ENGAGEMENT OF MICRO-INFLUENCERS IN THE FIELD OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION

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Abstract

The presented article deals with the issue of micro-influencers on social networks, focusing on micro-influencers in the field of sustainable fashion. In the theoretical part, we deal with social networks, influencer marketing, a closer definition of a micro-influencer and the sustainable fashion industry. With the help of a questionnaire survey, we are trying to find out their engagement in this sector from the point of view of users of social networks. We analyse the obtained data in more detail in several sections. In order to fulfil this goal of the work, we set several research questions, which we answer at the end of the work and compare them with other researches.

Key words: engagement, micro-influencer, on-line questionnaire, social networks, sustainable fashion

Introduction

In this study, we delve into the dynamic world of micro-influencers and their pivotal role within the realm of sustainable fashion. We have chosen this topic due to its timely significance and the potential for uncovering innovative insights, as our research environment has yet to witness studies of a similar orientation. Our research journey comprises an extensive literature review, leading to the logical formulation of research questions and the identification of our research problem. Additionally, we will expound upon our chosen research methodology—an online survey conducted via a questionnaire, an increasingly popular and expedient approach. We will also provide insights into our research framework and proceed to analyze the data we have meticulously collected.

Review of the Literature

In recent years, sustainability has emerged as an increasingly prominent concern. Beyond its application to personal consumption, including aspects like sustainable food practices and waste reduction, sustainability has also garnered significant attention in the corporate sector. Moreover, there is a growing awareness among the public regarding the significance of sustainability within the realm of fashion and clothing. Sustainable fashion manifests itself in diverse ways, encompassing the realm of second-hand apparel and garments crafted with a mindful approach to economic, ecological, and so-

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cial sustainability during their production.

We can say that social networks are nowadays an important part of the personal, work and actually everyday life of an individual. Social networks are tools for building virtual communities and networks for groups or individuals with similar interests, education, lifestyle, beliefs and activities (Bolotaeva, Cata, 2011). The history of social networks extends far into antiquity, envisioning them as intricate webs of human connections. As Kerpen (2011) posits, the origins of social networks can be traced back to the earliest recorded individuals on Earth, namely, Adam and Eve. Nevertheless, as technology has evolved over time, social networks have undergone a profound transformation. Conventional face-to-face communication has yielded ground to the digital realm of online social networks. Their fundamental purpose now revolves around establishing and nurturing virtual relationships among the users of a particular social network (Bednář, 2011). The primary characteristic of social networks lies in the user-driven creation of content. Each user possesses a dedicated space within the platform to publish content that aligns with their personal interests and beliefs. The form and nature of this content are inherently shaped by the specific social network in question. While social networks are constructed upon a diverse range of communication modalities, sharing remains the cornerstone. It is important to note that this act of sharing is inherently public, effectively transforming the user into both a content creator and a disseminator (Kopecký 2013, Bednář, 2011). The distinctiveness of social networks extends beyond mere interpersonal communication; it primarily revolves around the potential for self-expression and visibility. This unique feature has the potential to foster connections that might otherwise never have materialized (Haythornthwaite, 2011). Multimedia elements such as audio-visual, imagery, and sound content play pivotal roles, serving as potent vehicles for the dissemination of fresh ideas among users. These dynamics have paved the way for the emergence of novel digital spaces known as multimedia social networks. These platforms serve as the foundation for various contemporary phenomena, including, but not limited to, viral marketing and influencer marketing, which have gained immense popularity in today's interconnected world (Kaya - Alhajj, 2019).

Companies today recognize that social networks represent one of the most formidable avenues for establishing direct connections with prospective customers. These platforms facilitate the cultivation of profound relationships with the public by enabling direct communication, fostering trust, and serving as powerful tools for presenting ideas, attitudes, or products within the online sphere. The relentless market saturation compels businesses and content creators active on social networks to embrace novel strategies at an unprecedented pace. In the contemporary landscape, the absence of a substantial online presence is simply untenable (Sajid, 2016).

Turning our focus to social networks within the context of marketing, experts and enthusiasts concur that Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook stand out as the paramount and most efficacious platforms for 2021. They emphasize that, for both individuals and companies seeking to bolster their promotional and public relations endeavors, a judicious selection of the right tools is instrumental in achieving marketing success (Adobe, 2021).

Traack (in Sutherland, 2020) perceives influence in the case of an influencer as a complex of three main factors, which are reach, relevance and resonance.

1. Reach defines the size of the audience to which a given influencer can present their content.

2. Relevance expresses the applicability and relevance of the content to the target audience.

3. Resonance is what creates impact. It must be understood that the audience is not only interested in the content, what really resonates with them is the connection on an intellectual, emotional and psychological level.

From a fashion marketing perspective, influencers can be perceived as individuals possessing the unique capacity to exert a transformative influence on the consumer purchasing decisions of others. This influence stems from their established position, knowledge, authority, or the profound rapport they share with their audience. Furthermore, influencers often cultivate and actively engage within their own dedicated communities, as highlighted by (Schlosserová, Pániková, 2022). It is essential to recognize that these individuals extend beyond mere marketing instruments; rather, they manifest as invaluable social assets that brands can collaborate with to achieve their marketing objectives.

