaining respondents consisted primarily of unemployed individuals and retirees, each representing 7% of the sample.

RESULTS

Consumers' use of digital channels for fashion information and shopping

The findings indicate a strong consumer orientation toward digital channels when searching for information about fashion products and making purchase decisions. A substantial majority of respondents (77%) completely agreed that they increasingly rely on digital methods when purchasing fashion products, while an additional 18% agreed. Only 5% expressed a neutral opinion, and none disagreed with the statement. These findings suggest that digital channels have become the primary environment through which consumers interact with fashion brands.

Similarly, respondents overwhelmingly reported using digital communication channels when seeking information about fashion products. As many as 82% completely agreed with this statement, while 10% somewhat agreed. Only 6% expressed a neutral opinion, and 2% somewhat disagreed. These results further confirm the dominant role of digital communication in consumers' information search behavior.

Among the available digital channels, social media emerged as the most frequently used source of fashion-related information. Respondents unanimously agreed that social networking platforms represent their primary source of information when exploring fashion products. This finding highlights the central role of social media in contemporary fashion communication and supports previous research emphasizing the growing importance of visually oriented platforms in consumer-brand interactions.

By contrast, fashion brand websites were found to play a secondary role. While 40% of respondents agreed that they use official brand websites when searching for information (38% somewhat agreed and 2% completely agreed), 30% remained neutral. Moreover, 30% reported

limited reliance on brand websites, with 10% somewhat disagreeing and 20% completely disagreeing that websites represent their primary source of information. These findings suggest that although official websites continue to serve as an important information source, consumers are considerably more inclined to obtain fashion-related content through social media platforms.

Overall, the results demonstrate that digital marketing communication has become an integral component of consumers' interactions with fashion brands. Social media platforms, particularly visually oriented networks such as Instagram and TikTok, appear to dominate consumers' information-seeking behavior, whereas official brand websites serve a complementary role in the digital customer journey.

The influence of fashion influencers on consumer decision-making

The second part of the analysis examined the extent to which fashion influencers affect consumers' attitudes and purchasing behavior. One-third of respondents (33%) completely agreed that they enjoy purchasing fashion brands recommended by influencers, indicating a considerable level of influencer impact. However, respondents' opinions were relatively divided. While 22% somewhat agreed with the statement, 20% expressed a neutral opinion. Conversely, 20% somewhat disagreed, and 5% completely disagreed, suggesting that influencer recommendations are persuasive for a substantial segment of consumers but are not universally accepted.

Despite the influence of recommendations on purchase intentions, respondents demonstrated relatively low levels of direct interaction with influencers. A majority (60%) indicated that they do not frequently ask influencers for advice or additional information about fashion brands they intend to purchase. Twenty percent expressed a neutral opinion, while only 15% completely agreed that they regularly contact influencers regarding their experiences with fashion brands. An additional 5% somewhat disagreed with the statement.

These findings indicate that although influencers play an important role in shaping consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions, their influence is primarily passive. Consumers are more likely to observe influencer-generated content and rely on recommendations than to actively engage in two-way communication by requesting personalized advice. This suggests that influencers primarily function as opinion leaders and content creators whose recommendations contribute to brand awareness and purchase consideration rather than serving as direct advisors during the purchase decision process.

The findings indicate that negative influencer endorsements have a particularly strong effect on consumers' purchase intentions. As many as 82% of respondents completely agreed that they would avoid purchasing a fashion product if an influencer expressed a negative opinion about the brand. An additional 10% somewhat agreed with the statement, while 6% remained neutral and only 2% somewhat disagreed. These results suggest that negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) disseminated through influencers may have a stronger influence on consumer decision-making than positive recommendations.

Respondents also demonstrated a high level of engagement with influencer-generated promotional activities. Specifically, 90% reported that they frequently participate in contests and giveaways organized by influencers on social media in collaboration with fashion brands, whereas only 10% indicated that they do not engage in such activities. This finding reflects consumers' willingness to interact with branded content when it incorporates entertaining or rewarding elements.

Consumer preferences for digital brand communication

The results further explored consumers' preferences regarding different forms of digital communication employed by fashion brands. Email marketing appears to have a relatively limited influence on respondents. Only 25% completely agreed that they appreciate receiving promotional offers from fashion brands via email, whereas the majority (70%) expressed a neutral opinion and 5% completely disagreed. These findings indicate that email remains a supplementary communication channel rather than consumers' preferred means of interacting with fashion brands.

In contrast, mobile applications play a much more prominent role in consumers' shopping behavior. An overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) reported having mobile applications of their preferred fashion brands installed on their smartphones and using them to purchase products. Only 5% indicated otherwise (3% completely disagreed and 2% somewhat disagreed). This finding highlights the increasing importance of mobile commerce and dedicated brand applications in the digital fashion ecosystem.

Respondents also reported a high level of engagement with user-generated content. Nearly all participants (99%) indicated that they frequently read comments and opinions about fashion brands in the digital environment, demonstrating the importance of online consumer reviews and peer-generated content in shaping brand perceptions and purchase decisions.

The influence of brands' digital presence was also examined. When asked whether the absence of an active online marketing campaign discourages them from purchasing a fashion brand, respondents expressed relatively mixed opinions. While 20% completely agreed and 10% somewhat agreed that a lack of digital communication reduces their likelihood of purchasing a brand, the majority (60%) reported a neutral attitude. Only 10% disagreed with the statement (5% somewhat disagreed and 5% completely disagreed). These findings suggest that although digital visibility contributes to brand evaluation, it is not the sole determinant of consumers' purchasing decisions. Furthermore, all respondents agreed that they particularly appreciate fashion brands that respond promptly to customer inquiries submitted through digital communication channels. This unanimous response underscores the importance of responsiveness and two-way communication in establishing positive consumer-brand relationships within the digital environment.