Influencers represent individuals who have meticulously constructed their personal brand and reputation through their proficiency, convictions, or expertise in a particular domain. Over time, they methodically foster a devoted following by disseminating their ideas, thereby garnering significant attention and trust from their audience, as elucidated by Geyser (2021). In essence, an influencer can be any individual capable of effecting behavioral changes in others through their actions. These influencers may encompass public figures, brands, or individuals who have ascended to fame owing to their captivating presentation and dissemination of substantive content across various social media platforms. In the digital realm, they may also be identified as opinion leaders, influencers, recommenders, or opinion makers.

It is paramount to acknowledge that influencer marketing stands as one of the predominant marketing strategies of contemporary times. Traditional advertising approaches that primarily target the younger demographic have proven to be notably ineffective. Consequently, enterprises have begun to explore innovative means of forging closer connections with their target audience. Recommenders within the online sphere of social networks emerge as a potent and novel tool for kindling the interest of the younger generation in advertising messages and advertising itself, as discussed by Deges (2018).

Micro-influencers are significantly different from macro or mega-influencers, who got their influencer status through traditional media. They are not celebrities or publicly known people from television. These are people who have earned their influencer status on the social network with their charm, personality, hobbies, knowledge, and something new they have been able to offer society. So we can say that they arose against the background of social media (Küçük, 2020).

This type of the influencer has gained a lot of attention in recent years. Many companies have switched from using influencers with more than 50,000 followers to personalities with a smaller community of followers. Lina et al. (in Panetto et al., 2018) stated that these influencers hold one of the most important roles in social networks in terms of company marketing. They also add that a number of recent studies focused on this area have shown that this type of an influencer has a much higher level of engagement and interaction from followers compared to big referrals. And one of the main reasons is deeper relationships between the influencer and the audience.

Experts have realized that influencer marketing does not necessarily need a big influencer. It is more effective to focus on smaller recommenders, who are more attractive to brands and customers (Trzcielinski et al., 2021) also because they give the brand access to a small group of people with the same specific focus and interests (Ehlers, 2021). Micro-influencers are most often active in the fashion sphere, cosmetics industry, sports, or they present lifestyle and excel in deep relationships with their audience. At the same time, the use of these recommenders in brand advertising campaigns shows 60% more interest than the average campaign on social media (Trzcielinski et al., 2021).

While Ehlers (2021) sees the following as benefits when using a micro-influencer by a brand:

• price: since this type of a recommender does not have such a large community of followers, the price is significantly lower compared to larger influencers, and there is also a greater probability of repeated cooperation

- authenticity and reach: authenticity is a trait that the public is looking for. By publishing authentic content, the influencer appears credible when presenting a certain product, service or brand with which he is identified and creates the audience's interest

- multiple use: by making their cost per job lower, a brand can use multiple referrers for its promotion at the same time, allowing it to target multiple communities of individuals

- targeting: as micro-influencers focus mainly on one area of interest, they have an audience that has the same interests and preferences as themselves. This fact allows the brand precise targeting, which is only possible with a small community of followers (Ehlers, 2021).

Sustainable fashion

In recent years, the adoption of a sustainable lifestyle has emerged as a prominent cultural trend. According to Sustainablejungle (2021), this lifestyle embodies a profound philosophy centered on minimizing personal and societal impacts on the environment through affirmative changes that exert a constructive influence against climate change and other detrimental environmental factors. As Chiras (1995) elucidates, sustainability transcends the ecological realm, encompassing economic and social dimensions, necessitating a judicious approach to resource utilization and process management. This all-encompassing definition underscores our responsibility to ensure that our present actions and decisions do not imperil future generations or the delicate balance of our environment.

The realm of sustainable fashion, also known as slow fashion, has been progressively gaining momentum due to its enduring longevity, sustainable manufacturing practices, unique creations, superior craftsmanship, ethical production conditions, and positive environmental footprint. Slow fashion places great emphasis on ethical considerations, ensuring optimal production conditions while prioritizing quality over quantity. It is firmly rooted in principles of recycling, modernization, the utilization of traditional production techniques, and the utilization of renewable natural resources. Notably, sustainable fashion extends beyond the creation of new garments; it encompasses the realm of second-hand clothing and the art of upcycling, a creative practice currently embraced by numerous fashion designers (Gordon & Hill, 2014).

Yet, the concept of sustainable fashion has not always been readily embraced by the average consumer, often perceived as being constrained by limited style options, higher price points, or inconvenience in the shopping experience. In their illuminating work, Legere and Kang (2020) portray sustainable fashion as a movement that not only prioritizes the materials used in clothing but also emphasizes the deceleration of production and consumption, fostering sustainable values throughout the entire fashion ecosystem.

According to Fletcher (2007, 2015), the philosophy of sustainable fashion is built on the following pillars:

- Local production
- Preservation of the ecosystem
- Traditional values
- Sustainability
- Diversity of resources
- Responsible approach

The UN Alliance (2021) dealing with sustainable fashion adds that slow fashion also takes care of improving the working and economic conditions of workers, or solves environmental issues including reducing waste and water pollution in the fashion sector.

This fashion is not about responding to trends, it is about changing the mindset of consumers, which includes an interest in the origin of clothes and buying timeless pieces of clothing that will last the consumer for a long time (Pookulangara - Shephard, 2013).

In the nascent stages of community development within the realm of sustainable fashion, four pivotal cohorts of stakeholders converged on social platforms. These groups encompassed brands, notable public figures, conscientious consumers, and aspiring fashion creators with a vested interest in sustainability, who later ascended to influential roles in this domain (Ataman, 2021). Champions of sustainable fashion not only serve as conduits to thrust issues related to sustainability in fashion into the limelight but also aspire to catalyze tangible change through their endeavors. Their mission extends beyond mere information dissemination; instead, they ardently seek to foster transformative shifts. These advocates do not merely extol the virtues of the slow fashion movement; rather, they resolutely shed light on the detrimental facets of fast fashion, thereby awakening societal awareness (Minney, 2016).

Ataman (2021) talks about influencers in the sphere of sustainable fashion as recommenders who present their life philosophy to the public. Against the background of social networks, these recommenders can communicate sustainable fashion in 3 ways.

1. Photographs of sustainable outfits
2. By presenting the wardrobe with an emphasis on the sustainability of the pieces
3. Educational contributions

We consider this method of communication to be effective, which is also confirmed by the research of Riyant and Nurfadil (2020), who say that in the case of fashion, publishing photographic or audio-visual content is what attracts the public's attention most effectively, even in the case of promoting products. So, recommenders should encourage consumers to change their fashion consumption, by reducing the purchase of clothing and focusing on sustainable pieces when purchasing. It is important not to act forced, as this communication could ultimately create negative associations with sustainable fashion in the consumer and be counterproductive. When communicating this issue, influencers should act authentically, refer to the functionality and exclusivity of sustainable fashion (Jung – Jin, 2016).

Puspita and Chae (2021) found that due to the higher price of sustainable clothing, consumers tend to seek opinions from public figures who are social media influencers before making a purchase decision. These influencers are proven to positively influence consumer behavioral intentions and act as trendsetters. By showing consumers a positive experience with sustainable clothing shopping, they arouse their interest, which actually slows down shopping in fast fashion chains. And this also in the case of the presentation of sustainable clothing brands and second-hand shopping (Abbes et al. 2020).

When discussing sustainable fashion, it is common for authors to refer to the 3R concept. This concept forms the foundation of the slow fashion philosophy, which emphasizes mindful consumer practices. The 3R concept consists of three key pillars:

1. Reduce: The primary objective here is to curb impulsive clothing purchases. Decision-making regarding purchases should be premeditated, considering their long-term impact.

2. Reuse: Another crucial aspect involves reevaluating one's wardrobe. Discarded clothing items can be either passed on to new owners or deposited into collection containers for further use.

3. Recycle: Lastly, recycling involves repurposing old clothing items for alternative uses or donating them to organizations that specialize in recycling textiles (Pintu et al., 2020).

Subsequently, the 3R concept evolved with the addition of two supplementary elements, Repair and Rewear, although these may vary depending on the author. Repair per-

tains to mending damaged clothing items, extending their lifespan. Rewear encourages the practice of wearing garments repeatedly (Nayak, 2020).

Based on the theoretical findings we have summarized, we have taken the initiative to define our research parameters. In the scope of our investigation, we have carefully curated a selection of fashion micro-influencers operating within the Slovakian fashion landscape, each with a profound commitment to sustainable fashion principles.

Our inaugural subject of inquiry is the renowned public figure, Denisa Vyšňovská. We have singled her out due to her conspicuous presence on social media platforms, predominantly for her distinctive fashion sense and her ability to convey to her audience that dressing elegantly does not need to be synonymous with extravagance. Denisa Vyšňovská actively advocates for second-hand shopping, endorses local manufacturers and sustainable brands, fosters the culture of quality clothing acquisitions, all the while addressing the pressing issue of fast fashion consumption.

Our second subject of interest is Stylemon, also known as Lenka Madlenová, a prominent fashion blogger known for her vibrant and diverse wardrobe choices. Stylemon, too, frequently lends her voice to the discourse on sustainable fashion within her digital sphere. Her online presence predominantly champions homegrown fashion producers, encourages second-hand shopping, and urges conscientious contemplation when engaging in fast fashion purchases, with a focus on ensuring that each item serves a purpose in the wearer's wardrobe.

From the given knowledge, we can define the following research questions:

VO1 - Do fashion influencers with a focus on sustainable fashion help influence public awareness of slow fashion?

In the case of the first research question, we focus on the fact whether the public perceives these recommenders as one of the main pillars in spreading the given topic.

VO2 – Do consumers look for social media reviews of recommenders when purchasing sustainable clothing?

With the second question, we monitor consumers' interest in the opinion of micro-influencers when purchasing sustainable clothing. At the same time, we monitor whether consumers change their attitudes in the case of a positive or negative review.

VO3 - Do these recommenders encourage consumers to buy more sustainable clothing items?

With the third question, we find out whether the presentation of slow fashion by recommenders encourages the public to buy and influences the thinking of consumers.

VO3a – Do fashion micro-influencers influence the interest in buying in second-hand stores?

By means of the given sub-question, we find out whether the influencers in this sphere arouse the public's interest in shopping in second-hand stores, or second-hand purchases.

VO4 – Do slow fashion micro-influencers minimize interest in fast fashion?

The fourth question investigates whether the presentation and highlighting of the negative aspects of fast fashion by micro-influencers reduces consumers' interest in fast fashion.

This brings us to the identification of our research problem, which can be articulated as follows: In recent times, there has been a notable surge in interest surrounding sustainable fashion, fostering a fertile ground for its dissemination through various influential figures. These individuals have meticulously crafted their personal brands around the ethos of sustainable fashion, whether they are widely recognized personalities, established brands, influential blogs, and the like. Despite this escalating interest in sustainable fashion, it remains imperative to underscore the importance of effectively

communicating this message, with the aim of raising awareness and stimulating the consumption of sustainable goods.