Finally, respondents overwhelmingly recognized the importance of digital marketing campaigns in stimulating purchasing behavior. Most participants agreed that an active and well-designed digital campaign can positively influence consumers' purchase intentions. Collectively, the findings suggest that online shopping has become an integral part of contemporary consumer behavior. Respondents emphasized the convenience, speed, and broader product assortment available through online channels compared with traditional brick-and-mortar stores, reinforcing the strategic importance of digital communication in the fashion industry.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide further evidence of the increasingly central role of digital communication in consumers' interactions with fashion brands. The overwhelming majority of respondents reported relying on digital channels when searching for fashion information and making purchasing decisions, while social media emerged as the primary source of fashion-related information. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the transformation of fashion communication through digital technologies and the growing importance of social media throughout the consumer decision-making process [15], [16], [24], [25]. The particularly strong role of social media observed in this study also supports the view that visually oriented platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have become important spaces for fashion discovery, brand evaluation, and consumer engagement [42], [43]. At the same time, the relatively limited reliance on official brand websites suggests that consumers increasingly encounter and evaluate fashion brands through social media and user-generated content, rather than relying exclusively on brand-controlled communication. This observation is consistent with previous research showing that both firm-created and user-generated social media content can shape fashion consumers' brand perceptions and purchase intentions [44], [48].

The results concerning influencer marketing largely support previous research on the persuasive role of digital opinion leaders, while also indicating that influencer influence is not uniform across consumers. More than half of respondents agreed that they enjoy purchasing fashion brands recommended by influencers, which is consistent with studies demonstrating the relationship between influencer characteristics, credibility, trust, and purchase intention [6], [7], [9], [12]. However, the relatively high proportion of neutral and negative responses indicates that influencer recommendations do not automatically translate into consumer acceptance. This finding is in line with De Veirman et al. [8], who argue that influencer reach alone does not guarantee

advertising effectiveness, and with more recent research emphasizing the importance of relatability, expertise, authenticity, and consumer involvement [29], [30], [31]. The finding that most respondents do not actively contact influencers for additional information further suggests that influencer communication operates primarily through exposure to content and recommendations rather than through direct interpersonal interaction. Thus, influencers appear to function predominantly as opinion leaders whose content contributes to awareness, evaluation, and purchase consideration.

One of the most notable findings is the substantially stronger effect of negative influencer communication. The fact that 82% of respondents completely agreed that they would avoid purchasing a fashion product if an influencer expressed a negative opinion about the brand suggests that negative electronic word-of-mouth may be particularly consequential in the fashion context. This result complements previous research showing that trust and credibility are central to the effectiveness of influencer communication [7], [12], while also supporting research indicating that perceived risk can substantially affect consumers' responses to influencer recommendations [35]. When an influencer is perceived as a credible source, negative information may increase consumers' perceptions of potential product or brand risk and consequently discourage purchase. This finding also reinforces literature's emphasis on authenticity: when consumers perceive influencers as credible and relatable, their evaluations, whether positive or negative, may carry greater persuasive weight [26], [32].

The findings regarding consumer engagement further extend the literature by demonstrating that consumers respond particularly strongly to interactive and user-generated forms of digital communication. The high participation rate in influencer contests and giveaways and the fact that almost all respondents reported reading online comments and opinions about fashion brands indicate that consumers actively use peer-generated content when evaluating brands. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that social media has transformed consumers from passive recipients of promotional messages into active participants in brand communication [24], [25]. Similarly, the unanimous preference for prompt responses to customer inquiries highlights the importance of responsiveness and two-way communication. This finding supports the broader understanding of digital communication as a relational rather than exclusively promotional activity.

Finally, the relatively limited influence of email marketing and the very high use of mobile fashion applications indicate that consumers' preferred communication channels are increasingly shaped by convenience, immediacy, and integration with everyday digital practices. Interestingly, although respondents recognized the importance of active digital campaigns, the majority remained neutral regarding whether the absence of such campaigns would directly discourage them from purchasing a brand. This suggests that digital visibility is important for brand awareness and evaluation [46], [47], [48] but should not be interpreted as the sole determinant of purchase behavior. Overall, the findings support the existing literature while adding empirical evidence from consumers in Serbia, an emerging market context that remains comparatively underrepresented in research on digital fashion communication. The study therefore contributes by demonstrating that effective digital fashion communication depends not only on visibility, but also on credibility, authenticity, interaction, responsiveness, and consumer-generated information.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm the growing importance of digital environments in shaping consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing behavior in the fashion industry. The results indicate that digital channels have become a dominant source of information and interaction between consumers and fashion brands, with majority of respondents strongly agreeing that they increasingly rely on digital methods when searching for and purchasing fashion products. Furthermore, the findings highlight the significant role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process, particularly in relation to brand evaluation. The fact that most respondents stated that they would avoid purchasing a fashion product if an influencer expressed a negative opinion

about the brand demonstrates the persuasive power of digital opinion leaders and the relevance of electronic word-of-mouth in contemporary fashion communication.

Despite providing valuable insights into consumer responses to digital fashion communication, this study has several limitations, primarily related to the sample size, sampling approach, and the use of descriptive statistical analysis, which limits the possibility of establishing causal relationships. Nevertheless, the results offer important practical implications for fashion brands by emphasizing the need to develop authentic, interactive, and consumer-oriented digital communication strategies. Effective use of social media platforms, influencer collaborations, and personalized digital content can contribute to stronger consumer engagement, improved brand perception, and the development of long-term relationships between fashion brands and their audiences. Future research should further explore these relationships using larger samples and advanced analytical methods to better understand the factors that determine the effectiveness of digital fashion communication.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest to declare in relation to the research presented in this paper.

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