In light of the aforementioned context, we have formulated the following research objective for this study:

> To assess the perceived level of engagement of micro-influencers in the realm of sustainable fashion among discerning fashion consumers.

Research method

The increasing prevalence of Internet usage has paved the way for the development and utilization of online surveys. This expanded accessibility to the Internet has mitigated potential disparities in respondent coverage, thereby minimizing the likelihood of selecting biased survey participants. To partake in an online questionnaire, individuals necessitate access to the Internet through a compatible device. In contemporary times, this device encompasses not only personal computers but also tablets and mobile phones.

Online questionnaires can be divided into two types.

• The first type is an online questionnaire (provided to the respondent in person), which displays individual questions to the respondent personally on a selected computer. The questioner reads the questions to the respondent and at the same time answers them by pressing the keyboard.

• The second type of online questionnaire is a self-administered method, i.e. the respondent fills out the questionnaire electronically using their device (computer/mobile phone) and it does not matter where they are, as it is only necessary for the respondent to have an Internet connection (Johnson et al ., 2001).

In the process of constructing the questionnaire, a critical consideration lies in assessing the existence of prior research investigations pertaining to the given research problem. In our specific case, no analogous study has been identified thus far (Bowling, 2005). The chosen methodology offers several advantages, including rapid information processing, enhanced accessibility to otherwise challenging target demographics, and the incorporation of multimedia elements (Machková, 2009).

Another crucial determinant that may influence response rates is the order of questions within the questionnaire. It is generally advisable to commence with straightforward queries, formulated with precision and grounded in factual accuracy to prevent respondent confusion. In instances where the questionnaire necessitates the inclusion of sensitive or potentially embarrassing inquiries, it is prudent to position them towards the end, leveraging the respondent's investment of time in completing the survey, thereby enhancing the likelihood of obtaining responses (Marshall, 2005).

Respondents were provided with an electronic questionnaire comprising closed-ended queries. The primary objective was to assess the extent to which sustainable fashion recommenders can exert influence over consumer behavior in favor of sustainability. Additionally, we explored whether individuals consult these recommenders when making sustainable fashion purchases and whether they can influence the preferences of fashion consumers. Simultaneously, we examined the role of these recommenders as information disseminators. The questionnaire addressed research questions 1 to 4 inclusively. Distribution of the questionnaire occurred through various platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, as well as private profiles of female scientists and university groups in Slovakia. Data collection took place between March 9th, 2022, and March 17th, 2022. Subsequent to data acquisition, an extensive analysis was conducted employing a combination of statistical methodologies facilitated by Excel and Google Docs. Subse-

quently, results were presented through graphical representations and tabulated formats for interpretation.

In the light of time constraints, preliminary research was omitted in our study, thereby establishing the boundaries of our investigation. Additionally, the limitations of our research can be attributed to the constrained accessibility of our questionnaire. The distribution method and its inherent restrictions inadvertently limited the pool of potential respondents. Notably, the principal constraint lies in the modest size of our research sample. Enlarging the sample size would undoubtedly contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the issues under investigation. Furthermore, it is worth noting that our study exclusively focuses on the online environment of the Instagram social network, which presents another limitation.

Research file

The target demographic for our study encompasses individuals aged 15 to 40 in Slovakia, including both genders, who actively engage in social media and share an interest in the world of fashion. The rationale behind this age bracket is rooted in two key considerations. Firstly, it hinges on the intersection of gainful employment, which allows for independent clothing purchases, and the frequent use of social networking platforms. The selection of our research participants was executed using the random sampling method, given that our research cohort was not narrowly defined. We administered the questionnaire through an online platform, extending invitations to consumers with a proclivity towards fashion, encompassing both the fast fashion and slow fashion sectors. A total of 130 respondents partook in our research endeavor. The questionnaire revolved around the clothing industry, and as anticipated, a higher proportion of female participants (68%) engaged in the inquiry compared to their male counterparts (32%). To dissect the data further, we categorized our respondents into three distinct age groups. The largest contingent was found within the 21 to 30-year-old age range, followed closely by the 15 to 20-year-old group. Conversely, the 31 to 40-year-old category recorded the fewest responses, representing the elder segment of our sample. The demographic composition of our respondents is visually represented in the subsequent graph.
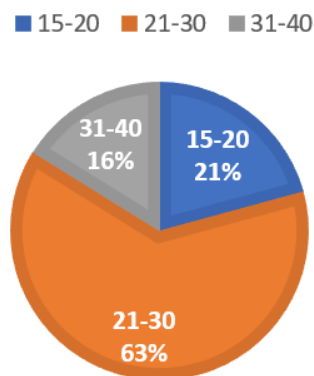

Fig. 1 Distribution of respondents by age
Source: The authors' own research

Analysis of the obtained results

The analysis revealed that out of the 130 respondents involved in the study, a substantial 97% were actively engaged users of social networks, leaving a mere 3% categorized as inactive. Each of the survey questions was designed as closed and mandatory,

requiring respondents to select a single answer.

Moving to question number 4, participants were queried regarding their primary source for acquiring clothing. As respondents had the option to choose multiple answers in this question, the percentage figures denote a cumulative value of 100%. Among the six provided choices, e-commerce platforms offering clothing emerged as the favored method, garnering a notable 63%. In the second position, stores situated within shopping centers were cited by 58% of respondents. A preference for second-hand clothing was expressed by 38% of participants, while 19% reported acquiring clothing through inheritance from third parties. In this context, the least frequented options were purchases from local brand boutiques or small-scale producers, accounting for a mere 18%. Additionally, only 8% of respondents indicated a liking for markets and stores specializing in Asian goods, a trend visually represented in the subsequent graph.

Fig. 2 Method of obtaining clothing
Source: The authors' own research

Promotion of sustainable fashion

This section encompasses inquiries centered on the promotion of sustainable fashion while concurrently assessing the significance of disseminating information about sustainable fashion through micro-influencers and the corresponding particulars. Given the escalating prominence of sustainability and sustainable fashion as industries of interest, the fifth query inquired, "Are you familiar with the concept of sustainable fashion, often referred to as slow fashion, which emphasizes ecological, economic, and social sustainability throughout its production?" This question yielded responses that shed light on the primary inquiry concerning awareness of slow fashion. The responses were stratified into three categories, comprising two affirmative responses and one negative response.

The subsequent graph visually portrays the results, revealing that a substantial 47% of respondents are acquainted with the term and concurrently engage in purchasing this category of clothing. Additionally, 35% of respondents are aware of the concept of sustainable fashion, while a mere 18% admit to being unacquainted with it. In summation, it can be inferred that a noteworthy 82% of respondents are cognizant of sustainable fashion, with only 18% remaining uninitiated in this domain.
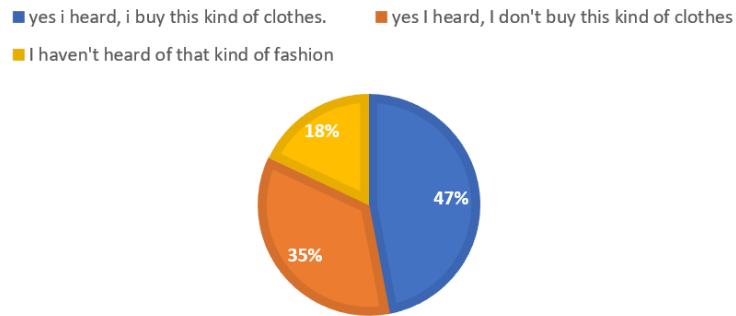
yes i heard, i buy this kind of clothes. yes I heard, I don't buy this kind of clothes
I haven't heard of that kind of fashion

Fig.3 Awareness of sustainable fashion
Source: The authors' own research

The study also investigated the role of question number 6, designed to elucidate the individuals' perception of key influencers in the promotion of sustainable fashion and where they acquired their knowledge about this subject. Participation in this particular inquiry was voluntary, contingent on a positive response to the preceding question. Respondents were provided with four response options. Notably, a substantial 46% of respondents identified social media influencers as pivotal figures in the advocacy for sustainable fashion. The second most prevalent choice, selected by 36% of participants, was social media platforms associated with fashion brands. In contrast, blogs and periodicals garnered the least attention, each receiving a mere 9% of responses. This data strongly suggests that social media platforms play a prominent role in disseminating information about sustainable fashion and serve as a primary channel for communication within this domain.
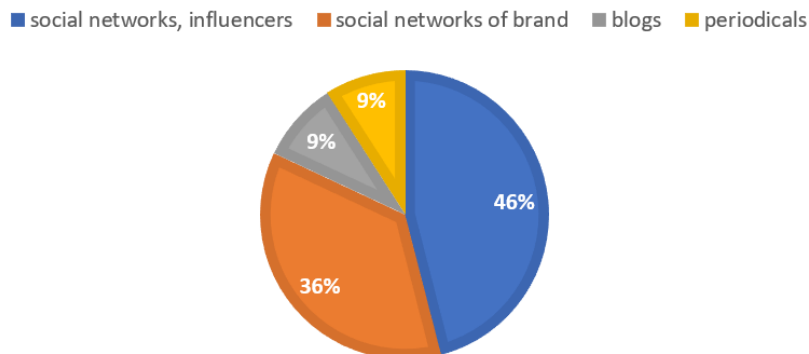
social networks, influencers social networks of brand blogs periodicals

Fig. 4 Promotion of sustainable fashion
Source: The authors' own research

In question number 7, we inquired about whether respondents had ever observed the promotion of sustainable fashion on influencers' social networks. The objective was to assess the effectiveness of conveying sustainable fashion through influencers, particularly in terms of raising awareness about the subject. Of the respondents, 71% affirmed that they had indeed noticed sustainable fashion promotions on influencers' social networks, while 29% indicated that they had not encountered any such promotions.

Moving on to question 8, it aimed to gauge whether the public agrees with the assertion that promoting sustainable fashion through micro-influencers has a positive impact on public attitudes. In response, participants were provided with a scale, offering options ranging from "yes" to "no," as illustrated in graph number 5. The results revealed that 40% of respondents agreed with the statement, 35% leaned towards a positive response, 19% expressed uncertainty with the response "I don't know," 4% firmly disagreed with "no," and only 2% disagreed entirely with the idea that communication of sustainable fashion

by micro-influencers positively influences public attitudes. To arrive at an average value, we employed an arithmetic mean calculation, where "yes" was assigned a value of 5 and "no" a value of 1. The resulting average value of 4.06 indicates a tendency towards positive responses among the participants. In other words, the majority of respondents are in agreement with the given statement. The accompanying graph visually represents the number of respondents' answers for question number 8.
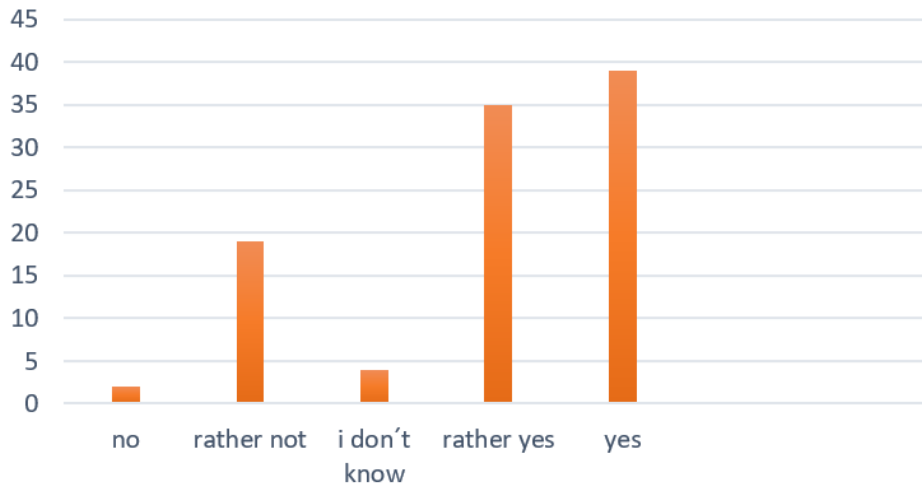

Fig. 5 The importance of communicating sustainable fashion by micro-influencers
Source: The authors' own research

The Importance of Micro-Influencer Recommendations in Sustainable Fashion

This section addresses the necessity of issuing a recommendation or conducting a review concerning the realm of slow fashion, specifically focusing on the influence wielded by micro-influencers, the extent of their desirability, and the significance of their viewpoints in shaping consumer purchasing patterns.

In the pursuit of our research objectives, we examined the extent to which consumers exhibit a willingness to invest in more sustainable apparel when guided by the endorsements of micro-influencers, a phenomenon explored in question number 9 of our survey. Analogous to the preceding query, respondents were presented with a graded scale encompassing responses spanning from affirmative to negative. The ensuing graph offers a visual representation of the distribution of responses among survey participants.
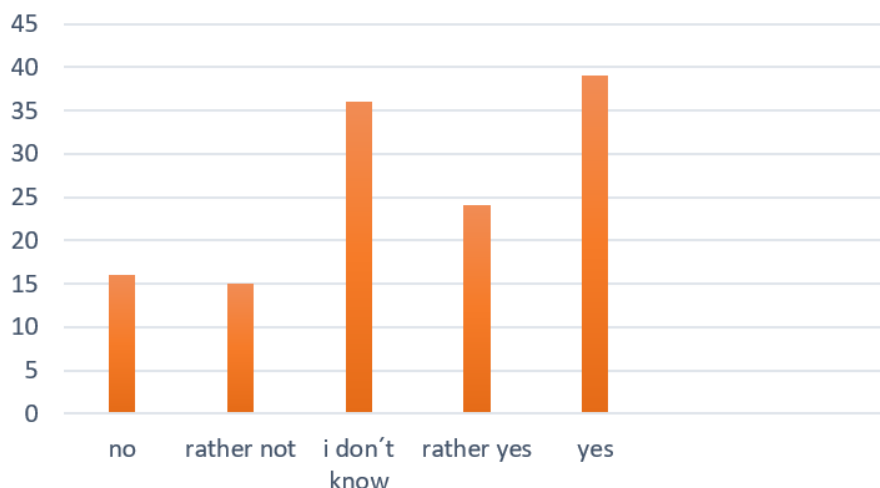
Fig. 6 Interest based on the recommendation of a micro-influencer
Source: The authors' own research

The graph presented above illustrates respondents' preferences concerning the potential purchase of sustainable clothing based on the recommendations from micro-influencers. 39 individuals, constituting 30% of the total group, were among the highest representation of respondents who expressed their intention to definitively purchase a sustainable clothing item following such a recommendation. Conversely, the "I don't know" option garnered the second-highest number of responses, while the "rather not" option received the fewest responses, with only 15 individuals selecting this choice. It is noteworthy that, in terms of overall sentiment, up to 17% of respondents exhibited a more positive disposition towards influencer recommendations, while 28% adopted a neutral stance.

In the context of the eleventh question, we explored whether consumers are susceptible to negative opinions expressed by influencers when considering the purchase of sustainable clothing. An intriguing discovery emerged: exactly a half, or 50% of the respondents, indicated that a negative review from an influencer would significantly impact their decision, leading them to definitively forgo the product in question. Conversely, the remaining 50% leaned towards the belief that such negative opinions would not exert influence on their decision-making process. Instead, they would rely on their personal experiences and preferences when making their sustainable clothing purchases, maintaining their steadfast commitment to these principles.

Second hand as part of sustainable fashion and their presentation

Questions 12 to 14 are pertinent to this domain of inquiry. In this context, the primary focus of these inquiries was to assess the potential efficacy of micro-influencers in influencing consumer behavior within a shopping sphere that is often met with negative perceptions. Each respondent was presented with a binary response format for questions 12 and 13, with questions 12 and 13 being obligatory. The necessity to answer question 14 was contingent upon providing an affirmative response to the preceding question.

The primary objective of question 12 was to ascertain whether the respondents engage in shopping at second-hand stores. The findings unequivocally indicate that a significant proportion of respondents, precisely 75 (58%), frequent such establishments, whereas 55 (42%) respondents abstain from patronizing second-hand stores. Concurrently, question 13, phrased as follows: "Have you observed the promotion of second-hand stores on influencers' social media platforms?" revealed that a substantial 65% of respondents noted instances of influencers endorsing and accentuating sec-

ond-hand stores on their social media channels, while only 35% reported a lack of awareness regarding promotional efforts within this industry. This disparity in awareness is further elucidated in the accompanying graphical representation. Additionally, this query sought to discern whether micro-influencers serve as an efficacious conduit for the promotion of second-hand stores.
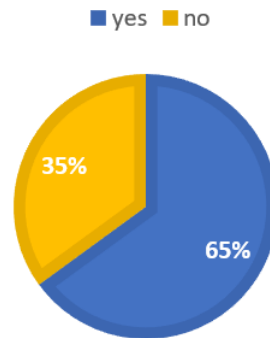

Fig. 7 Promotion of second-hand goods against the background of micro-influencers
Source: The authors' own research

The subsequent inquiry in this section builds upon the preceding question, specifically question number 13. As previously indicated, it is worth noting that this question was presented as an optional query, with respondents required to provide a response only if they had observed second-hand shops engaging in promotional activities. Consequently, question number 14 was formulated to explore whether those respondents, who did, in fact, record instances of these aforementioned stores promoting their merchandise, were influenced to such an extent that they patronized these establishments. However, given that this question was also answered by respondents who had responded negatively to the preceding query, it became necessary to segregate the responses with respect to the previous question.

Respondents were presented with two response options, and the findings unequivocally reveal that out of a total of 84 participants, 57 respondents, constituting 68% of the sample, answered affirmatively. This indicates that the promotional efforts were sufficiently compelling to prompt them to make purchases at the mentioned stores. In contrast, 27 respondents, accounting for 32% of the sample, chose not to respond affirmatively. This group indicated that the promotional communication employed by the aforementioned stores did not sufficiently impress them to engage in actual purchases at these establishments. The results substantiate the proposition that the communication of sustainable fashion through micro-influencers exerts a positive influence on public preferences and stimulates purchasing behavior.

The influence of micro-influencers on interest in fast fashion

Questions 15 and 16 were assigned to the fourth part of the questionnaire, which focused on communicating the negatives of fast fashion through micro-influencers. Specifically, question number 15, which is: Do you perceive communicating the negative impacts of fast fashion on the environment through micro-influencers as important? Investigated public attitudes in relation to the importance of fast fashion communication through micro recommenders. Respondents were offered answers using a scale ranging from definitely yes to definitely no. 62 respondents, representing 48% of the total number of respondents, marked communicating the negatives of fast fashion as very important and marked the answer definitely yes, and thus, this item had the largest representation in the answers. The second most frequently optional item was rather yes, and this

item was marked by up to 28 respondents representing 22%. 17 (13%) respondents were neutral in this case. In this case, the option definitely not had the lowest representation, namely only 3%. If we divide the scale into positive and negative attitudes, 69% of respondents agreed with the importance of communicating the negative impacts of fast fashion, while only 18% perceive this issue negatively, which can also be seen in the graph below. We can therefore claim that up to 69% of consumers are aware of the importance of communicating the negative aspects of fast fashion, which can ultimately lead to a change in purchasing behavior towards a more sustainable path, which is followed by the following question.
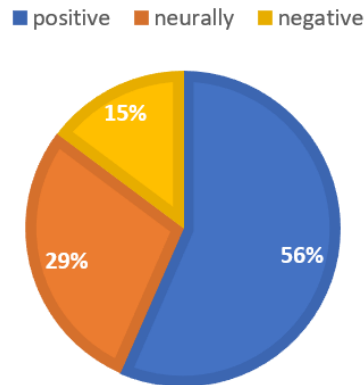

Fig. 8 The importance of communicating the negatives of fast fashion
Source: The authors' own research

Question 16: Does communicating these negatives minimize/would minimize your interest in buying fast fashion? followed up on question 15 and investigated the influence of the public towards avoiding the purchase of fast fashion based on communicating its negative impacts on the environment. As many as 93 (71%) respondents confirmed that communicating the negative would affect interest in buying fast fashion, and 37 (29%) respondents expressed their disagreement by answering no, and thus they would continue to buy and are buying fast fashion, which we can also see in the following graph. And thus the effectiveness and importance of this communication is confirmed by 71% of the respondents.
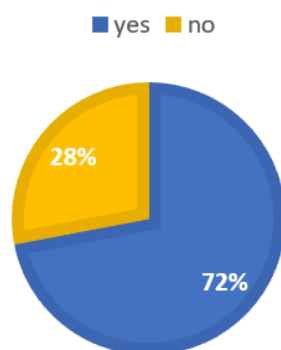

Fig. 9 Changing preferences based on communicating negatives
Source: The authors' own research

Answers to research questions and Discussion

The first research question explored the impact of fashion influencers specializing

in sustainable fashion on public awareness of slow fashion. Our investigation aimed to assess whether the public perceives fashion influencers as significant contributors to the dissemination of sustainable fashion concepts. The results of this inquiry reveal that the public indeed regards influencers as primary agents in promoting sustainable fashion. A noteworthy 47% of respondents reported gaining insights into sustainable fashion through influencers' social media platforms. In contrast, 36% acquired information from brand social networks, 9% from blog articles, and only 8% from periodical publications. Consequently, we assert that social media platforms serve as highly effective channels for information dissemination, with influencers assuming a pivotal role as the principal conduits for this topic. Additionally, a substantial 71% of respondents acknowledged encountering sustainable fashion promotion on influencers' social media profiles, with 75% perceiving micro-influencers as effective agents in reshaping consumer purchasing behavior. These findings align with the recommendations made by Riyanto and Nurfadila (2020), who advocate for the utilization of recommenders when communicating about sustainable fashion, as they are considered influential figures in shaping public opinion on such subjects. Consequently, the results validate the role of fashion influencers in raising public awareness of slow fashion, affirming their status as key pillars in disseminating this topic.

The second research question investigated whether consumers seek out social media reviews from recommenders when purchasing sustainable clothing. This inquiry delved into consumers' receptiveness to micro-influencers' opinions when making clothing purchases. The findings indicate that, when it comes to searching for reviews prior to buying sustainable fashion, negative responses are predominant, with a substantial 57% of respondents reporting that they do not seek reviews on social networks before making such purchases. In contrast, 43% do actively seek these reviews before making a purchase decision. However, when it comes to the impact of a negative review shared by a recommender, 50% of respondents affirmed that such a review would influence their purchasing behavior, dissuading them from buying the product and underscoring the recommender's influence on their buying choices. The remaining 50% indicated that such negative reviews would not sway their decisions, as they prefer relying on their own experiences. As previously mentioned, Puspita and Chae (2021) have posited that consumers express interest in influencers' opinions when purchasing sustainable fashion, emphasizing the role of recommenders in shaping consumer perspectives. Therefore, while negative responses dominate, the significant percentage of positive responses suggests that consumers do, to some extent, consult reviews on recommenders' social media platforms prior to making purchases. Additionally, the fact that half of the respondents are willing to alter their buying behavior based on a negative review underscores the influence of recommenders in this context. Thus, even though positive responses do not predominate in our findings, it is evident that reviews from recommenders exert a certain degree of influence on consumer purchasing decisions, making their opinions a crucial factor in this matter.

The third research question aimed to discern the influence of micro-recommenders on consumers' interest in purchasing sustainable clothing. The study explored whether the presentation of slow fashion via micro-recommenders effectively stimulates consumer buying behavior. The findings revealed that nearly half of the respondents, constituting 49% of the total sample, expressed their willingness to purchase the showcased product based on an influencer's recommendation. Another 28% remained neutral, uncertain about whether they would buy the endorsed product. Only 24% definitively stated that they would not buy the recommended item. The average score across respondents was 3.42, indicative of a predominantly positive response. Consequently, it can be inferred that upon encountering sustainable fashion products promoted by recommenders on social networks, nearly half of the respondents exhibited a willingness to make a purchase. This suggests that the presentation of slow fashion plays a significant role in encour-

aging public consumption. This finding aligns with Kong and Ko's (2017) assertion that sustainable fashion's communication through influencers, particularly micro-influencers, profoundly influences consumer attitudes and their propensity to purchase sustainable fashion items. As an extension of research question number 3, the study explored whether fashion micro-influencers influence interest in shopping at second-hand stores. It was examined whether micro-influencers, by promoting sustainable fashion and emphasizing second-hand purchases and stores, generate increased interest among consumers to patronize second-hand establishments. Abbes et al. (2020) had previously reported that influencers' positive experiences and endorsements of second-hand products stimulate public interest in second-hand stores. The research addressed this sub-question through two inquiries and discovered that 65% of the respondents observed communication about second-hand stores within influencers' social networks. Among this group, an impressive 68% of interviewees indicated being influenced and encouraged to purchase more sustainable items as a result of this communication. Conversely, only 32% remained unswayed by the promotion of second-hand items. These findings echo those of Abbes et al. (2020), affirming that fashion influencers indeed have a positive impact on fostering interest in sustainable clothing and second-hand shopping.

The fourth research question sought to ascertain whether slow fashion micro-influencers could diminish interest in fast fashion by highlighting its negative aspects. Respondents were asked about the significance of influencers communicating the drawbacks of fast fashion through their social networks. A substantial 69% of respondents acknowledged the importance of such communication, while an even higher percentage, 72%, confirmed that these negative portrayals would, indeed, reduce their interest in fast fashion and promote a more sustainable mindset. These findings align with Minney's (2016) perspective, which posits that communicating the downsides of fast fashion through micro-influencers can effectively minimize consumer interest in this industry. The results of this study support this viewpoint and emphasize the potential of slow fashion micro-influencers in shifting consumer preferences toward sustainability.

Conclusion

The objective of our study has been successfully met, and our research findings have yielded a number of noteworthy conclusions. Our investigation has revealed that micro-influencers hold a prominent role in shaping the public's perception of the subject matter in question. Furthermore, they possess the capacity to instigate shifts in public awareness and attitudes within this domain. Our results have also unveiled that encouraging the public to patronize various sustainable fashion retailers while simultaneously highlighting the drawbacks of fast fashion has the effect of diminishing interest in the latter.

In summary, we have ascertained that the involvement of micro-influencers in the realm of sustainable fashion is favorably perceived by our survey respondents. However, it is imperative for these influencers to continue their efforts in order to fortify the dissemination of sustainable fashion-related discourse.

In delineating future research directions, in the context of micro-influencer involvement, we propose the implementation of investigative methodologies grounded in personal inquiries. These inquiries should be strategically designed to elucidate the prevailing public perceptions pertaining to the scrutinized micro-influencers in their capacity as advocates for sustainable fashion promotion. Concurrently, in the realm of the scrutinized personalities, it is imperative to extend the scope of research to encompass the channels of communication prevalent on social networking platforms such as TikTok and Facebook.

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